

Censorship and

Self-Censorship

in Turkey:

DECEMBER 2019 — DECEMBER 2020



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PLATFORM AGAINST
CENSORSHIP AND
SELF-CENSORSHIP

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Foreword

As Speak Up Platform, we have completed the fourth edition of our annual censorship and self-censorship report covering the period between December 2019 and December 2020. Throughout the year, while the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed our daily lives, upending our plans, working spaces, and planned events, the practices of prohibition, obstruction, censorship and self-censorship have taken on new forms. In 2020, when culture and arts were among the first things to sacrifice for "the coronavirus measures," digital platforms became even more crowded, as a result of which they also became the very places where censorship was most visible. Performing arts and artists, who had borne the brunt of financial restrictions for quite a long time, have additionally had their lifeline cut off, in a manner of speaking, due to the pandemic "measures." It was another difficult year for journalism, marked by the enactment of the new social media regulation and Turkish broadcasting watchdog RTÜK's continued efforts to perform outside its jurisdiction.

Despite the restrictive climate, we tried to give prominence to those who created and produced, those who brought something new to the table, who found brand new ways to create, the seekers of truth, the arts and media workers who kept on resisting, who heaved a sigh of relief while practicing solidarity and organizing. We look forward to the days after the current pandemic when we can all be united in our fight against censorship and self-censorship.

Censorship in Graphics

Sumru Tamer

In order to create an extensive framework on censorship and violations of freedom of expression, we, as Speak Up Platform, visualized the data about censorship cases that we documented and archived during the year.

In the following graphs, we share data regarding the common areas, the subjects, the enforcers, the methods, and official and unofficial reasons of censorship cases, and indeed present a detailed picture of how mechanisms of censorship, which are constantly proliferating with each passing year, work.

This study of monitoring, archiving and data collection can hopefully provide an insight into how we can best proceed with our demands and recommendations in the struggle against censorship in the future as non-governmental institutions, individuals and organizations working in the fields of media, culture and arts.

[illegible]

As can be seen in the graph, the crime of **insulting** the president, public officials or other persons is the most common reason. People were prosecuted due to the artwork they performed, the news articles they penned or the social media content they shared as per **Articles 299 and 125** of the Turkish Penal Code (TCK) that penalizes **defamation**.

“Making propaganda for a terrorist organization,” “membership of a terrorist organization” and **“aiding a terrorist organization”** were also frequently employed reasons. The subjects of this report, and in particular journalists, were tried on the grounds of these offenses under the **Anti-**

Terror Law (TMK).

The reason **“violation of personal rights”** was often used in lawsuits filed pursuant to **Article 9 of Law No. 5651** at the request of persons in public offices in order to block access to news articles and online content.

Reasons such as **“public order, national security, prevention of possible provocations and social events, public peace, ensuring peace and quiet”** and occasionally **“public morality”** were used by governorships and district governorships to declare bans on public gatherings and demonstrations under **Articles 17 and 19 of the Law No. 2911 on Meetings and Demonstration Marches** in conjunction with **Article 11 of the Law No. 5442 on Provincial Administration**.

The justification that certain books would have an **“obscene effect”** on the spirituality of minors was used to declare publications obscene in accordance with the **Law No. 1117 on the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications**. Authors and translators were prosecuted on the charge of “obsenity” (**TCK 226**).

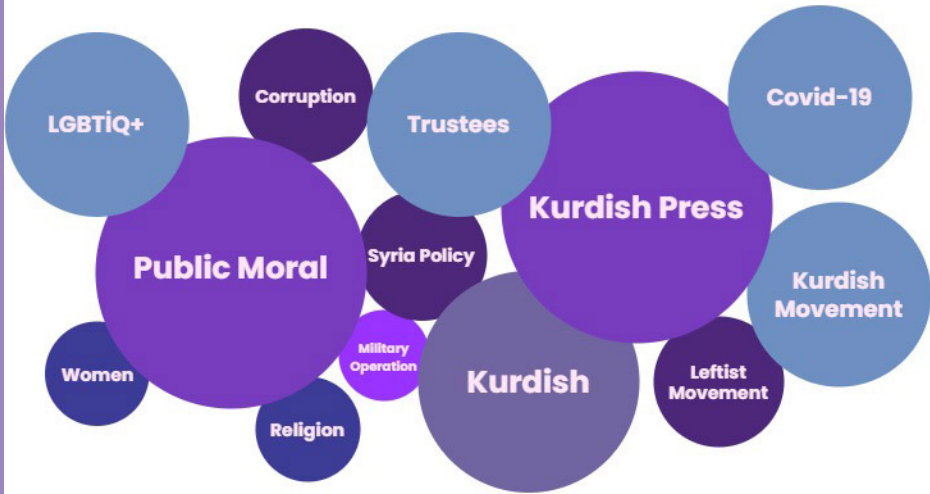
“Coronavirus, pandemic and public health” has become a common justification for declaring bans on public gatherings and demonstrations. Again, many people were investigated for **“causing fear and panic to the public and disseminating false allegations”** in their social media posts about the COVID-19 outbreak.

On the grounds of **“publicly degrading a section of the public on grounds of social class, race, religion, sect, gender or regional differences” (TCK 216)**, those prosecuted were mostly people who commented on the Presidency of Religious Affairs, religious vocational *imam hatip* schools, and Islam. Journalists, anchors and politicians were brought to court on the grounds of **“inciting the public to hatred and enmity, to provoke hostility” (TCK 216)** for critiquing the implementation of coronavirus-related measures.

Grounds of **“degrading the Turkish nation, state of Turkish Republic, the organs and institutions of the state” (TCK 301)** were utilized against those who chanted slogans such as “rapist state” during protests denouncing violence against women, and those who criticized military operations.

Additionally, **“closed for renovation”** and various technical failures were among the reasons used to cancel the venues allocated to theater plays at the last minute, as in the previous year.

What were the unofficial reasons of censorship?



In addition to the reasons presented by the official authorities, we have visualized what we will call “unofficial reasons” for censorship, reasons that were not always expressed clearly by practitioners of censorship and which we interpreted by looking into the conjuncture in which censorship and prohibitions took place.

It is, of course, not a coincidence that the majority of the bans and punishments which were officially declared due to offenses under the Anti-Terror Law were directed towards **the Kurdish press**, people who created in the **Kurdish language**, and people and institutions who were or were perceived to be **associated with the Kurdish movement**. When we look at the toll of censorship cases for the last year, we can see that being Kurdish, writing and speaking in Kurdish, and creating and producing works related to Kurdish people constituted a sufficient justification for censorship and other punishments.

Although **“public morality”** was rarely mentioned in official statements; we can see that the cases where books, images and activities related to sexuality, gender and LGBTIQ+ people were censored and banned were carried out with either explicit or implicit references to “public morality, national and social values.”

Some of the censorship cases we reported were aimed at preventing information flow, comments and critiques about the **coronavirus** pandemic, even though they were officially due to different reasons. While anchors criticizing the coronavirus-related measures were censored for insulting the president, TV stations were sanctioned for “violation of the principles of accuracy and truth,” and journalists were tried for “provoking the public,” we could see that these practices actually served the purpose of denying us the right to access information about the COVID-19.

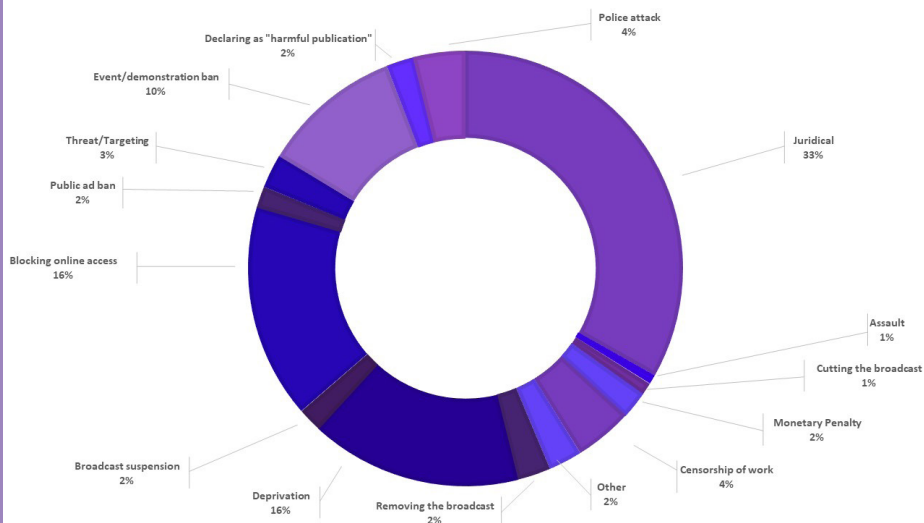
We could also see that preventing news items about **corruption and other irregularities** was the main unofficial reason for decisions blocking access and lawsuits which were brought against those who reported on such weighty matters.

Sharing critical views and information about the government's **Syria policy** and, in particular, **Operation Peace Spring**, and even saying “No to War” was banned and penalized.

Many subjects of this report, especially musicians and journalists, were censored because they were **left-wing** or expressed left-wing views.

It can be said that justifications such as public morality and national values were occasionally utilized with references to **religious values** and by way of institutions that purported to act as carriers of those values. Some movies, TV shows and radio programs that fall within the scope of this report were censored for specific words such as “alcohol” and “magic.” Furthermore, LGBTIQ+ people began to face an even more complex array of challenges, censorship and prohibitions after they were targeted by the Presidency of Religious Affairs; a number of people stood trials on the charge of “insulting religious values” for expressing their views on the Presidency of Religious Affairs, *imam hatip* schools and Islam.

What were the methods of censorship?



Investigations, lawsuits, detentions and similar **legal procedures** were the main methods used to censor, block and penalize those who created and worked in the media, culture and arts, especially journalists.

Access-blocking decisions were primarily imposed on news sites such as Jinnews and OdaTV with the intent of preventing the publication and circulation of news stories about corruption, irregularities, the coronavirus and military operations.

Under the heading of **"deprivation,"** we catalogue the following methods: depriving newspapers of income by imposing sanctions and ordering the suspension of public announcements and advertisements; not allocating spaces for exhibitions and theater plays; preventing inmates from accessing or sending letters, publications and watching television broadcasts; expulsion of artists; preventing the sale of books in bookstores; cancelling journalists' press cards; closing down cultural centers, libraries and movie

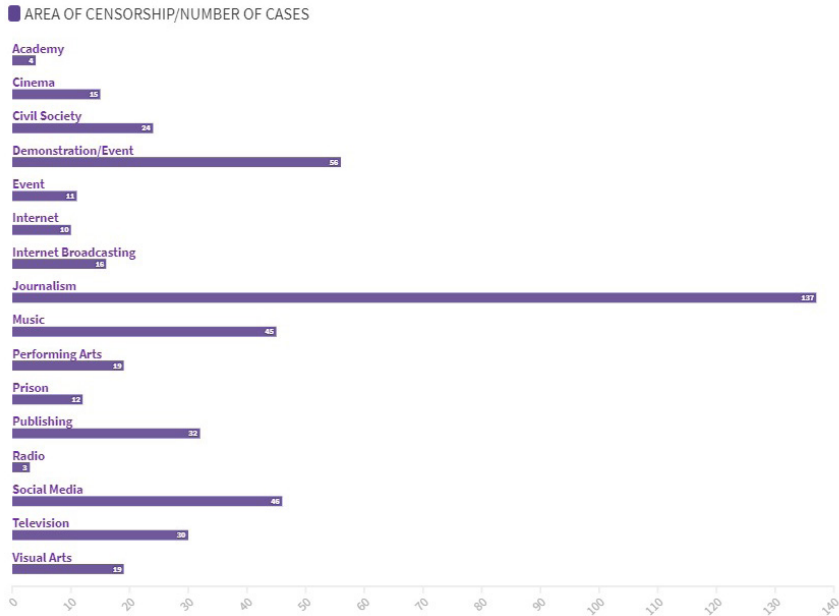
theaters; removing Kurdish signposts.

Frequently used methods also included **banning events, public gatherings and demonstrations** constantly and uninterruptedly; **police** intervention in press conferences and concerts; raids on cultural centers; imposing penalties on newspaper distributors and forcing reporters to inform on their colleagues.

Another common method of censorship was to **directly censor a work** by disrupting **the integrity of the work** such as cutting out the expressions and images in films and shows, interfering with the content of exhibitions, and removing book chapters.

The "**others**" category includes methods such as disciplinary penalties imposed due to poems written and songs performed in prisons; bans on publication, distribution and sale of books; confiscation and destruction of books; interventions on slogans and banners; total blackout orders, and throttling down traffic to social media.

In which areas was censorship applied?



As can be seen from the graph, **journalism** is the area where censorship and violations of freedom of expression are experienced the most. Throughout the year, journalists and newspapers were often faced with judicial processes and deprived of the rights and opportunities necessary to practice their profession. Frequent access-blocking decisions imposed on news websites and news items point to a significant increase of censorship on the **internet** as well.

Bans on demonstrations, public gatherings and events increased and the freedom of peaceful assembly and demonstration was hampered, especially in Kurdish-majority provinces and in periods when a social reaction against the political developments in the country was deemed imminent. Lawsuits were filed against countless **social media** users, journalists and artists for their social media posts on issues such as COVID-19, Elazığ and İzmir earthquakes, Operation Peace Spring, Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) soldiers who died in the northwestern Syrian province of Idlib.

Music, and in particular Kurdish music, was on trial yet again last year.

Concerts were banned; musicians were taken off the stage and investigated

for their remarks on the stage. In the field of **publishing**, several books were declared “obscene publications,” not admitted to prisons or even bookstores, and we have even seen books on trial. The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) imposed hefty sanctions against **TV stations** it deemed dissenting, and films were censored on TV.

It has been a year in which the pressure on the expression outlets of **civil society** and NGOs, their planned events and press statements increased exponentially. Noticeably, institutions and organizations working on violence against women and LGBTIQ+ rights have become targets. In the field of **visual arts**, the content of exhibitions have been intervened in, and paintings and cartoons have been prosecuted. In the field of “**performing arts**,” where we group together theater, stand-up, opera, and so on, artists were expelled and/or put on trial, and plays were denied venues.

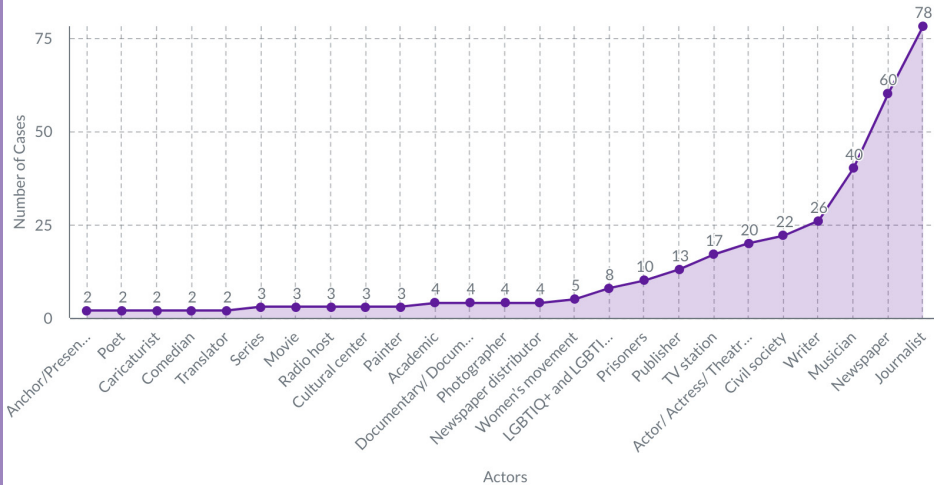
Internet broadcasting has also become an area where censorship has been more commonplace, with RTÜK’s undertaking the task of regulating and supervising internet broadcasts, as a consequence of which censorship has spread rapidly to online channels. The art of **cinema** could not evade the newfound powers of RTÜK, either. Whether broadcast on television or on digital platforms, films were censored, filmmakers were prosecuted, screenings were blocked, and festivals were canceled.

In **prisons**, we reported that prisoners were denied print publications; that some TV stations were not broadcast; that pictures, cartoons and articles the inmates wanted to send were censored, and that those who sang in Kurdish were hit with disciplinary actions. Unfortunately, we have reasons to suspect that there have been far more violations of freedom of expression in prisons than we could report last year.

Many **events** such as theater plays, photography exhibitions, music festivals, concerts and awards/commemoration ceremonies were blocked at the last minute, often under pressure from local administrators, for reasons such as renovations or by means of canceling hall permits.

With the appointment of trustees to universities and the increasing pressure on academia and academics, it has been a period in which the **freedom of academic expression** has been severely damaged. It should be noted here that a comprehensive study on violations of freedom of academic expression remains crucial and that the number of cases in this regard is far greater than reported here.

Who were affected by censorship?



Journalists and **newspapers** took the lead among actors affected by censorship, since journalism was the field where censorship and prohibitions were most intensely experienced. Similarly, **musicians** and **theater players** were among those most affected by the heavy violations in their respective fields.

Writers are among the prominent actors in this graph, as they were prosecuted for their articles in newspapers and books or for their social media posts, in addition to the fact that their books were declared obscene, and sometimes even destroyed.

Publishers, along with their writers, were among the actors most affected by censorship since their books were declared “obscene publications,” and withdrawn from sale in bookstores because they were in Kurdish. Their offices were raided, and their books were confiscated.

Translators, too, were affected by the said violations; the books they translated were declared obscene and they were prosecuted for “obscenity offenses.”

With bans on public gatherings and demonstrations, along with constant police interventions, attempts were made to silence civilian voices, and efforts were made to halt the activities of non-governmental organizations; hence

civil society is in the foreground in this graph. Human rights defenders continued to be targeted, prosecuted and punished.

TV stations and **prisoners** were also faced censorship and relevant prohibitions, the former due to recurrent sanctions by the broadcasting authority, RTÜK; the latter by a myriad of violations of freedom of expression in prisons.

The most distinctive categories in this chart, though, are the **women's movement, LGBTIQ+ people** and the **LGBTIQ+ movement**. We have seen that censorship cases in public gatherings/ demonstrations, publishing, music, cinema, internet broadcasting and other fields were somehow due to the issues related to gender equality, LGBTIQ+ issues and violence against women.

Police interventions took place in protests against the prospects of Turkish government withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention, which guarantees the rights of everyone who is subjected to gender-based violence and violence motivated by perception of sexual orientation, and the "Las Tesis" protests, named after a Chilean feminist collective that inspired a song and dance that has prompted rallies in several countries, denouncing targeted violence against women. Furthermore censorship of gay characters and expressions about homosexuality in movies and shows; declaring books as "obscene publications" for including imagery that is perceived to evoke homosexuality such as rainbows and for allegedly promoting homosexuality; the targeting of LGBTIQ+ by the Presidency of Religious Affairs, and the suppression towards NGOs that reacted to the targeting of LGBTIQ+ continued throughout the year.

Who were the enforcers of censorship and prohibitions?



In the above word cloud, you can see the main actors who cause or enable censorship and other violations. **RTÜK** stood out among the actors that enforced censorship through sanctions against and interventions in TV channels and digital platforms such as Netflix, BluTv and Özgürüz Radio.

The Press Advertisement Agency (BİK) also came to the fore due to persistent sanctions they imposed on dissenting newspapers. The police and the governorships of İstanbul, Van, Tunceli, Ankara, İzmir and Hakkâri respectively were among the actors who infringed upon the freedom of expression the most with constant bans on public gatherings and demonstrations, interventions and cancellations of events.

The Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK) has become one of the leading censors, especially through issuing access-blocking decisions to online media platforms such as Jinnews, OdaTV, and Özgürüz Radio.

Prison administrations have also become one of the main actors which facilitated censorship by preventing the entrance and exit of print publications and pictures. Another noteworthy institution in this regard was the **Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services**, under whose remit the **Board for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications** declared numerous books obscene throughout the year.

TV stations **CNN Türk**, **Habertürk** and **Kanal D** were among the leading private organizations deploying censorship by interrupting broadcasts and

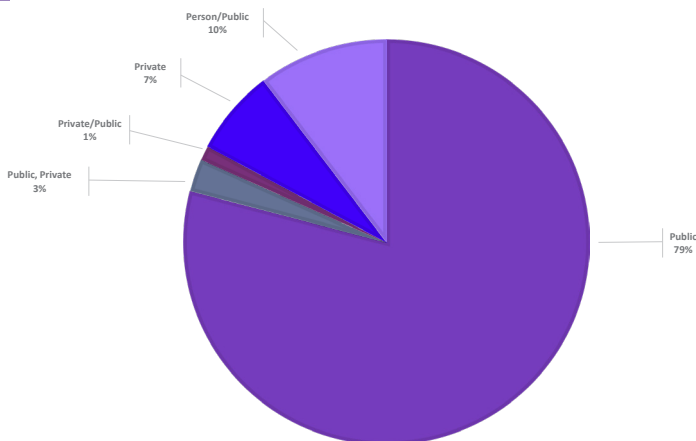
editing films. Using similar methods, state broadcaster **TRT** became a notorious public institution among the censors.

The **Interior Ministry** has become one of the main actors which enforced censorship by instigating investigations into those who shared social media posts about topics as varied as military operations and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The **Ministry of Culture and Tourism** has become an important actor that typically infringed upon freedom of expression by denying halls and venues to exhibitions and plays at short notice, refusing to grant permits to series scripts, and depriving artists of much-needed state support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many people **working for public institutions and organizations**, and most notably **President Erdoğan**, have become among the actors who enabled censorship the most since they have repeatedly lodged defamation complaints against people who work in the fields of media, culture and arts, and brought on access-blocking decisions to countless news articles.

It should be noted here that we have intentionally refrained from including **the courts, prosecutors' offices and judgeships**, who were essentially the executives of legal procedures such as lawsuits, investigations, and access-blocking decisions that fall within the scope of this report, in the above word cloud, since they would dominate the whole picture, that is, they would overshadow other actors discussed in the report, but also that these actors constitute markedly the biggest cog in the censorship machine.



79% of the actors who enforced censorship and prohibitions were public institutions. Public servants such as the President, the Treasury and Finance Minister made up 10% of the actors enabling censorship, and private companies accounted for 7%. We evaluated the cases where censorship was enforced by private companies through the judicial mechanism under the category of "Private/ Public," such as the access blocking of "reputation damaging" news stories upon the request of companies. On the other hand, we evaluated the cases where public institutions acted as intermediaries and private actors were practitioners of censorship under the category of "Public, Private," such as removal of the artists from festival lineups by the organizers under pressure of governorship and other public institutions, or canceling the halls given to theater companies.

Provinces



Istanbul and Ankara were the two provinces with the most censorship cases, due largely to the fact that legal procedures were initiated by actors-- prosecutors, criminal judgeships of peace, etc.-- in these cities.

In provinces with a Kurdish-majority population, especially in Van and Diyarbakir, there have been severe violations of freedom of expression due to endless bans on public gatherings and demonstrations, appointments of trustees and police raids.

The critical reason for the sharp increase in the number of cases in Izmir was that the governorship blocked a multitude of events such as theater plays and exhibitions and demonstrations.

It should be noted here that provinces with a rather high number of censorship cases enjoy a more vibrant culture and arts life and a more active civil society, therefore, obstructions – “the coronavirus measures” and other similar methods – have been implemented there more frequently.

One of the important data points that stands out on the map is that censorship has spread to many provinces, which can be to a large extent attributed to the all-too-many investigations launched against news items published in local newspapers and local journalists, and the access-blocking decisions

issued by Criminal Judgeship of Peace (Sulh Ceza Hakimlikleri) in the provinces. After Istanbul and Ankara, Gaziantep comes third with regard to the number of access-blocking decisions. In view of these points, we can say that it has been a year in which the pressure on local newspapers and journalists increased and censorship expanded spatially.

Journalism

Alican Acanerler

It has been a year when we witnessed vigorous attempts to block critical statements in the press about the successive Turkish offensives into northeastern and northwestern Syria, codenamed Operation Peace Spring and Operation Spring Shield respectively. Since the last days of 2019, the content that depicted the destruction caused by the said operations were hit with severe sanctions, including the suspension of advertisements and delimitation of the free flow of news. In February 2020, criminal complaints were filed against *Yeni Yaşam* newspaper's responsible editor Osman Akın and distributor Necmettin Tosun, demanding imprisonment for reporting on cross-border operations.

There were sustained efforts to block news stories about irregularities in large shady projects and public tenders in 2020, as in the past years. Access to news reports about public tenders that capitalist groups won from the public institutions by journalists who strive for a transparent and accountable democratic process were regularly blocked. Criminal complaints were filed against publications, made to raise awareness among members of the public, particularly about Berat Albayrak and his purchase of land on the route to Kanal İstanbul, the decade-long controversial project aimed at creating an artificial seaway between the Black Sea and the Marmara Sea ostensibly to divert traffic from the Bosphorus Strait.

Jinnnews, one among the many websites that have been blocked on the grounds of "national security and protection of public order," was issued with 13 separate access-blocking orders in 2020. On the other hand, the platform that had drawn the most attention over access-blocking decisions over the year was OdaTV. OdaTV News Director Barış Terkoğlu and reporter Hülya Kılınç were arrested over a news report titled "OdaTV received footage from the quiet burial of a MIT operative who was martyred in Libya" and the website of the news portal was repeatedly blocked. In the subsequent trial into the news report, together with Terkoğlu and Kılınç, *Yeni Çağ* columnist Murat Ağirel, *Yeni Yaşam* newspaper editor-in-chief Mehmet Ferhat Çelik and editor Aydın Keser stood trial on the charge of "disclosing classified information crucial to the security and the interests of the state," but were later acquitted.

The Public Advertising Authority (BİK), one of the most crucial tools the government has to restrain the media, has been galvanized frequently. In particular, BİK ordered the suspension of public announcements and advertisements for *Evrensel* newspaper repeatedly and periodically. In view of the fact that public announcements and advertisements constitute almost the majority of a newspaper's limited income, it can be argued that newspapers and journalists were punished with poverty over their news.

BİK, in one instance, justified a sanction imposed on *Evrensel* daily as readers' purchase of the newspaper from stands in bulks and bringing them to prisons; we've thus seen the criminalization of dissenting papers and supplying inmates with newspapers.

In 2020, the matter of "accreditation" was again a bump in the road for journalists. Journalists, lacking press cards which are henceforth granted by the Presidency's Directorate of Communications, had difficulty in covering stories as they were no longer allowed in press conferences or were refused briefings by public offices. It is noteworthy, within this context, that reporters and editors working for online platforms are denied press cards *ab initio*.

According to a Committee to Protect Journalists report¹, Turkey ranks second in jailing journalists after China, with 37 journalists imprisoned in the country as of 1 December 2020 and at least 77 journalists and media workers are currently behind bars in Turkey according to Expression Interrupted.²

In one of the dozens of journalist trials this year, Can Dündar was sentenced to 27 years and 6 months in prison on the charges of "obtaining information that must be kept confidential for political or military espionage" and "knowingly and willingly aiding a terrorist organization" in the retrial of a news report on alleged transfer of weapons to insurgents in Syria on trucks operated by the National Intelligence Organization (MİT), the trial of which is publicly known as "MİT trucks trial." In another trial, one that had been going on since 2017, *Die Welt* newspaper's former correspondent in Turkey Deniz Yücel, who was arrested in 2017 in connection with a probe into the leaked e-mails of the then Finance Minister Berat Albayrak, was sentenced to 2

¹ <https://cpj.org/2020/12/number-of-journalists-jailed-worldwide-hits-record-amid-unrest-pandemic/>

² <https://expressioninterrupted.com/census.php>

years and 9 months in prison on the charge of “making propaganda for PKK terrorist organization.”

Sözcü newspaper trial was likewise one of the most discussed. The newspaper’s columnists and editors were tried and sentenced to prison on the allegation of “knowingly and willingly aiding FETÖ” – the appellation for the movement founded by Fethullah Gülen which authorities blame for instigating the July 2016 failed coup. As of December 2020, the case is before the Court of Cassation pending review. The fact that the prosecution presented merely news items as evidence, and that other platforms that covered the same subject matter were not prosecuted, drew adverse reaction.

Many journalists were not admitted into the courtroom for the first hearing in the retrial of the killing of Diyarbakır Bar Association President Tahir Elçi due to stringent pandemic measures. It was later revealed that the few journalists who were allowed in the courtroom were specifically “accredited” in advance by the Chief Prosecutor’s Office. The practice continued on to other trials as well; journalists were not allowed in courtrooms for more or less the same reasons.

In moments of crisis such as natural disasters, the public’s access to news and the right to information are disproportionately threatened. In the aftermath of the earthquakes in Elazığ and İzmir, RTÜK launched investigations against “publications and content that deliberately aim to provoke and mislead the society.”

The problems with regards to the access to healthy information was aggravated notably during the pandemic. Just before the official announcement that the first coronavirus case was detected in Turkey, investigations were launched against news items about the spread of coronavirus in certain workplaces. Access-blocking orders directed at number of cases soon enough gave way to access-blocking decisions about the death toll. According to a report by the International Press Institute³, legal action was taken against six journalists in Turkey due to their reporting on COVID-19, and they were summoned to give their statements. On the grounds of spreading panic, access to news items that included statements by Turkish Medical Association (TTB) were blocked. Fifteen journalists lost their lives due to COVID-19 in Turkey, as they were striving to report truthfully in dire

³ <https://susma24.com/gazetecilere-koronavirus-sorusturmaları-artiyor/>

situations from the field, according to a report by Global Journalism Council (KGK)⁴. In addition, a draft bill on amnesty due to coronavirus-related measures excluded journalists who were imprisoned on terror-related charges and kept in prisons during the outbreak.

According to a report by Press in Arrest, the enactment of a draft bill that stipulated the establishing of alternative bar associations in each province would result in jeopardizing due process for journalists, since members of the press would then be branded by their lawyer's registered bar association.⁵

Throughout the year, which saw attempts to force a number of Kurdish journalists such as Mesopotamia Agency reporter Emrullah Acar and *Yeni Yaşam* newspaper worker Hamdullah Bayram to spy on their co-workers, the mounting pressure on the Kurdish press continued to grow.

One of the most important journalistic events of the year occurred following the news about two citizens who were thrown from a helicopter by soldiers in Van. On 13 September 2020, Mesopotamia Agency (MA) documented with a medical certificate that Servet Turgut and Osman Şiban, who were detained by soldiers out on an operation in the countryside of Çatak district in Van province, were thrown out of a military helicopter in a news item titled "Two days after their detention they appeared in a hospital." Servet Turgut lost his life 20 days after the incident. Police prevented gatherings to read out press statements about Servet Turgut. Access to all news items about the incident were blocked. During a police raid on the offices of Mesopotamia Agency in Van, MA reporters Adnan Bilen and Cemil Uğur who had documented the incident, Jinnews reporter Şehriban Abi and journalist Nazan Sala were arrested.

⁴ <https://www.kgk.org.tr/kgk-dunyada-489-turkiyede-15-gazeteci-kovid-kurbani-oldu/>

⁵ <https://susma24.com/press-in-arrestin-basin-ozgurlugu-raporu-yayinlandi/>

Social Media

Kültigin Kağan Akbulut

While the government tightened its grip on the major actors of the mainstream media one after the other, we have seen attempts to neuter and stifle social media, one of the last remaining free spaces, by means of legal investigations and regulations.

Criminal complaints were filed against scores of journalists, artists, and members of the public on the grounds of their social media posts.

Investigations were launched against cartoonist Nuri Kurtcebe, Kurdish writer Fuad Önen, *Tiyatro* magazine editor Mustafa Demirkanlı, photographer Fırat Eren, Mesopotamia Cultural Center artist Weysi Ermiş, actress Nilüfer Aydan, all for their social media posts. A criminal complaint was filed against poet Ahmet Telli on the ground of “insulting the president” in a fan page on a social media platform; Telli was later acquitted in the trial.

Journalists, too, got their share of social media trials. Many a journalist who either work in independent media or continue their work on social media have been subjected to criminal prosecution. Journalist Nurcan Baysal, reporter and former Halk TV executive Hakan Aygün, Aydın Metropolitan Journalists Association head Cem Ulucan, Fox TV anchor Fatih Portakal, journalist Zülal Koçer, activist and reporter Taylan Kulaçoğlu, *RED* magazine editor-in-chief Hakan Gülseven, journalist Metin Uca, Jinnews reporter Beritan Canözer, Artı Gerçek columnist Nurcan Kaya, reporter Oktay Candemir, reporter Sabiha Temizkan, and reporter Burhan Ekinci are only a fraction of the names who have been investigated or prosecuted for their social media posts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also become a potent pretense for social media arrests. According to the statements from the Health Ministry and the Interior Ministry, authorities pursued legal proceedings against 449 social media accounts on the ground of disseminating provocative information about the coronavirus in March 2020. In May, it was declared that more than 7,000 social media accounts were under legal proceedings, 496 individuals were detained, and a further 10 were arrested.

In addition, an investigation was launched against an individual who had hacked the central audio system of a mosque and played the Turkish version of the popular protest song *Bella Ciao* (Çav Bella).

We have also witnessed social media restricted. Social media bandwidth was throttled, essentially rendering the platforms inaccessible, following an airstrike against Idlib, Syria that claimed the lives of Turkish soldiers.

Among the most important developments this year was the “social media law” that came into effect as of 1 October. The Law on the Regulations on the Publications on the Internet and Suppression of Crimes Committed By Means of Such Publications mandated social network providers with over one million daily users in Turkey to appoint local representatives and store user data locally in Turkey.

It became the subject of much speculation whether the social network providers would comply with the law, which the critics decried as an attempt to silence the last remaining free voices. Companies who failed to appoint legal representatives would face a drastic bandwidth reduction by an initial %50, and subsequently by up to %90. As of this writing, US-based YouTube, Facebook, and LinkedIn; Russia-based Vk; China-based TikTok announced they would appoint legal representatives in Turkey. The case of Twitter, the most popular platform for independent media in Turkey, which has refused to designate a local representative, remains to be seen.

In addition, homophobia and bans towards LGBTIQ+ people has escalated noticeably. During a period of increased hate speech against LGBTIQ+ people, and in particular Istanbul Pride Week, access to Hornet, a foreign dating app for LGBTIQ+, and Gabile, Turkey's longest-running LGBTIQ+ chat and meet app, were blocked.

Publishing Industry

Lara Güney Özlen

Last year, the most noteworthy censor in the publishing industry was the Board for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications that worked under the remit of Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services. Between October 2019 and November 2020, the Board declared 13 books, 9 of which were children's books, as "obscene publications." As per the Law No. 1117 on the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications, these books could only be sold to those over 18, packaged in an opaque envelope or a plastic bag with the statement "harmful to minors" visible over the packaging; they could not be displayed in store windows and they could not be advertised.

It is significant to note here that the children's books in question focused on gender, biology, knowledge of anatomy, sexuality, sexual orientation and children's rights. Moreover, it has been a year where we witnessed certain ideas and images which supposedly hinted at LGBTIQ+ themes such as rainbows were declared potentially harmful for children.

The Declaration of the Rights of Girls (Kız Çocukları Hakları Bildirgesi), the Turkish translation of which was recalled and destroyed after being declared an "obscene publication" on the account of "encouraging homosexuality and including images and expressions that challenge the stereotypical ideas on child development," and against whose translator a criminal complaint was filed, was about children's rights and gender equality. Likewise, children's books *Asi Kızlara Yatmadan Önce Öyküler* (Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls), *Evden Uzakta* (Ilse is Gone), *Bazı Günler* (There Are Such Days), *Kin Kanatlılar* (Wings of Hatred), *İçim Dışım Gökkuşağı* (I am Rainbow All Over, Inside and Outside) and *Burcu ve Berk/ Cinsellik- Cinselliği Keşfediyoruz* (Burcu and Berk/ Sexuality- We Are Exploring Sexuality), and a TÜBİTAK (the national science agency) publication titled *Bebekler Nereden Gelir* (Where Do Babies Come From) were about gender equality, adolescence, and human anatomy. The board decided that these books could have "harmful effects on the spirituality of children."

Towards the end of 2020, Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services established a hotline within the scope of Fight Against Obscene Publications (MİM) project. Prior to the hotline, the Board for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications had taken action against certain books that

had either been targeted in lynch campaigns on social media or otherwise denounced. An organization called Turkish Family Council filed a criminal complaint against Amnesty International executives on the charges of “inciting the public to hatred and animosity,” “obscenity,” “establishing a terrorist organization,” and “espionage” over a children’s book published by the organization titled *Feminist Alfabe* (Feminist Alphabet); the complaint also called for a ban on the book.

The Board for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications did not only target books classified under “children and young adult” category and declare them obscene. According to a report by the Turkish Publishers Association, five books classified as adult fiction were also subjected to restrictions reserved for “obscene publications.” One such book was *Aydın En Çıplak Günü* (The Most Naked Day of the Month) by Buket Uzuner that was first published 34 years ago.

Throughout the year, we have seen a board which despite having no relevant field expertise, neither pedagogues nor sexual health specialists, violate the freedom to publish by means of exercising an unchecked authority to decide which books could be harmful to children. We have also seen that the board takes their decisions with references to abstract and subjective judgments such as “public morality” and “national values” and by means of describing concepts such as “obscenity” which are not defined in the law as criminal elements. Thus, we can claim that the board, responding to social reflexes calling for the board to take action exacerbated control and censorship in publishing.

Publishers and writers who publish in Kurdish were not exempt from suppression last year either. J&J Publishing House was raided as part of an operation against Democratic Society Congress (DTK); some of its books were confiscated on the ground of being “documents related to terrorist organizations,” and owner Azad Zal was briefly detained on the allegation of “membership of a terrorist organization.”

Mehmet Tunç ve Bêkes (Mehmet Tunç and Bêkes), a biographical book by Kurdish politician and writer Mahmut Alınak about Mehmet Tunç, Cizre People’s Assembly Co-Chair who had died during a state-imposed curfew in Cizre, and his brother Orhan Tunç was banned and confiscated on 14 December. A criminal complaint demanding life sentence was filed against Mehmet Alınak, citing his meeting with the Tunç family to donate the

proceeds of the book and petitioning the UN to recognize Kurdish as an official language as “gross misconduct.” Alınak was arrested in February and released in May.

Additionally, Istanbul Bookseller, a network of city-owned bookstores, that is run by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality was revealed to have refrained from selling Kurdish books by many publishers including Nûbihar, Na, Hivda and Avesta on the ground of “public sensitivities.” Upon public outcry, the Istanbul Bookseller retracted and announced that it would sell Kurdish books by the publishers on their website. Istanbul Bookseller’s retreat is a powerful reminder that speaking up and standing against censorship is extremely crucial.

Cinema

Özkan Küçük

As with other fields in the arts, cinema shared in the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Movie theaters were closed for the most of the year. The simple practice of going to a movie theater and watching a movie was almost removed from daily life. Production works on new films were suspended. With quarantine, film events transitioned online. Thus, the digital transformation of cinema that had started long ago brought about censorship and self-censorship cases to the digital realm.

Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) had acquired the authority to supervise digital film platforms following the entry into force of the new online broadcasting law the previous year. However, the fact that a film called *Minnoşlar* (Cuties) was caught in the web of RTÜK prior to its release on Netflix due to arguments over the film's poster and teaser exceeded even the wildest of expectations. The fact that the platform was obliged to remove the film from its Turkish catalogue upon the "recommendation" of RTÜK, considered as a case of "prior censorship, prior control," was a clear sign that the council would thereafter utilize a systematic censorship apparatus over online broadcasts.

Self-censorship cases that can be construed as "negotiatory, reconciliatory" pertaining to Netflix Turkish originals and the decision of Blu TV, a local subscription video-on-demand service launched in 2016, to remove a series called *Çıplak* (Naked) from its platform due solely to the fact that it became a trending topic on the social media before even a RTÜK takedown request appeared, was evidence that digital platforms would not confront oppressive censorship policies. Moreover, it revealed that scriptwriters and other creative staff were "OK" with self-censorship mechanism.

It has become a common occurrence for some time to censor certain statements and paraphrase the original content in dubbing and subtitles in films broadcast on TV stations. One such incident occurred when TV channel Kanal D aired *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, and censored the words "magic," "wizard," "dementor," and "goblin."

All the scenes depicting sex and showing nudity in productions broadcast on TV were cut almost "out of habit." The cutting of a sex scene in *The English Patient* that was streamed on Sinema TV, accessible via subscription, on the

grounds of RTÜK rules, was just one of such incidents.

Even a statue had its share of censorship of nudity. Tivibu, a digital TV streaming platform owned by Türk Telekom, made an unparalleled case of censorship by blurring the breasts of a mermaid statue in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's latest feature *Ahlat Ağacı* (The Wild Pear Tree).

In parallel with lynching campaigns against LGBTIQ+ people throughout the year, supported not least by the head of RTÜK, dialogues in films broadcast on TV stations were censored. Homophobic "sensitivities" even caused a film festival to be cancelled. Following the announcement that the festival committee would grant a gender-neutral "Best Performance" award instead of "Best Actor" and "Best Actress" awards, Malatya International Film Festival which was organized by Malatya Metropolitan Municipality and overseen by Turkish Cinema and Audiovisual Culture Foundation (TÜRSAK) head Elif Dağdeviren, was cancelled by the municipality. The statement by the municipality read, "The phrase 'gender-neutral' in the said press statement is a manifestation of an approach that threatens the entire world and our future, and that is certainly not in line with our values, regarding which our Metropolitan Municipality has the utmost sensitivities."

Film festivals in Turkey, as was the case for all film festivals around the world, were either delayed or organized online due to COVID-19 pandemic. As can be expected, while the "major" festivals with vast resources were able to adopt to this new phenomenon relatively easily, the rest were forced to postpone their events because of their infrastructure or insufficient resources. *Hangi İnsan Hakları? Film Festivali* (Which Human Rights? Film Festival) organized by Documentarist was one of the festivals that was cancelled. Documentarist attributed the cancellation to the heavy traffic, hence adding a whole new dimension to the issue at hand.

Another controversial case of the past year was the cancellation of the screenings of the movie *İki Gözüm Ahmet* which is about the late Kurdish singer Ahmet Kaya, directed by Gani Rüzgâr Şavata and Hakan Gürtop, due to an interim prohibitory injunction upon the request of the Kaya family. The producers condemned the decision as "a series case of oppression and censorship."

Another director was sentenced to prison because of his film. Kutbettin Cebe was sentenced to 2 years and 4 months in prison on the charge of "membership of a terrorist organization" due to the documentary film *Roza-*

İki Nehrin Ülkesi (Rosa: The Land of Two Rivers).

The construction of an ornamental pool at the site of the historic Yılmaz Güney Movie Theater (Yılmaz Güney was a Kurdish film director whose works focused on the plight of Kurdish and working class people in Turkey, whose works were banned, he was imprisoned and died in exile), which had been demolished by the then government-appointed trustee after a suspicious fire in 2017, by the government-appointed trustee Hulusi Şahin was another nail in coffin for the preservation of cinema history.

In view of these examples that come to light and then recorded as “cases,” we can claim that it has been a year of restraint for the cinema industry, when the government cracked down on the industry through the mobilisation of ministries, prosecutor’s offices, public institutions, and unofficial mechanisms. We have seen the worrying institutionalization of censorship and self-censorship mechanisms.

Theater

Ayşen Güven

The year 2020 started with the murmurings⁶ that we lived in “the golden age” of theater despite the fact that freedom of artistic expression had been gradually losing altitude over the past 10 years. Artists and art institutions had increasingly become the target of the government following massive demonstrations against the proposed amendments to the regulation of İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality City Theaters (ŞT), the fight to cancel the destruction of historic Emek Movie Theater in downtown İstanbul, and Gezi Park protests. Then came the treatment of theater as enjoying no public subsidy or exemptions but subject to the same tax regime as the local shop and thus being throttled by taxes and withholding taxes... Just when the sheer power of the creative process as well as the number of viewers started to wane, we were told that the theater had entered a “the golden age.” A “golden age” that conceals economic, and physical pressure along with censorship and heavy-handed self-censorship!

The pandemic has fallen right into the middle of such an “age.” The classic and “legitimate” excuses for refusing stages to theater plays and players such as “absence of fire escape” and “renovation of the stage” – which are relatively more common in Anatolia – were easily found in the coronavirus pandemic. While cargo and meal deliveries, and even nights shifts in factories continued during the pandemic, despite taking all the relevant precautions, art venues – considered as “entertainment” stops were closed to protect our health, without the necessary support and funds to keep them alive during the lockdown. A few stages have permanently shut down due to irregular and yet stringent implementation of the pandemic measures, that prioritizes neither life nor arts. Öykü Sahne, Küçük Salon, Toy İstanbul, and Galata Perform stages – there might be more; forgive me – closed down.

That wasn’t the end of the heavy losses for a year of suffering. In November 2020, Ankara State Opera Orchestra musicians whose concert schedules were not canceled despite the measures to curb the coronavirus outbreak,

⁶ Just some of the few articles that use the phrase “golden age”: <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/kelebek/hurriyet-cumartesi/sezon-acildi-sahnenin-altin-cagi-41348909>

<https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/gunaydin/sb-mevlut-tezel/2020/05/06/tiyatrolar-kenara-para-koymadi-mi>

reported themselves to the Ministry of Health. State Theaters (DT) members objected to being forced to perform at official concerts in spite of the outbreak. The failure of the authorities to address these urgent calls resulted in the death of stage designer Ali Cem Köroğlu due to COVID-19. At about the same time, 50 theater players reportedly tested positive for COVID-19 in Izmir.

Officials, though, took some “baby steps” as our theaters were struggling to survive. On 15 March, on account of cancellations in the culture and arts field due to the coronavirus pandemic, Culture and Tourism Minister Mehmet Nuri Ersoy had a meeting with representatives of private theaters. The meeting went well; private theaters expressed their requests such as tax relief and rental subsidy; however eventually it all came to naught. In addition to the organizations of the city theaters within the body of certain municipalities that have been recently taken over from AKP by CHP such as the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, we also witnessed the ministry “deign to” allocate stages to private theaters through the State Theater. For some reason, the ministry acted only after City Theaters’ solidarity initiative.

The City Theaters welcomed independent private theaters that were tested with “to be or not to be” to their stages. Among the private theaters Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IBB) City Theaters allocated their stages to in a show of solidarity, a Teatra Jiyana Nû production *Bêrû* performed in Kurdish was soon after targeted by Aydınlık newspaper with a news item titled “IBB stage handed over to PKK theater group.” Merely hours before the curtain was to rise, the play was banned by the District Governor’s Office. In fact, it would have been the first time a Kurdish play would be put on stage in the 106-year history of Istanbul City Theaters. Instead, an investigation was launched. On the other hand, the DT’s support by allocating its stages was not unconditional, either; the texts had to be “examined” first, which raised concerns of censorship among the theater players.

Last year was no exception in that artists were pilloried, investigated, and prosecuted due to their social media posts. As the increasingly authoritarian ruling perspective permeated the language and behaviors of many a section of the public, it also cut through humor. An investigation was launched against stand-up comedian Pınar Fidan on the charge of “publicly degrading a section of the public on grounds of social class, race, religion, sect, sexuality and religious differences” over her remarks about the Alevi

community in a show. Another stand-up comedian, Emre Günsal, was arrested for allegedly defaming Atatürk, Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi, Shams Tabrizi, Konya province and Konya residents over his remarks in a show. Access to an online video of Günsal from the said show was blocked.

Government-appointed trustees in Kurdish provinces weren't inactive in the theater field, either. Upon the appointment of a trustee to Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality, 8 musicians and theater players employed by the municipality were expelled. Amed City Theater, founded by theater players who were expelled from the municipality by government-appointed trustees, on the other hand, opened the season with an adaptation of a Dario Fo play on its new stage despite the abiding obstacles.

In March 2020, that is, when the pandemic continued to spread rapidly and theaters closed down their doors to protect themselves and their audience, TV shows continued to shoot. In those days, Actor's Union of Turkey organized a solid campaign to call for the filming to be stopped and it got results. The union additionally launched a "Monitoring and Prevention of Censorship in the Fields of Visual, Audio, and Performing Arts in Turkey" project.

Let Our Theaters Live Initiative was also established to draw attention to the fact that the lifeline of theaters were completely cut under pandemic conditions. The statement published by the Initiative attracted the attention of the audience, though arguably not the officials. Young actors who were left unemployed and vulnerable in the pandemic tried to raise their voice in a silent protest last August. The Theater Cooperative, founded in 2019 with the aim of strengthening independent theaters, played a crucial role in securing contacts with the Ministry. In order to meet the basic needs of theater workers, a solidarity platform called "Dayanışmanın 100'ü Şiir" (100 Poems of Solidarity) was launched. In those tumultuous times, the Istanbul Theater Festival, organized by the Istanbul Culture and Arts Foundation, decided to continue. The festival program mainly consisted of plays by private theaters, which fought for survival.

The pandemic brought numerous stages on both sides of the city such as Kumbaracı50 and Kadıköy Emek Theater to the brink of closure. The heartfelt response of the audience to the solidarity campaigns launched by these two theaters was one of the most promising events of the year in the theater. Towards the end of the year, the interest audiences showed

for Moda Stage, which started to livestream its plays and shared this opportunity with other private theaters, was also one of the important resistance points.

Our theaters perhaps felt the power of solidarity most during the pandemic.

By contrast, the administering authorities saw theater neither as a public service nor as a public need. They continued to see the theater as presumably the last thing to save in a fire. Therefore, saying “let our theaters live” did not lead to any other consequence than a show of unit last year.

Music

Lara Güney Özlen

Lawsuits filed against musicians within the scope of the Anti-Terror Law (TMK), concert bans and interventions in cultural centers were the prominent forms of violation in the music field last year.

Throughout the year, we witnessed on many occasions that Grup Yorum's freedom of artistic expression was violated in this way. A myriad of lawsuits were filed against members of the folk band on the grounds of "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" and "membership of a terrorist organization." Idil Cultural Center, where the group rehearsed, was raided by police on at least 3 different occasions. During the year, the concerts of the band, at least 30 members of which were arbitrarily arrested, and 13 members of which were still imprisoned pending trial, were banned five times. Band members Helin Bölek and Ibrahim Gökçek, who went on a death fast demanding that the concert bans be lifted, the cultural center not raided and the lawsuits against the group members dropped, lost their lives.

In addition to Idil Cultural Center, other cultural venues used by musicians were also suppressed, and musicians were often left without a place to work. Mesopotamia Cultural Center (MKM), a Kurdish culture and arts center in Istanbul, was one of the venues that were put under pressure throughout the year. Although MKM won the tender for the renovation of the building rented from the Directorate General of Foundations three times last year, it was forced to vacate its building upon the order of the Beyoğlu District Governorship after the municipality canceled the tenders. Later, the District Governorship allocated the building to the Beyoğlu Municipality.

In addition to the offenses defined under the Anti-Terror Law, musicians were put on trial particularly on the charges of insulting the president and other public officials last year. The grounds in these trials against musicians cited their songs, their social media posts or their remarks during stage performances.

Due to the ambiguous definition of "terror" under TMK, which can be interpreted in various ways depending on the political conjuncture, performing Kurdish music can be conflated with "making propaganda for a terrorist organization," which often causes artists to face retrospective lawsuits. A prime example of this happened when Kurdish folk-rock band Grup Munzur

was sentenced to 10 months in prison on the charge of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” for the Kurdish songs *Zindana Diyarbakır* (the Dungeon of Diyarbakır) and *Serhildan Jiyane* (Uprising is a Life) they had previously performed during the Newroz celebrations in Van in 2017. Since the announcement of the verdict was deferred, the members will be imprisoned if they commit the same “crime,” that is, if they sing again.

Throughout the year, Kurdish musicians were subjected to investigations for “insulting the president” along with “making propaganda for a terrorist organization.” Kurdish musician Hozan Canê had been arrested and sentenced to prison on the charges of “membership of a terrorist organization” and “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” over a documentary titled *74. Şengal Fermanı*, or *74th Sincar Firman* (also 74th Sinjar Genocide; literally meaning “edict,” the word *firman* is usually translated as “genocide”). 3rd of August 2014 marked the beginning of the attacking and capturing of the Sinjar city and neighboring towns and killing of thousands of Yazidi people by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) for which she wrote the screenplay and which shows images of People’s Protection Units (YPG) and the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) members fighting against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS). As she was in prison, the musician was tried again on the charge of “insulting the president” over cartoons posted under her name on Facebook. Hozan Canê, who was released with a travel ban in September, still stands trial on the allegation of “membership of a terrorist organization,” which carries a prison term with the lower limit of 5 years, despite having spent 2 years in prison already.

Kurdish musician Ferhat Tunç, who has been a political refugee in Germany since 2019, has stood trial in 7 separate cases with demands totaling up to 20 years of imprisonment on charges of since 2017 of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization,” “insulting the president,” and “insulting a public official” over his comments about the military operation in Afrin, Syria, for remarks at concerts, and for the artwork on the cover of his album.

While organizations that advocate gender equality and LGBTIQ+ rights and work to end violence against women and LGBTIQ+ were publicly targeted all the year round, musicians who defend these rights were also subjected to similar pressures and censorship.

A striking example of this occurred when police was called to a concert hall and musician Melek Mosso was taken off the stage in August when she said “Is-

tanbul Convention saves lives" before singing *Keklik Gibi* (Like A Partridge) dedicated to murdered women.

Musicians were also affected by the rise of hate speech against LGBTIQ+. The acceptance speech of musician Mabel Matiz at the 46th Pantene Golden Butterfly Awards was censored and cut during the live broadcast. The openly gay musician, also known for his support for the LGBTIQ+ movement, had dedicated his award to "everyone who celebrates and spreads diversity" in his speech. Previously, the lyrics of Matiz had been used in a multiple-choice question in the Higher Education Institutions Examination (YKS), upon which it was announced that an investigation was launched about the question in issue.

In conclusion, musicians were prosecuted and censored for their desire to make art in their mother tongues or for expressing their political views in 2020. The censorship, intimidation and lawsuits they faced, as well as being deprived of the professional needs such as concert permits, rehearsal venues, access to cultural centers, combined with the lack of state support in face of the growing economic problems due to the pandemic, caused artists to be unable to perform their craft and some of them left the country.

Visual Arts

Derya Ülker

(Painter, Academic and Speak Up Platform Advisory Board member)

A perception common to us all during the pandemic, is that things in some many fields and to different degrees could no longer remain the same. There was a particular stagnation in the field of visual arts, but not only because of the pandemic. Since being visible is the main feature of visual arts, the restrictions on expression have become even more noticeable in this field. From the first months of the year, censorship made its pressure felt on the works and artists. As a result of certain interventions, organizers sometimes had to cancel their own exhibitions, and sometimes an image was deemed an element of crime. I will confine myself to just mentioning the self-censorship mechanism that emerged as a consequence of the widespread use of these practices.

Exhibitions held within the scope of commemoration events on the anniversaries of social incidents were distinctly under strict control. The *Peace and Freedom Photography Exhibition* to be jointly organized by the Diyarbakır Bar Association and Tahir Elçi Foundation to mark the 4th anniversary of the killing of Diyarbakır Bar Association President Tahir Elçi in Hasan Paşa Han on 29 November 2019 was not granted permission by the Regional Directorate for Foundations, that worked under the remit of Culture and Tourism Ministry. The application made by the Tahir Elçi Foundation was rejected by the Governor's Office on the grounds of "high customer traffic."

From the first days of the year, we began to hear of interventions in art. In January 2020, the Istanbul Amateur Photography and Cinema Association had to cancel the *Şehrin İnsan Halleri* (Human States of the City) and the *60th Season Opening Exhibition*. The reason for the cancellation of the exhibition, which was scheduled to open in Üsküdar Municipality Bağlarbaşı Congress and Culture Center, was declared as the interference of cultural center administrators who tried to select which photos would be exhibited.

Domestic matters resonated abroad as well. Zehra Doğan's works titled *Özgür Gündem Zindan* (Free Agenda Dungeon), completed while she was still imprisoned for allegedly making propaganda for terrorist organization, was exhibited at the London Tate Modern Art Museum in January. In addition, the famous graffiti artist Banksy supported Zehra Doğan with a powerful

painted tribute to her.

Speaking of graffiti, one is reminded of the spray-paint intervention to one of the reproductions of Devrim Erbil exhibited on the billboards surrounding the construction site of the Seagull Project in Kabataş: Criminal prosecution was initiated against 6 persons who drew the figure of a man hanging from his neck tied to the moon and a star, reminiscent of the Turkish flag, on one of the billboards with Erbil's reproductions on 24 February 2020 on the charge of "publicly degrading the Turkish flag."

In March, museums and art galleries were closed for an indefinite time due to the pandemic. The museum week in May was imprinted on the memories with virtual tours where indoor spaces were transitioned to digital platforms. It was a challenging test for art galleries and museums to keep up with this process. After the initial confusion of quarantine, there came a lively period in which exhibitions changed mediums, and artists and galleries tried to reach their audiences through various means, in particular social media. The role of critics and art writers became even more important at this stage. Unfortunately, not all artists and galleries had equal opportunities to establish and maintain virtual exhibitions, and thus reach their audiences. However, this new situation brought with it the insistence and inventiveness in search of new possibilities for the art world.

The main problems we faced before the pandemic such as the lack of social security rights and benefits for the artists were perhaps addressed with seriousness and broad participation for the first time. Solidarity networks were intermingled to confront basic needs. Although debates on organizing came at a rather late stage compared to other fields, artists in the field of visual arts showed tremendous solidarity, sharing each other's work, holding online meetings and live streams. A number of teams and platforms such as Omuz (Shoulder), Sanatçı Destek Birliği (Artists Support Association), İzole (Isolated) Project, Orta Hareketi (Middle-Center Movement) emerged along this axis of addressing such basic needs such as joint production, sharing experiences and materials, and above all reaching buyers in the face of increasing prices for materials and decreasing sales figures. I hope these new developments will reaffirm our optimism that when art is blocked in one place, it will reappear in even more places.

With the transition to online teaching in Fine Arts Faculties, restrictions on the working opportunities of live models who are under contracts with some

universities, hence their eventual expulsion and even the likelihood of not receiving work permits for 2021 emerged. This important subject of live models, an indispensable part of arts education, is one of the issues that should not be forgotten from the past year.

Internet Broadcasting, Radio and Television

Sumru Tamer

In the last months of 2019, with the entry into force of “the By-Law on the Provision of Radio, Television and On-Demand Media Services via Internet Environment,” which invested RTÜK with the authority to supervise and censor periodic broadcasts such as shows, movies, radio and music programs on the digital realm, online broadcasting has also become entrenched in the mechanism of censorship and self-censorship.

Experts had raised concerns over the regulation, stating that it would target digital platforms such as Netflix, BluTV; media organizations that broadcast through platforms such as YouTube, Periscope, Spotify and citizen journalism initiatives.⁷

What occurred in 2020 proved those predictions right. Soon after the regulation came into effect, an episode of the political thriller series *Designated Survivor*, which came under fire on the allegation of “supporting and making propaganda for FETÖ” over depicting a fictitious version of the events of 15 July failed coup attempt, was removed from the Turkish catalogue of Netflix.

Then, it was claimed that Netflix Turkish original *Aşk 101* (Love 101) had a gay character in its original script, but was later censored. The President of RTÜK stated, regarding the issue, that they would not “allow for broadcasts that are offensive to the national and moral values of the society, that may have adverse effects on the physical and spiritual development of children and young people,” and that they issued a “verbal warning to Netflix.” Another RTÜK official confirmed that the series was indeed censored, declaring “The problem with that character was resolved through one-on-one meetings.”⁸

A similar case occurred during the production of another Netflix Turkish original series *Şimdiki Aklım Olsaydı* (If Only) which also included a gay character in its script. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which reviews all scripts of internationally sponsored shows, gave the drama permission to film on the condition of a series of changes, including the removal of the gay character from the script. However, following a meeting requested by RTÜK officials, Netflix decided to cancel the series.⁹

⁷ <http://platform24.org/yazarlar/2915/rtuk-interneti-kontrol-edebilir-mi>

⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-53354391>

⁹ <https://fasikul.altiyazi.net/pano/bakanlik-ve-rtuktan-sansur-netflixten-iptal-karari/>

Although the particulars of the process between online broadcasting companies, the ministry and RTÜK were not transparent, we could well see that RTÜK, which lacks a pre-supervision authority on paper, that is, the authority to interfere with the content of productions before their broadcast, could in reality obstruct projects in the script development stage as well as yet-unaired productions.

As can be seen from the examples, homophobia, or in the words of the official discourse, “public morality and national values,” emerged as one of the significant reasons for censorship, as it was in the past years. Instances such as when RTÜK Vice President İbrahim Uslu replied a tweet about a kissing scene between two women in an episode of Netflix Turkish original *Hakan: Muhafız* (The Protector) on the social media platform, that read “even RTÜK didn’t watch that show for controlling purposes” with “we watched it=),” and thereby raising concerns of upcoming censorship; or when state broadcaster TRT 2 censored the movie *Green Book* by cutting a scene where it was revealed that a character had been subjected to police violence because he was gay, clearly illustrate that government agencies and representatives support and even encourage homophobic campaigns and censorship.

We have also seen that those same actors adopt it as part of their natural duty to impose a certain value system, enforcing censorship and self-censorship of sexuality, eroticism or any expression they associate with sexuality and eroticism, and that they do not hesitate to use their powers in this regard. For instance, TRT 2 paraphrased the following sentence “Now that we’ve had sex, we can be seen in public together” in an episode of the Nordic noir crime series *Bron/Broen* (The Bridge) as “Now that we’ve slept together...” RTÜK issued a warning on the ground of obscenity to a music video by singer İrem Derici uploaded to YouTube. RTÜK, again, ordered the suspension of 3 episodes of a radio show on Kafa Radio over the remarks “I just made potato chips at home. These would be good with a beer.”

With the new regulation in effect, broadcasts of digital platforms that RTÜK does not approve and therefore do not issue a license or a broadcasting certificate can be blocked upon an application by RTÜK and a decision by BTK. For example, the website of Özgürüz Radyo at ozguruz20.org, headed by exiled journalist Can Dündar, was taken to court by RTÜK on the ground that it was “broadcasting illegally” and was eventually blocked by BTK for the 21st time.

Internet broadcasting, which has recently become a rare outlet where dissenting voices can express themselves, can sometimes be restricted without resorting to any legal procedures, in addition to legal – but unlawful – practices. For instance, access to the YouTube channel KHK TV, which was created by people who were dismissed from public service through statutory decrees issued during Turkey's 2016-2018 state of emergency, was blocked without a court order.

Throughout the year, we have witnessed RTÜK impose disproportionate penalties on programs and channels in television broadcasting that were not affiliated with the government and that broadcast critical comments and news as well. The grounds for the suspension of programs, total blackout orders, administrative penalties and fines were predominantly over criticism of government's Syria policy, the handling of the coronavirus pandemic and the course of economy. The harsh punishments handed down to such broadcasts were mostly related to the charges of "inciting the public to hatred and enmity," "violating the principles of accuracy and truth," "disrespecting national and moral values of the society," "broadcasting against the existence and indivisible integrity of the state."

In addition, RTÜK imposed a total blackout sanction for the first time in its history on similar grounds, suspending the broadcasts of TELE1 for 5 days; the same sanction was imposed on Halk TV as well, but the execution of the decision was later suspended.

To conclude, we saw that critical information and discussions about the COVID-19 pandemic and Turkey's military operations, which were among the crucial topics of 2020, could not be broadcast in programs on television; that broadcasts were cut; that TV stations were handed down heavy penalties; and that numerous lawsuits were launched against people due to their remarks during such programs.

Diyarbakir and the Region

Özkan Küçük

With respect to the cases of censorship in Diyarbakir and other Kurdish provinces, the almost continuous declarations of bans on public gatherings and demonstrations by the governor's offices of Mardin, Van, Hakkari, Şanlıurfa, Batman and Diyarbakir are the most notable.

These bans, which covered a period of 15 days or a month at a stretch, and were constantly renewed, created a de facto state of emergency in the region.

While the bans were justified on differing grounds until March when the coronavirus-related measures were announced in Turkey, as of then, the pandemic measures were cited as a ground for bans without exception. With the measures taken, social dissent was presumably prevented and the expression and activities of civil society were restricted.

The discretionary practices of government-appointed trustees also remained on the agenda. The efforts of government-appointed trustees to design the cultural environment in the previous years, though briefly interrupted due to local elections, continued almost "without a hitch" thanks to a new wave of dismissals and appointments of new trustees.

The then governor Hasan Basri Güzeloğlu who was appointed as a trustee to Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality dismissed eight theater players and musicians on the grounds that they were "redundant." Among those dismissed from the municipality's Department of Culture and Social Affairs was filmmaker Lisa Çalan, who lost both of her legs as a result of an ISIS bomb attack at a Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) rally held in Diyarbakir's İstasyon Square on 5 June 2015.

The Batman trustee, who had previously appointed a man to Batman Municipality's Directorate of Women and Family Services, decided on the construction of an ornamental pool on the empty lot of Yılmaz Güney Movie Theater, which was demolished after a suspicious fire in 2017. The elected city council had actually decided to rebuild the movie theater. One of the first actions of Governor Ali Fuat Atik in his new office as the appointed trustee to Siirt Municipality was to demolish the Celadet Ali Bedirxan library.

Van's trustee mayor, in similar vein, removed the bilingual signposts in Turkish and Kurdish in Çaldıran district under the pretext of renewal and later

hanged only Turkish signposts in their stead. Governor Türker Öksüz who was appointed as a trustee to Kars Municipality deleted all the posts about the work of the previous HDP administration from the Turkish account and deactivated the Kurdish account of the municipality on Twitter, after dissolving the city council.

It was a year in which artists, writers and journalists were habitually detained in the region. Musician Yılmaz Çelik was detained in a police raid on his home after his concert in Dersim.

As the crackdown intensified in the region, governors and district governors, in what is essentially an unusual turn of events, made it their “duty” to interfere with the words and phrases on banners or with the content of artistic activities. Here are two interesting examples. A banner carried by Confederation of Public Employees Trade Unions (KESK) members to participate in the “social peace rally” organized by the Amed Labour and Democracy Platform in Diyarbakır was stopped by the police, who cut the word “war” from it, before letting it be seen at the rally.

In January 2020, a music and theater performance organized by Doğubayazıt Municipality, Ağrı, was blocked by the District Governor’s Office on the grounds of the performers who were reported to take part in the production. It was later revealed that artists who had come to Doğubayazıt to attend events were systematically detained in advance.

The governor of Şanlıurfa banned an upcoming performance of the Kurdish play *Bêrû*, which was previously banned by the Gaziosmanpaşa District Governor in Istanbul, offering his own “contribution” to these practices.

The raids on the Democratic Society Congress (DTK) and the Rosa Women’s Association in Diyarbakır were among the important cases during the last year.

In lawsuits related to DTK, Evrensel newspaper columnist Yusuf Karataş was sentenced to 10 years and 6 months, and journalist Ayşegül Doğan was sentenced to 6 years and 3 months in prison. Journalist Hakkı Boltan was served an indictment that demanded from 7 years and 6 months up to 15 years of imprisonment.

2020 was a year in which the suppression of the Kurdish press, detentions and arrests increased exponentially in the region. The arrest of the Mesopotamia Agency reporters who reported on the citizens thrown from a military helicopter and the raids on the agency’s Van offices; the arrest of five

journalists while covering the protests that started after the appointment of a trustee to the Mardin Metropolitan Municipality, and the indictment against them for “attending illegal public gatherings and marches unarmed and refusing to disperse on their own accord despite warning” were two events that summarized the perilous conditions of practicing journalism in the region.

Nevertheless, journalists in the region also faced threats other than their detention and court orders. For instance, reporters who went to cover a house fire that broke out in downtown Diyarbakır were attacked by the landlord while on duty. As yet another example, a person from a group of people who had been waiting and demonstrating in front of HDP’s Diyarbakır Provincial Organization building for more than a year claiming that their children were kidnapped by PKK and holding HDP responsible for this, attacked the journalists who were frequenting the party building on 16 December 2020. These attacks, of course, went unpunished.

The media outlets affiliated with the government reported the insults and attempted attacks against journalists as “mutual tension,” which was a distressing in the context of journalistic ethics.

Over the last year the oppression in Diyarbakır and other Kurdish provinces became even bleaker as a result of the pandemic’s “contribution”. Nevertheless, people of Diyarbakır, who attribute a kind of holiness to the number 21, the license plate code of their city, welcomed the year 2021 with great hope.

Legal Expert Interpretation

Atty. Figen A. Çalikuşu

Oppression and pandemic competed one another...

Here's a snippet of what I wrote for the censorship and self-censorship report as we were saying goodbye to 2019:

"This is how 2019 went by.

I hope 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."

It turns out that was a very optimistic and hopeful, and yet naïve, wish. Why, you might ask.

The answer lies in the pages of the meticulous 2020 report by the Speak Up Platform.

The year 2020 made 2019 almost envious with violations of freedom of expression and the right to press freedom, censorship and self-censorship, bans, oppression, lawsuits and other obstacles.

Just like a relay race, it picked up right where 2019 left off and sped on.

Not even the pandemic that handcuffed our lives could stop that pace.

COVID-19 has locked up our lives in all aspects, like a stroke. The most bitter part of it all was that it trivialized death.

Even the pandemic, which captured our lives with pain, tears, confusion and obscurity as if stranded in a straitjacket, could not stop the climate of oppression, threat and intimidation looming over our unlucky country.

As if the pandemic was not enough to hinder our daily and traditional lives and habits, we were left even more breathless with bans, oppression, censorship, lawsuits and punishments.

Again, lawsuits were filed; again, arrests continued; again, access-blocking decisions were issued; yet again, artists, writers, musicians, journalists, in short, those who added value to life, were despised, banned, arrested, punished, in short, they were persecuted.

Dreadful laws were enacted that allowed them to oversee the platforms and associations people gathered and organized by appointing trustees.

TV screens were blacked out for days; websites were shut down.

The ECtHR judgments were not respected again. In fact, the European Convention on Human Rights, which Turkey ratified, was outright ignored.

With death at our bedside, why hasn't this climate of oppression, rivaling death itself, slowed down?

Could it be because of fright?

The unjust and the unlawful are afraid; and the more unjust they become, the more scared they get, and the more scared they get, the more cruel they become.

While the persecution was on the rise, the never-ending legislative packages dressed with "judicial reform," all painted and made-up, remained on the agenda in 2020.

In fact, the packages were opened, but there was no trace of freedom to be found in them once again. The very rights guaranteed in the Constitution continued to be ignored despite these packages...

Now, a new reform package is being prepared.

For all intents and purposes, they make it very clear that the reform packages are not to safeguard our rights and freedoms, but an attempt to sugarcoat the pill for the people that has long ago abandoned them.

They say that the aim of reforming the judiciary is to ensure that foreigners who will invest here have confidence in the law.

Apparently, the ruling party is in the grip of fear. It is at once afraid that the people will abandon them completely due to its urgent need of financial resources, and that fundamental rights and freedoms will be exercised in the country, therefore resorts to intimidating people with oppression and persecution.

Isn't this a dilemma, and a very grave dilemma at that?

They are writhing in the grip of a dilemma, but they also see fundamental constitutional rights and freedoms as a threat.

As a matter of fact, this was further revealed by a RTÜK decision.

RTÜK's defense statement in the lawsuit filed by Halk TV, on which was imposed a total blackout order by the council, revealed the fact that they were afraid, in all its nakedness.

In the case filed to overturn the sanction, RTÜK's defense statement asserted that the media was strong enough to overthrow the government, reading:

"In a situation where the media can lead to the collapse of the government, dominate economic decisions, to put it bluntly, in a situation where the media is so important that it can bring anyone it wants to power and overthrow anyone it doesn't want, it will never be possible to talk about the freedom of

each and every show guest to say whatever they want through the media."

The media can change the government, therefore it should be silenced. Period. For fear of losing power, the screen is blacked out; the broadcast is blocked; the content is removed; the shutdown is ordered; the activity is not allowed; censorship is enforced; the confidentiality order is issued; and as if that's not enough, the arrest warrant is put out, then people are arrested, their property is confiscated; the penalty is given; the trustee is appointed; people are called members of a terrorist organization; people are called the propagandists; and in the end the thought can even be handcuffed on the crime of coup d'état.

What if their power collapses democratically...?

What if their seats and authorities come to an end...?

What if the confrontation with the law follows...?

This dreaded, most dreaded nightmare...

Who cares if rights and freedoms are sacrificed for power, for seats?

We bid farewell to 2020 in the grip of fear, in the grip of the pandemic.

Wishing to meet at the end of 2021 to discuss the march of the struggle that will continue with the beliefs, hopes, determination and solidarity of those who do not give up on the virtue of being human.

Censorship Cases

JANUARY 2019

Grup Yorum members Bergün Varan, Sultan Gökçek and Tuğçe Tayyar were arrested when police raided the İdil Cultural Center in İstanbul, which is used by the folk-rock band.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism banned the planned *Peace and Freedom Photography Exhibition*, which was jointly organized by the Diyarbakır Bar Association and the Tahir Elçi Foundation to mark the fourth anniversary of the killing of lawyer and human rights defender Tahir Elçi and was due to be held at the Hasan Paşa Hanı, citing "high customer traffic" at the popular Ottoman-era inn.

A criminal investigation was launched against rapper Ferhat Yılmaz, known as Ben Fero, for "setting a bad example for the youth in his songs and music videos."

Sex scenes in the film *English Patient* were censored when it was shown on the movie channel Sinema TV, available on subscription-based TV platforms including Kablo TV, Tivibu and Turkcell TV+, on grounds of the rules of the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK).

Broadcasting watchdog RTÜK said it began licensing on-demand broadcasting under recently-enacted legislation that gave it powers to regulate and supervise online radio and television broadcasting.

Authorities canceled the planned staging of the Ankara Birlik Theater's play *Aman Başkan Duymasın* (Careful, Don't Let the President Know) at the Kemal Sunal Hall of the Malatya Culture and Congress Center, citing renovation work at the facility.

The District Governor's Office banned a Grup Yorum concert that was due to take place at Yıldız Kenter Theater in Şişli, İstanbul.

Journalist Hacı Yusuf Topaloğlu was imprisoned pending trial on the charge of “membership of a terrorist organization” on the basis of a secret witness statement.

The Hatay Provincial Directorate of National Education closed down the offices of the Antakya Purple Solidarity Women’s Association for “holding trainings without authorization” and slapped it with a fine.

Musician Yılmaz Çelik was arrested during a police raid on his home after giving a concert in Dersim (Tunceli).

Police dispersed a group of women gathered in Istanbul’s Kadıköy district to protest femicide in Turkey by dancing and singing their rendition of a song by the Chilean feminist group Las Tesis, on the grounds that the chanting of lyrics “You are the rapist, you are the killer; cops, judges, state and president” was criminal.

Avesta Publishing announced it would not attend the Van Book Fair after finding out that its booth space was downsized without notice.

A request to stage the play *Aman Başkan Duymanız* (Careful, Don’t Let the President Know) at the Malatya Public Education Center Hall was denied by the Culture Commission of the Provincial National Education Directorate on the grounds that the play contained slang words.

Police dispersed a “Las Tesis” protest that Ankara Women’s Platform attempted to stage at Güvenpark in downtown Ankara; detained 10 protesters.

The Izmir Aliğa No. 1 Women’s Prison administration refused to send the paintings that imprisoned painter Aynur Epli wanted to send to another prison on the grounds that they were obscene.

Kurdish politician and writer Mahmut Alınak’s book *Mehmet Tunç ve Bêkes* (Mehmet Tunç and Bêkes), which describes the events during a period of military operations and curfew in Cizre in 2015-2016 was banned and confiscated.

The Istanbul Amateur Photography and Cinema Association announced that they canceled the planned *Şehrin İnsan Halleri* (Human States of the City) and the 60th Season Opening Exhibition, which was to be opened at the Üsküdar Municipality's Bağlarbaşı Congress and Culture Center, because the cultural center administration attempted to intervene in selecting the photographs to be exhibited.

A criminal investigation was launched against nine people, who were detained at a demonstration in Izmir to protest violence against women by dancing and singing their rendition of a song by the Chilean feminist group Las Tesis, on charges of "denigrating Turkish nation, state of Turkish Republic, the organs and institutions of the state" under Article 301 of the Turkish Criminal Code (TCK) and "violating the Law No. 2911 on Meetings and Demonstrations."

The Edirne F-Type Prison administration denied a copy of the *Evrensel* newspaper to Selahattin Demirtaş, the former leader of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) who is held in pre-trial detention at the facility, on the grounds that the newspaper issue, which included an interview with him, increased "anti-state sentiments."

Musician Erhan Güteryüz was charged in an indictment with "publicly insulting a section of the public on grounds of social class, race, religion, sect, sex or region," punishable by a prison term of six months to a year, for a speech he made during a concert, in which he criticized the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) for not mentioning Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, in a Friday sermon.

The Public Advertising Agency (BİK) imposed a 17-day advertisement ban on *Cumhuriyet* newspaper for a column by Işıl Özgentürk, in which she criticized the Operation Peace Spring, the Turkish military offensive into northern Syria that was launched in October 2019.

The Şanlıurfa Governor's Office banned all public gatherings and demonstrations for 30 days.

Police broke up a public gathering organized in Ankara by the Union of All

Municipality Civil Servants (Tüm Bel-Sen) to read out a press statement titled “Budget for the People, a Democratic Turkey,” due to references in the text of the statement to “[state appointed] trustees.”

An Istanbul court ordered continuation of the pre-trial detention of business person and founder of Anadolu Kültür Foundation Osman Kavala, behind bars for 784 days, at the end of the latest hearing in his trial, despite a European Court of Human Rights judgment finding that his detention violated his right to personal liberty and security.

Access to a T24 report entitled “Cumhuriyet’s ‘Our report banned’ report was also banned” was blocked. The original Cumhuriyet report that was blocked previously was titled “İhale Partisi” (Party of Public Tenders) and published on 22 February 2018.

The word “war” on a banner prepared for the “Let’s build democracy for social peace and humane life” rally organized by the Amed Labour and Democracy Platform in Diyarbakır was cut off from the banner when the police said the word was prohibited.

A criminal investigation was launched against musician and human rights activist Ferhat Tunç on account of his social media posts critical of Turkish military operations into northern and eastern Syria.

Yeni Yaşam newspaper distributor Necmettin Tosun was charged with “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” on the basis of reports published in the newspaper about Turkish military offensive into northern and eastern Syria, which the indictment claimed were aimed at “defaming Turkey.”

Cartoonist Nuri Kurtcebe was charged with “insulting a public official” on account of a social media post upon the complaint of former Prime Minister and Parliament Speaker Binali Yıldırım, government ally Nationalist Movement Party’s (MHP) Chairman Devlet Bahçeli and the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu.

An Istanbul court ordered the confiscation of part of the assets belonging to

the dissident writer and publisher Ragıp Zarakolu, who has been living in Sweden, as part of an ongoing trial known as the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) Istanbul main trial.

Seven columnists and editors of the opposition Sözcü newspaper were convicted of “knowingly and willingly aiding a terrorist organization without being its member” and given prison terms.

Cumhuriyet columnist Zülal Kalkandelen was briefly detained at Istanbul's Sabiha Gökçen Airport due to an existing warrant for her arrest.

All public demonstrations and events were banned for 15 days in the southeastern province of Hakkâri on such grounds as “national security” and “public order.”

The Board for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications declared the books *Kin Kanatlılar* (Wings of Hatred), *İçim Dışım Gökkuşağı* (I am All Rainbow Inside and Outside) and *Burcu ve Berk / Cinsellik – Cinselliği Keşfediyoruz* (Burcu and Berk– Sexuality/ We are Exploring Sexuality) as obscene, saying they were “potentially harmful for the spiritual well-being of minors.”

Police dispersed a “Las Tesis” demonstration of about 100 women who are members of the Antalya Women's Platform to protest violence against women. The protest is named after a Chilean feminist collective that inspired a song and dance called “The rapist is you” that has prompted rallies in several countries.

Police in the eastern province of Elazığ fined a group of people who were distributing Evrensel newspaper and its Almanac 2019 supplement, citing disturbance complaints.

Habertürk columnist Sinem Kaymakçı said the newspaper removed her column after she refused a request from the newspaper administration to write an article praising Istanbul's new airport as disability-friendly.

January 2020

Organizers of the Çamlıhemşin Ayder Snow Festival canceled musician Selçuk Balcı's planned participation in the event under pressure from the provincial governor's office due to Balcı's support for the Gezi protests of 2013.

Musician Yılmaz Çelik was charged in an indictment with "membership of a terrorist organization" and "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" on account of his social media posts featuring photos of İbrahim Kaypakkaya and Mahir Çayan, Turkish Communist revolutionary leaders killed in the 1970s, and performing a song written in memory of Ali Haydar Yıldız, a founding member of the outlawed Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist (TKP/ML-TİKKO) organization who was killed in clashes with the military in 1973.

Journalist Mehmet Erol was put on trial on the charge of "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" in posts he shared on his personal Twitter account and the account of the Democratic Regions Party's (DBP), where he worked as press officer in the past.

At least 57 employees at the opera section and 90 employees at the theater section of the State Theaters were denied renewal of their employment contracts for failing to pass a "security screening."

It was revealed that access to news sites such as soL, BirGün, Cumhuriyet and Sözcü was blocked on the internet network of the High-Speed Train operated by the Turkish State Railways.

İbrahim Gökçek, a member of the folk-rock band Grup Yorum who was on hunger strike for 201 days to demand the release of imprisoned members of his band, lifting of the arrest warrants and an end to the ban on concerts by Grup Yorum, started a death fast.

The state appointed "trustee" of the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality terminated jobs of eight music and theater artists at the Department of Culture and Social Affairs on the grounds of "redundancy."

Journalist Barış Polat, who was arrested while distributing the now-defunct Özgürlükçü Demokrasi newspaper, was sentenced to 6 years and 3 months in prison on the charge of “membership of a terrorist organization” with his social media likes used as evidence.

Yeni Yaşam responsible editor Osman Akın was sentenced to five months in prison for “publicly degrading the state, the military or police force of the state” under Article 301 of the Turkish Criminal Code (TCK) over a news report published in the newspaper, titled “Persecution of prisoners of Afrin.”

The press officer of the trustee-run Van Metropolitan Municipality, who is also the head of the Van Journalists Association, canceled free public transportation cards of several journalists in the city, saying “they do not hold membership of any journalist association.”

48 actors and technical staff working at the Antalya Metropolitan Municipality City Theaters were denied renewal of their employment contracts, while seven personnel were dismissed.

A blanket ban in the southeastern province of Hakkâri on all public demonstrations and events, ongoing for four months, was extended for another 15 days.

Parts of the yet-to-be-published book *Ülkerler – Dost mu Düşman mı?* (The Ülkers – Friend or Enemy?) by writer Ergün Poyraz that describe the Ülker food products as a threat to public health were banned by a court order upon a complaint from businessman Murat Ülker citing an “attack on his personal rights.”

The Mardin Governor’s Office announced a 30-day ban on public demonstrations and events in the province in order to prevent protests against the takeover of the Mardin, Diyarbakır and Van municipalities by state appointed “trustees.”

The sale of books by Sakine Cansız, one of the co-founders of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) who was assassinated in 1993, was halted

at the Istanbul Bookstore operated by the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality following complaints. Similarly, books of imprisoned Kurdish politician Selahattin Demirtaş were removed from the national postal service PTT's online shopping site PTTAvm.com.

Access to Wikipedia was restored in Turkey, following a ban that was under way for over two years.

İsmail Çoban, the former responsible editor of the now-defunct Azadiya Welat newspaper, was sentenced to 7 years and 6 months for "membership of a terrorist organization."

Public Advertising Agency (BİK) imposed lengthy ad bans of 10 or 15 days on Evrensel newspaper on the basis of news reports it published. It emerged that the ban imposed by BİK was due to bulk buying and that readers took newspaper copies to prisons.

The Tunceli Governor's Office announced a 15-day blanket ban on all public demonstrations and rallies ahead of a planned gathering to protest disappearance of university student Gülistan Doku and a reported incident of sexual abuse of multiple children in Pertek district of the province.

It emerged that inmates in the Elazığ No. 1 Prison were subject to arbitrary restrictions on access to books and disciplinary sanctions because of the poems they wrote.

Days after İbrahim Gökçek, fellow Grup Yorum member Helin Bölek also started a hunger strike.

A planned music and theater show organized by Doğubayazıt Municipality of Ağrı was banned by the District Governor's Office, citing the inclusion of artist Ruken Yılmaz, five theater players of Van Tiyatro Mencil, and Şêrzat of Bahar Cultural Center in the lineup of the event.

Folk-rock band Grup Munzur members were sentenced to 10 months in prison on the charge of "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" over

performing Kurdish songs *Zindana Diyarbakır* (the Dungeon of Diyarbakır) and *Serhildan Jiyane* (Uprising is a Life) at Newroz celebrations.

Writer Gülşen İşeri was arrested on the allegation of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” in two of her books over an anonymous complaint: *Metropol Sürgünleri* (Metropolitan Exiles) and *Sürgünün Gölgesinde Kentsel Dönüşüm* (Gentrification in the Shadow of Exile).

During a heated argument between guests at political talk show *Tarafsız Bölge* (Neutral Zone) on CNN Türk, show's presenter Ahmet Hakan cut the live broadcast while a former Republican People's Party (CHP) MP Gökhan Günaydın was speaking.

The 49th edition of the monthly *Özgür Gelecek İçin Yeni Demokrasi* newspaper (New Democracy for a Free Future) was banned on the allegation that the news and articles published in the publication “made propaganda for PKK/KCK and TKP/ML (the Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist) terrorist organisations.”

Presidency's Directorate of Communications cancelled press cards of hundreds of journalists, which included widely circulated opposition newspapers Evrensel, BirGün, and Cumhuriyet reporters as well.

Broadcasting watchdog RTÜK announced it launched an investigation into several media service providers for “publications and content that deliberately aim to provoke and mislead the society” in the aftermath of an earthquake in Elazığ.

Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation against a number of social media posts about the earthquake in Elazığ.

Parts of an article that People's Democratic Party (HDP) MP Filiz Keresticioğlu penned for the Turkish Parliamentarians Union magazine *Parlamento* that describe the unlawful practices directed at HDP deputies were censored.

Former Diyarbakır Metropolitan Co-Mayor Gültan Kışanak said the prison

administration continued to arbitrarily prohibit inmates from accessing to books in Kocaeli No. 1 F-Type Prison, where she was imprisoned.

It emerged that many publications such as newspapers *Yeni Demokrasi*, *Yeni Yaşam*, *BirGün* and magazines *Partizan*, *Yürüyüş*, *Halk Okulu* were banned in Van Prison.

Anadolu University Literature Club's interview with the theater player Cansu Fırıncı, who was scheduled to stage Nazım Hikmet's play *Taranta Babu* – which had been blocked on countless occasions before – in Eskişehir, was blocked by the university administration.

February 2020

The Board for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications banned the display and sale of Ersan Pekin's book *Bu Kadınlar Yedi Bitirdi Beni* (The Women Have Eaten Me Up) on the ground of "obscenity."

TV station Show TV censored the cult Turkish movie *Neşeli Günler* (Happy Days) during its broadcast, cutting the expression, "The Interior Minister happens to be a friend of mine, I got him sacked with just a phone call," and blurring the graffiti that read İlerici Gençlik Derneği (the Progressive Youth Association), the youth wing of the erstwhile Communist Party of Turkey, founded in 1976 and outlawed in 1979 by the martial law authorities.

Retired combat pilot Bahadır Altan, who was a guest speaker at CNN Türk's broadcast about a passenger plane skidding off the runway, killing at least 3 people and injuring dozens at İstanbul's Sabiha Gökçen Airport, was taken off the air while questioning the incident.

Kurdish politician and writer Fuad Önen was brought to court on the charge of "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" over his social media posts about Roboski Massacre, where Turkish Air Force bombed Kurdish civilians at the southeastern border in 2011 killing 34, and Operation Peace Spring; Önen was later released under judicial control measures.

In the latest hearing of the Gezi Park trial, the prosecution submitted their final opinion of the case, asking the court to convict intellectuals, artists and activists on the charge of "attempting to overthrow the government" under TCK Article 312, which carries hefty sentences from 20 years to life sentence; the court ruled for the continuation of pre-trial detention of Osman Kavala at the end of the hearing.

A blanket ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations that had been in effect across Van province for the past 1176 days on grounds of "preservation of national security" and "protection of public order and safety" was renewed once again by the Governor's Office.

In a report by the Turkish Parliament's Detainee and Convict Rights Inquiry Sub-Committee on Diyarbakır Prison, it was stated that Booker-nominated author Elif Şafak's novel *Mahrem* (The Gaze) and imprisoned former Diyarbakır Metropolitan Co-Mayor Gültan Kışanak's book *Siyasetin Mor Rengi* (The Colour Purple of Politics) were banned by the administration, and prisoners were not allowed to watch TV broadcasts.

Evrensel newspaper was hit with a 10-day suspension of public announcements and advertisements for publishing a news report dispatched by the Mesopotamia Agency, that read "Public Advertising Agency finishes off Kurdish publishing."

The trustee appointed as the Urla Municipality Mayor by the İzmir Governor's Office shut down Urla Photography Art House.

District Governorships in Ankara and İstanbul banned the planned screenings of the documentary *Alnında Kılıç Yarası: Armenak* (A Sword Wound on His Forehead: Armenak), which is about the life of Armenian revolutionary Armenak Bakırcıyan (Orhan Bakır), a leading member of the Liberation Army of the Workers and Peasants of Turkey (TİKKO) who was killed in a clash with the gendarmerie in 1980.

Beyoğlu District Governor's Office banned an online concert by Grup Yorum.

Access to satirical magazine *Leman*'s cover, which read "It was revealed that Berat Albayrak owned a lot on the Kanal İstanbul route" and all news reports mentioning the cover was blocked.

Tiyatro magazine editor Mustafa Demirkanlı was briefly detained on the allegations of "insulting the president" and "degrading the organs and institutions of the state" over an anonymous complaint. Demirkanlı was released after he was interrogated about his social media posts on Gezi Park protests of 2013.

Workers İlyas Arzu and Jiyan Savcı at the DEM Musical Center in Adana were detained during a police raid.

The screenings of the Kurdish singer Ahmet Kaya biopic *İki Gözüm Ahmet*, directed by Gani Rüzgâr Şavata and Hakan Gürtop, was canceled due to an interim prohibitory injunction upon the request of the Kaya family.

Kurdish politician, writer, and lawyer Mahmut Alınak was arrested on the charge of “membership of a terrorist organization.”

Netd, Turkey's largest music channel on YouTube, refused to release the music video *Nereden Nereye* (From Whence to Where) by the pop band Grup Gündoğarken, that is described as a political reaction to current affairs in Turkey by music aficionados.

An arrest warrant was issued for business person and human rights defender Osman Kavala several hours after he and eight other defendants were acquitted of all charges in the Gezi Park trial, where he was accused of “attempting to overthrow the government of the Turkish Republic” under Article 312 of TCK.

Billboard advertisements for A. Yasemin Eren's book *Güç Mevsimi* (The Season of Power) in Samsun were obstructed, citing the female body on the cover of the book as too “revealing”; the advertisements could be hanged provided the body was “covered.”

Access to news reports about access-blocking decisions to news reports about Treasury and Finance Minister Berat Albayrak's land purchase on the route of Kanal İstanbul project was blocked.

A contestant on the reality television music competition *O Ses Türkiye* (The Voice Turkey) broadcast on TV8, Hayri Kasaç claimed that he was not allowed to perform Kurdish songs on the show and was discriminated against after singing a Kurdish lullaby.

Police prevented a planned Kanal İstanbul forum and a concert by the band Bandista organized by the Either Kanal or İstanbul Coordination, after the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality withdrew its permission for the event.

The Bursa Governor's Office banned a planned concert by Grup Yorum Bursa Community Choir and all activities "on the same subject" in the province.

An investigation was launched against actress Berna Laçın in the aftermath of the Elazığ and Malatya earthquake for her social media posts questioning how earthquake taxes, that were introduced after a magnitude 7.4 quake in 1999 and has been in effect ever since, had been spent; Laçın was also the target of heated online vitriol on social media.

The theater play *Hayal Satıcısı* (The Dream Seller) by Berna Laçın could not be staged in Samsun province after Samsun Atakum Metropolitan Municipality Arts Center and Doğa College denied the play the use of their stages.

Publication and distribution of photos and videos depicting the destruction of Turkish Armed Forces armored vehicles operated by the Turkey-backed Free Syria Army in Syria's northeastern city of Idlib at the hands of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham militants, accused of working as al-Qaeda's Syrian branch, were banned. Access to 52 social media accounts and websites that published or distributed the material was blocked.

Six people were charged with "publicly degrading the Turkish flag," for spray-painting the figure of a man hanging from his neck tied to the moon and a star, reminiscent of the Turkish flag, on one of the reproductions of Devrim Erbil's paintings hung on billboards in the street.

Access to a discussion topic on the Kyrgyz journalist Yeldana Kaharman who allegedly committed suicide after being sexually assaulted by Tolga Ağar, AKP Elazığ deputy and son of former Interior Minister Mehmet Ağar, on the Ekşi Sözlük website was blocked.

A planned concert in Izmir organized by musicians in solidarity with Grup Yorum members who were in hunger strike was banned by the Governor's Office.

Access to website of Jinnews was blocked by the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK) for the ninth time.

Access to the YouTube channel KHK TV, created by a number of people who had been dismissed from public service by statutory decrees (KHK) issued during Turkey's 2016-2018 state of emergency was blocked in Turkey without a court decision.

Access to numerous social media platforms including Twitter was restricted following the death of 33 Turkish Armed Forces soldiers in an airstrike to Idlib, northwestern Syria.

TV channel NTV removed a video from its social media account where a refugee who had gone to Kapıkule, Turkey's border gate that opens to Bulgaria, upon official statements in the lines of "Turkey will no longer stop refugees from entering Europe" following the death of 33 Turkish soldiers in Idlib said "Buses brought us here for free. And now they say at the entry point, they say, the gates are closed but you can cross the sea."

An 8 March event to celebrate International Women's Day in Adana by HDP was banned by the District Governor's Office, citing coronavirus pandemic, allegedly never detected in Turkey by that point.

March 2020

A joint event by HDP district organization and Diyarbakır Municipality to mark 8 March International Women's Day was cancelled by the district governorship.

Nine journalists were arrested while reporting on the latest developments regarding the refugees who were waiting to cross the border in Kapıkule, Edirne.

The Istanbul Governor's Office declared a ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations that were designed to create a public opinion against military operations to Syria or to ask for the termination of such operations, including the campaign "Savaşa Hayır" ("No to War") on the ground of "threatening social peace."

OdaTV News Director Barış Terkoğlu and reporter Hülya Kılınç were jailed pending trial over a news report titled "OdaTV obtained footage from the quiet burial of MIT employee who was martyred in Libya."

Columnist, scriptwriter, and director Işıl Özgentürk was acquitted in the trial where she was charged with "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" over social media posts.

Governor's offices in Adana, Aydın, Kırklareli, Trabzon, and Kilis banned "Savaşa Hayır" ("No to War") protests in an attempt to "prevent provocative incidents."

Information Technologies and Communication Authority (BTK) blocked access to Odatv.org despite the fact that the website had removed the news story that was cited as the ground for Barış Terkoğlu and Hülya Kılınç's imprisonment.

Yeni Çağ newspaper columnist Murat Ağirel was arrested for reporting on government officers who had lost their lives in Idlib, following a statement by the President Erdoğan, that said "a couple of soldiers were martyred."

Yeni Yaşam newspaper editor Aydın Keser and editor-in-chief Ferhat Çelik, who were detained and later released on bail for a news report about National Intelligence Agency (MİT) operatives, were arrested.

The Governor's Office in Ordu cancelled a permit for the stage play *Hayal Satıcısı* (Dream Seller) by actress Berna Laçın due to "a failure in the stage lighting system." Laçın was previously the target of online vitriol for questioning the whereabouts of special communication taxes that had been in effect since 1999.

Far right Patriotic Party (VP) filed a criminal complaint against rapper Onur Dinç – aka Khontkar – on the allegation of "slander and defamation against women" over a song he released on 8 March titled *Sürtüğe Bak* (Look at That Bitch).

The Izmir Governor's Office banned several concerts and events that were planned to take place under the slogan of "Sanata Özgürlük, Grup Yorum yaşasın istiyoruz!" ("Freedom to Arts, we want Grup Yorum to live!")

Turkish copies of the children's book *Declaration of the Rights of Girls* (Kız Çocuk Hakları Bildirgesi) by Elisabeth Bami that had been declared an "obscene publication" in 2019 for "encouraging homosexuality and including expressions and images that challenges stereotypes on child development" were destroyed upon the recommendation of Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Services.

Haberimizvar.net editor-in-chief İdris Özyol and editorial coordinator Ebru Küçükaydın were detained on the grounds of "causing the general public to panic" and "reporting on coronavirus about which there was no official statement" over a news report titled "A Coronavirus Case in Demre."

Access to odatv2.com launched by the news portal OdaTV whose original URL had been blocked to continue its activities was blocked.

An investigation was launched against Burcu Uğuz, who had translated the book *Declaration of the Rights of Girls* to Turkish on the charge of "aiding the spread of obscene publications."

The Hakkâri Governor's Office declared a ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations for 15 days across the province on the grounds of "prevention of provocations," "protections of rights and freedoms," and "national security" ahead of Newroz celebrations.

According to an Interior Ministry statement, 24 out of 137 people were detained for allegedly sharing false and provocative posts on social media concerning the coronavirus outbreak in the wake of the official confirmation that the pandemic had reached Turkey.

Wikimedia Foundation announced that Turkey had submitted removal requests into a number of Wikipedia content that contained imagery not suitable for those under 18.

An investigation was launched against stand-up comedian Pınar Fidan for her remarks about the Alevi community in her stand-up show *Tuz-Biber* (Salt-Pepper) following a criminal complaint filed by the Adana Division of the Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association.

SES Kocaeli newspaper editor-in-chief İsmet Çiğit, editor Güngör Arslan and responsible editor Ahmet Serimer were briefly detained for a news report about two deaths due to COVID-19.

An investigation was launched against journalist Enver Aysever on the charge of "publicly degrading religious values of a section of the public" over a social media post where he shared a cartoon.

Access to the website of OdaTV was blocked for the seventh time.

A fiction book by writer Buket Uzuner titled *Ayın En Çıplak Günü* (The Most Naked Day of the Month) was declared "obscene" and therefore subject to restrictions on the ground of being "harmful for the spirituality of children under 8."

Interior Ministry announced officials had inspected 1748 social media accounts and taken legal action against 316 account-holders who "made propaganda

for terrorist organizations; incited the public to hatred, violence, fear, and panic; shared provocative posts about the coronavirus pandemic and conducted a perception operation by means of releasing false documents."

Broadcasting watchdog RTÜK imposed administrative sanctions and ordered the suspension of several shows on TELE1, Halk TV, and Habertürk over news stories about COVID-19 pandemic that "violated the principles of accuracy and truth."

Musician Yılmaz Çelik was released on bail after he was arrested on the charges of "membership of a terrorist organization" and "making propaganda for a terrorist organization." The criminal evidence against Çelik included mentioning Ali Haydar Yıldız, İbrahim Kaypakkaya and Mahir Çayan, Turkish revolutionary leaders killed in the 1970s, and singing *Vartinik Ağdı* (Vartinik Elegy).

State broadcaster TRT1 cut the live broadcast as Health Minister Fahrettin Koca was criticizing Murat Sancak, the nephew of Ethem Sancak who was famously affiliated with the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), for obtaining and trying out coronavirus test kits on air.

Yeni Akit newspaper targeted an activity by the Istanbul Modern Museum for children who couldn't go out due to strict social distancing with a call to display rainbow paintings from windows, claiming it was LGBTI+ related.

Muğla Provincial Directorate for National Education called for a termination of displaying rainbow paintings from windows, by sending messages to parents.

An investigation was launched against journalist Nurcan Baysal on the charge of "inciting people to hatred and enmity" over two articles she penned in Ahval news site about the COVID-19 measures in Diyarbakır and her social media posts where she shared letters that were sent to her from prison.

Criminal investigations were launched against Mesopotamia Agency reporter Ahmet Kanbal, journalist Oktay Candemir who resides in Van, İz newspaper

reporter Tugay Can, Bartın-based Halk newspaper and Pusula newspaper owner Mustafa Ahmet Oktay and editor Eren Sarıkaya Bartın due to their reporting on the coronavirus outbreak.

April 2020

Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu announced that officials had taken legal action against 449 social media accounts over sharing provocative messages about the coronavirus pandemic, but that their efforts were hindered by the judgments of the Constitutional Court.

Grup Yorum's Helin Bölek died on the 288th day of her death fast.

The Kocaeli Governor's Office declared a ban on strikes, as well as all public gatherings and demonstrations for 15 days across the province within the scope of coronavirus-related measures.

Journalist Hakan Aygün was arrested on the allegations of "inciting the public to hatred and enmity" and "defamation and slander" over a social media post where he criticized President Erdoğan for sharing an IBAN and asking for donations from the public due to the coronavirus pandemic during a live broadcast.

An investigation was launched against journalist Cem Ulucan, also the head of Aydın Metropolitan Journalists Association, on the grounds of "inciting the public to hatred and enmity" and "defamation" over a social media post where he misquoted a hadith as "...he who goes to bed 'drunk' whilst his neighbor is sober is not one of us."

President Erdoğan filed a criminal complaint against Fox TV anchor Fatih Portakal who had criticized the National Solidarity Campaign launched to aid against the coronavirus pandemic, on the allegations of "posting false and manipulatory statements on social media" and "insulting the president."

An investigation was launched against Nabız newspaper owner and head of Progressive Journalists Association Rize Branch Genççağa Karafazlı over a news report that revealed 11 Çaykur workers had been infected with the coronavirus.

Netflix Turkey original *Aşk 101* (Love 101) was targeted in a homophobic social media campaign following a post on Twitter speculating that a character on the show would be revealed to be gay.

Stand-up comedian Emre Günsal was arrested over his remarks in a show on the allegation of defaming Atatürk, Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi, Shams Tabrizi, Konya province, and Konya residents. Access to an online video of the show at issue was blocked.

Progressive Lawyers Association member Yağız Timoçin was arrested on the ground of “inciting the public to hatred and animosity” over a Twitter post where he criticized the fundraising campaign launched by President Erdoğan to aid against the coronavirus pandemic with the hashtag #ÖdemeYapmıyoruz (#WeAreNotPaying).

Artist Fadime Aygün was briefly detained for taking photos of a stampede in the streets ahead of the weekly coronavirus curfew.

Ebubekir Şahin, the head of RTÜK, said the broadcasting watchdog would never allow for broadcasting “contrary to national and moral values of the society” and “that could harm the physical and spiritual development of children and youth” with regard to the Netflix show *Aşk 101* (Love 101).

Six separate investigations were launched against Rize-based Nabız newspaper publisher Genççağa Karafazlı and editor Doğan Can Dilek over their reporting on COVID-19 pandemic.

RTÜK imposed maximum administrative sanction and issued an order to suspend prime-time news for three times on FOX TV on the grounds that remarks by anchor Fatih Portakal about the coronavirus pandemic “incited the public to hatred and enmity.”

In reaction to a news show titled *Gün Başlıyor* (The Day is Starting) where presenter Can Ataklı remarked “How come everybody is a martyr? I mean, whoever you do that, they are martyrs. And everybody has their own martyred, and everybody has their own terrorists” on TELE1, RTÜK imposed maximum administrative sanction and ordered the suspension of the program for three times, claiming the remarks by Ataklı were disrespectful towards the national and moral values of the society.

The Kırklareli Governor's Office renewed a ban on all public gatherings, demonstrations, and marches for another 30 days on the grounds of coronavirus-related measures, thereby practically declaring a state of emergency across the province.

BTK blocked access to 18 news websites, including Independent Türkçe, that were based in the UK, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Ban on all events in Van province that had been in effect for months was renewed for another 15 days on the grounds of "eliminating the plans of terrorist organizations" and "protection of public health."

TV channels TRT, NTV, CNN Türk, and Habertürk temporarily cut the live broadcast twice during the celebrations of 23 April National Sovereignty and Children's Day at the Turkish parliament: once when HDP Co-Chair Mithat Sancar started speaking, and once when Workers's Party of Turkey (TİP) leader Erkan Baş said, "Today, the regime of the palace reigns over Turkey."

An investigation was launched against journalist Zülal Koçer over a Twitter post she shared which showed police seizing numerous women by their hair and detaining them during 8 March Feminist Night March.

A ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations that had been in effect in Hakkâri province for months was renewed for another 15 days.

An investigation was launched against Ankara and Diyarbakır bar associations, which criticized the Presidency of Religious Affairs for targeting LGBTI+ and people living with HIV in a central Friday *khutba* over a criminal complaint by the Presidency of Religious Affairs.

Access to a Cumhuriyet daily news report about illegal construction on a patch of land in Kuzguncuk rented by the Presidency's Communications Director Fahrettin Altun was blocked. Altun filed a claim for non-pecuniary damages against the daily, demanding TL 250,000 (approx US\$ 34,783) in compensation.

May 2020

RTÜK imposed punitive sanctions against FOX TV and TELEDİ, respectively for including someone arrested on the allegation of FETÖ membership in its credits, and for the remarks of Gün Başlıyor (The Day is Starting) anchor Can Ataklı. The council also ordered a show titled Medya Mahallesi (Media Neighborhood) on Halk TV to be suspended.

Netflix removed an episode of political thriller series *Designated Survivor* which depicted a fictitious version of events of the 15 July failed coup attempt in Turkey following a demand from the Turkish watchdog RTÜK.

Police forcefully dispersed Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DİSK) members who wanted to celebrate the 1 May International Worker's Day in Istanbul's Taksim Square; almost 20 people were detained.

Access to Independent Türkçe was blocked by BTK for the third time on 3 May World Press Freedom Day.

Interior Ministry announced that officials inspected 7,127 social media accounts that had been sharing posts about the coronavirus pandemic; 496 account holders were detained and 10 people were arrested.

Kurdish writer and politician Mahmut Alınak who was jailed pending trial was hit with an indictment that demanded life sentence over donating the proceeds of his book *Mehmet Tunç ve Bêkes* (Mehmet Tunç and Bêkes) to the Tunç family and petitioning the UN to recognize Kurdish as an official language, both efforts were described as "gross misconduct."

Grup Yorum member İbrahim Gökçek who had been holding a death fast for 323 days to demand an end to concert bans and suppression towards the band discontinued his protest over affirmative contacts. Shortly after being taken to intensive care unit, Gökçek lost his life.

RTÜK imposed sanctions on Halk TV over the remarks of Republican People's Party (CHP) İstanbul Head Canan Kaftancıoğlu who said "I see a way toward

a government changeover, I think that's what will happen" on air.

RTÜK imposed sanctions on Habertürk over the remarks of TV presenter Fatih Altaylı who said "The dogs bark, but the caravan goes on" during a show titled *Teke Tek* (One on One) which included İYİ Parti leader Meral Akşener as the guest.

Ragıp Zarakolu'nun Evrensel Gazetesi ve Artı Gerçek haber sitesinde yayınlanan "Makus Kaderden Kaçış Yok" başlıklı köşe yazısında "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'a karşı açıkça darbe ve idam tehdidinde bulunduğu" gerekçesiyle Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan suç duyurusunda bulundu.

President Erdoğan filed a complaint against columnist Ragıp Zarakolu "for publicly threatening President Erdoğan by calling for a coup and his execution" over his article "Makus Kaderden Kaçış Yok" ("There's No Escape from the Ill Fate") published in Evrensel daily and the news portal Artı Gerçek.

BİK suspended public announcements and advertisements for Evrensel daily for 5 days over an article titled "Would a government promise martyrdom to its citizens?" that slammed government's Syria and Libya policies.

Photographer Fırat Emez was jailed pending trial on the charge of "publicly degrading religious values" over his Twitter posts.

"İsimsizler Hareketi" (the Anonymous Movement) announced that Taylan Kulaçoğlu and *RED* magazine editor-in-chief Hakan Gülseven who were jailed pending trial on the charge of "making propaganda for the DHKP/C terrorist organization on social media" were released. Kulaçoğlu was later arrested again.

Broadcasting watchdog RTÜK ordered the suspension of 3 episodes of a radio show on Kafa Radio over the remarks of an audience that were read on air: "I've just made potato chips at home. These would be good with a beer."

BİK suspended public announcements and advertisements for Cumhuriyet daily for 35 days over a news report about illegal construction facilitated by

Presidency's Communications Director Fahrettin Altun.

BİK suspended public announcements and advertisements for BirGün newspaper for 2 days and 5 days in separate orders for news reports titled "Kızılay holdingleşti" (Kızılay became a holding) and "Milyonluk ihale Menzil hayranına" (Millions worth of bid goes to a Menzil fan) respectively.

The İzmir Chief Public Prosecutor's Office announced that criminal action was taken against persons who played the Turkish version of the song *Bella Ciao* (Çav Bella) from the minarets in mosques and the persons who shared the incident on social media with complimentary remarks.

The offices of Rosa Women's Association in Diyarbakır was raided by police; many Kurdish women politicians, including the executives and members of the said association and "Tevgera Jinên Azad" (TJA, Kurdish for Free Women Movement) were detained.

A 30-day ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations was declared across Siirt province, following the takeover of the municipality by a government-appointed trustee. The ban covered all events including plays, shows and performances.

Hrant Dink Foundation announced that they received death threats via e-mail.

June 2020

Governor Ali Fuat Atik who was appointed as a trustee to the Siirt Municipality demolished Celadet Ali Bedirxan public library, citing the ongoing tram project on the street as the reason.

Grup Yorum's application to give a concert in Yenikapı Meeting Area on 9 August 2020 was rejected by the governor's office.

Poet Ahmet Telli was summoned to give his statement on the account of "insulting the president" over a post in his Facebook fan page, that read "Murderer of soldiers President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan."

Access to news reports about a sizeable donation made by Başkent Natural Gas Distribution Company to Turkey Youth and Education Service Foundation (TÜRGEV) which counted President Erdoğan's son Bilal Erdoğan among its founders and his daughter Esra Albayrak among its board members was blocked.

Access to several news reports by soL News Portal --about an illegal construction affiliated by Presidency's Communications Director Fahrettin Altun, about a judge who earned TL 1,000,000 (approx US\$ 132,119) by appointing his own nephew as expert to his cases, and about the appointment of the wife of an AKP deputy as the culture and arts director-- was blocked.

The Hakkâri Governor's Office banned all public gatherings and demonstrations for 15 days across the province after the parliament revoked the seats of several Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) deputies.

Journalist Metin Uca was sentenced to prison on the ground of "insulting a commissioned official because of their duties" over his disapproving remarks about the state-run Anadolu Agency (AA) data during the presidential and parliamentary elections.

The authority to choose the recipients of the Presidential Culture and Arts

Awards was taken from a council and handed over to President Erdoğan through an amendment in the relevant legislation.

Presidency's Directorate of Communications announced it would press charges against social media posts about live-streamed Yeditepe Concerts which were criticized for their costs and the low number of viewers.

OdaTV Ankara news manager Müyesser Yıldız who was detained on the charge of "political and military espionage" was jailed pending trial. A few days before her detainment, Yıldız had lodged a complaint against Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu for targeting her.

TELE1 TV Ankara correspondent İsmail Dükel was arrested and later released under judicial control measures.

Entries into and exits from 11 provinces were prohibited on the ground of the coronavirus pandemic ahead of a planned march by HDP to protest the parliament's decision to revoke the seats of HDP deputies.

Voice of America reporter Arif Aslan who was covering HDP's democracy march was detained.

Access to Özgürüz Radio station and its website ozguruz20.com, both headed by exiled journalist Can Dündar, was blocked after a complaint by RTÜK, arguing that the station was "streaming radio illegally."

Musician Gülşah Erol who was put on trial for "non-accidental injury," "coercion," and "insulting a public official" after she was subjected to police violence on the subway was acquitted of all charges.

Jinnews reporter Beritan Canözer was sentenced to 10 months and 15 days in prison on the charge of "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" over her social media activities.

Musician Azad Bedran was sentenced to prison on the ground of "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" over a music video titled *Partizan*

(Partisan) the song of which bore a banderole provided by the Ministry of Culture, his setlists, and social media posts.

TV channel Kanal D censored the words and expressions “gay” and “I’d live with that family as their gay-in-law,” during the broadcast of *Kocan Kadar Konuş* (Husband Factor), a Turkish film released in 2015.

Access to content under six separate discussion topics including “Emine Erdoğan’s bag” and “Telling it as if telling it to Bilal” at Ekşi Sözlük website was blocked.

Access to news reports about the spread of COVID-19 among factory workers at Oba Makarna in Gaziantep province and the relevant social media posts was blocked on the ground of “damaging reputation.”

Security General Directorate announced that they had filed criminal complaints against news reports that claimed “night watchmen were granted powers to keep their eyes on single and lonely women.”

Police raided J&J Publishing House’s offices as part of an operation against the Democratic Society Congress (DTK), confiscating several books by the publishing house; owner Azad Zal was jailed pending trial.

Journalist Özgür Paksoy was sentenced to prison for 11 months and 20 days on the charge of “insulting the president” over a social media post where he shared a cartoon by Brazilian Carlos Latuff about the 2015 killing of Tahir Elçi, who was the president of the Diyarbakır Bar Association.

Access to a news story about corruption allegations published in Sözcü newspaper, titled “TL 4 millions worth of denouncement” and featured the statements of a whistleblower bureaucrat who was in charge of public biddings and claimed to tell about corruption by the executives of the municipality and AKP district organization was blocked.

Adapazarı Akşam Haberleri newspaper editors were summoned to give their statements on the allegations of “insulting a public official while on duty”

and “slander” for satirizing the remarks by AKP Sakarya MP Ali İhsan Yavuz, who had said “Media doesn’t cover the beauty.”

YouTube removed the live stream of Hormonlu Domates (Genetically Modified Tomato) awards ceremony that was organized as part of the İstanbul LGBTI+ Pride Week twice on the ground of “violation of community principles.”

RTÜK imposed a 5-day broadcasting ban – blackout – on TV stations Halk TV and TELE1 each. The council thereby issued its first total blackout order since its new regulation entered into force.

July 2020

Police prevented a commemoration ceremony to mark the 27th anniversary of the Sivas Massacre, which resulted in the killing of 37 people, mostly Alevi intellectuals, in Ankara on account of a “demonstration ban” by the Governor’s Office due to the coronavirus measures.

Amnesty Turkey’s Honorary Chair Taner Kılıç was sentenced to 6 years and 3 months in prison on the charge of “membership of a terrorist organization, while Günel Kuşun, İdil Eser, and Özlem Dalkıran were handed down 1 year and 13 months in prison each for “aiding a terrorist organization” at the final hearing in the trial of 11 human rights defenders, commonly known as “Büyükada Trial.”

The Ankara Governor’s Office declared a ban on public gatherings and demonstrations for 15 days across the province ahead of the rally “Great Defense Meeting” to protest AKP and MHP’s (Nationalist Movement Party) joint plans to establish alternative bar associations in each province.

Artı TV Ankara Bureau Chief Sibel Hürtaş was detained as she was reporting on a gathering in front of the Turkish Parliament to read out the press statement of bar presidents against government’s plans to establish alternative bar associations in each province.

On the occasion of a contested question in the Turkish section of the Higher Education Institutions Examination (YKS) that included lyrics by singer and an outspoken advocate of LGBTI+ rights Mabel Matiz, the Head of the Measuring, Selection, and Placement Center (ÖSYM), Halis Aygün, said “The sensitivities of our institution with regards to our national and moral values and our social value judgments are clear for everyone to see.”

TV channel Kanal D censored the acceptance speech of singer Mabel Matiz who was given an award at the 46th Pantene Golden Butterfly Awards. Matiz had said “I believe one shouldn’t get caught in boundaries, labels, human made categories in life, in love or in music” at the ceremony.

Presidency's Communications Director Fahrettin Altun filed a complaint for damages against Cumhuriyet daily responsible editor Olcay Büyüktaş Akça, reporter Hazal Ocak, and Yeni Gün News Agency Media and Publications Corporation over a news report titled "There is illegal construction on the Bosphorus."

Music video *Karanfil* (Clove) by musician Sıla was removed from broadcasting schedules following RTÜK's "recommendations" to media providers, noting that the lyrics praised cigarette smoking.

Bebekler Nereden Gelir (Where Do Babies Come from), a book published by Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) was declared "an obscene publication that could have harmful effects on the spirituality of children" by the Board for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications.

Veteran actors Metin Akpınar and Müjdat Gezen were subjected to criminal proceedings on the charge of "insulting the president" over their remarks during a talk show *Halk Arenası* (Public Arena) that was broadcast on the television station Halk TV.

Ban on all demonstrations across Şanlıurfa province that had been in effect since last October was renewed once again.

An investigation was launched against Ersan Pekin demanding up to 3 years of imprisonment on the charge of "obscenity" over his fictional book *Bu Kadınlar Yedi Bitirdi Beni* (These Women Have Eaten Me Up) that was published in 2013 and tells the story of a nymphomaniac.

An article in the regulation prepared with the object of establishing a Scientific Committee on Food within the body of Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry which stipulated that the committee could consider all reports, articles, and statements deemed unscientific an offense caused concerns of censorship among food experts.

Upon the request of the Central Union of Agricultural Credit Cooperatives

of Turkey, access to 84 news reports, 19 of which was published by Milli Gazete and the remaining 65 of which was published by Tarımdan Haber, was blocked in a day.

Upon a tweet by a social media user that read “even RTÜK didn’t watch that show for controlling purposes” with regards to a kissing scene between two women in an episode of Netflix Turkish original *Hakan: Muhafız* (The Protector), RTÜK Vice President İbrahim Uslu replied, “yeah we watched it=),” hence raising concerns of censorship.

An investigation was launched against Habertürk columnist Nagehan Alçı demanding up to 2 years and 4 months of imprisonment for an article she had written over a complaint by the İstanbul Criminal Court of First Instance judge Hakkı Yalçınkaya.

Police dispersed a gathering in front of the Borusan Contemporary building on İstiklal Street owned by Borusan Energy to read out a press statement by the Northern Forests Defense to protest the construction of 20 more wind turbines in Kıyıköy Wind Power Plant; four activists were detained.

Many were detained in home raids in Diyarbakır, Ağrı, and Antep, including HDP councillors, TJA executives, and Jinnews editor Ayşe Güney.

An investigation was launched against Artı Gerçek columnist Nurcan Kaya on the allegation of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” over her social media posts about a Saturday Mothers vigil, police violence during Gezi Park protests, and her meeting with Yiğit Aksakoğlu who was jailed pending trial in the Gezi Park case.

Access to a news story about a worker who had tested positive for COVID-19, but remained silent and kept on working for fear of dismissal that was published on the website of Evrensel daily and kizilbayrak.net was blocked.

Retail chain BIM withdrew a product from sale because it contained a rainbow pattern, and put up notices in its stores, saying “The sale of the lighting product with rainbow colours have been halted.”

The sentence "Now that we've had sex, we can be seen in public together" in an episode of Nordic noir *Bron/Broen* (The Bridge) broadcast by state-run TRT2 was censored and paraphrased as "Now that we've slept together..."

The owner of a photography studio in Kocaeli who had taken photos of a gay couple and shared it on social media was targeted and threatened by Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party) District Head and local news outlets.

Die Welt newspaper's former Turkey correspondent Deniz Yücel was acquitted of "disseminating propaganda for FETÖ/PYD terrorist organization" and "inciting the public to hatred and animosity," but convicted of "disseminating propaganda for PKK terrorist organization" in the final hearing of his trial.

Netflix Turkish original *Şimdiki Aklım Olsaydı* (If Only) produced by Ay Yapım failed to receive a filming permit from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which reviews the scripts of all internationally produced shows, over a secondary gay character in the script. The permission was granted over the removal of the gay character from the script.

AKP General Vice President Hamza Dağ claimed the columns at the entrance of the İzmir Municipality building that had been painted in rainbow colors were disseminating LGBTI+ propaganda, asking for the removal of the paint.

Police forcefully dispersed Saturday Mothers who wanted to hold a sit in and leave gillyflowers at the Galatasaray Square in Istanbul, detaining many people in attendance. Saturday Mothers have been prevented from holding their weekly vigils since their 700th gathering.

Access to news reports about a change in the zoning plan regarding the land on the planned rout of Kanal Istanbul belonging to Berat Albayrak and conversion of the city plan from field to housing/commercial was blocked.

The Çanakkale Governor's Office declared a ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations for a week across the province, which houses protests against the ongoing mining activities on Ida Mountain.

The Mersin Governor's Office banned all public gatherings and demonstrations for five days. The Office cited "military operations against terrorist organizations," and COVID-19 outbreak among the reasons of the ban.

Governor's offices in Antep, Sinop, Adana, Denizli, Hatay, and Adiyaman declared bans on all public gatherings and demonstrations that included conferences, panel discussions, and concerts across their provinces on the grounds of the coronavirus pandemic. The timing of the ban stood out as it came on the heels of another announcement that heralded the start of a "normalization process" regarding COVID-19 measures.

Turkish parliament passed a draft bill, commonly referred to as social media law, that mandated social network providers to appoint local representatives in Turkey, stipulating that failure to do so would result in hefty administrative fines and sanctions, including throttling up internet bandwidth by up to 90%.

August 2020

The Hakkâri Governor's Office banned all public gatherings and demonstrations for 15 days across the province on the grounds of "safeguarding the indivisible integrity of the State with its territory and nation," "prevention of COVID-19 infection," and "protection of public health."

The Muş Governor's Office banned all public gatherings and demonstrations for 15 days across the province on the ground that "supporters of terrorist organizations might organize meetings and demonstrations to protest military operations."

Access to news reports about the suspicious death of Harun Zengin, who had been working as an electrician in Tosyalı Holding Corp's operational unit in Algeria was blocked upon the request of the company.

Rudaw TV reporter Rawin Sterk Yıldız, who was arrested in Pazarkule while covering the refugee crisis on the Turkish border with Greece, was issued an indictment demanding his imprisonment on the charges of "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" and "membership of a terrorist organization," citing his news reports in Dicle News Agency (DİHA) and Roj TV as evidence.

State broadcaster TRT 2 censored a scene in the movie *Green Book*, where it was revealed that the Don Shirley character had been subjected to police violence in a bathhouse because he was gay.

Grup Yorum members Dilan Poyraz, Bahar Kurt, Betül Varan, Eren Erdem, Barış Yüksel and Sercan Toptancı were detained during a raid while rehearsing for a concert.

İdil Cultural Center, located in İstanbul's Okmeydanı district, which also housed Grup Yorum's rehearsals was raided by police.

Police forcefully dispersed women and LGBTI+ who wanted to protest the efforts to overturn the Istanbul Convention, the first-ever legally binding international

treaty combating violence against women, in Izmir and Mersin provinces.

An investigation was launched against Jiyan Haber newspaper publisher on the charges of “inciting the public to hatred and enmity” and “defamation” over a news report about İpek Er who committed suicide after she was sexually harassed by sergeant Musa Orhan.

Ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations that had come to effect in June and was later renewed for another month in July was renewed for yet another month across Urfa province under the pretense of the coronavirus measures.

Access to LGBTI+ dating app Hornet was blocked without an official explanation.

Police stopped a Grup Yorum concert in Yenikapı to which the Governor's Office didn't issue a permit; 25 were detained.

Police prevented “Düş Yolcuları Adalet Plaketleri” (Dream Passengers Justice Awards) ceremony that was scheduled to be held in Taksim Hill Hotel by the Suruç Families Initiative and was banned by the Beyoğlu District Governor's Office.

The Bitlis Governor's Office declared a curfew across all 36 villages within the central district “until further notice.”

Access to news reports about a friend of President Erdoğan's son Bilal Erdoğan from their days at Kartal İmam Hatip High School winning a public tender by the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund was blocked.

Police prevented Ankara Women's Platform from reading out a press statement on the Istanbul Convention. 33 women, including a reporter, were detained.

Mesopotamia Cultural Center (Navendên Çanda Mezopotamya) was evicted from its location of 20 years in Istanbul's Tarlabası district by the District Governor's Office; the building was allocated to Beyoğlu Municipality.

Seven former civil servants who had been dismissed by statutory decrees issued during 2016-2018 state of emergency were detained over the “We want our jobs back” protest in Ankara. Several books of one detainee, teacher Acun Karadağ, were confiscated in a police raid on his home. The books included *Türkiye’de Sol Örgütler* (Leftist Organizations in Turkey), *Kinimiz Dinimizdir Türkçü Faşizm Üzerine Bir İnceleme* (Our Hatred Our Religion: An Analysis of Turkish Fascism), *Faşizm ve Diktatörlük* (Fascism and Dictatorship).

Access to the online radio Özgürüz, founded by journalist Can Dündar, was blocked for the 21st time.

BTK blocked access to Jinnews once again on the ground of “national security and protection of public order.”

The Governor’s Office in Tunceli banned all public gatherings and demonstrations for 15 days across the province on the ground of the coronavirus pandemic.

Access to news reports about the national wrestler Recep Çakır who was convicted of rape was blocked on the ground of “the right to be forgotten.”

Cumhuriyet reporter Seyhan Avcı wrote about unconfirmed rumors she had heard from her readers that her book on child abuse in Quran courses *Rezilsiniz* (You Are Rascals) was not on sale in D&R stores, a leading retail chain in the country.

A documentary about Chora Museum in İstanbul, that was to be handed over to the Presidency of Religious Affairs and converted to a mosque following the example of Hagia Sophia, was removed from the website and YouTube channel of state broadcaster TRT2.

Erkan Akkuş, former anchor and news director at the now-defunct TV stations Kanal Türk and Bugün TV, was jailed pending trial for “membership of a terrorist organization.”

The Van Governor’s Office renewed a ban on all public gatherings and

demonstrations that had been in continuous effect since 29 April 2019 for another 15 days across the province on the grounds of “prevention of demonstrations and assaults” and “the coronavirus pandemic.”

Access to a Twitter post by CHP Vice President Veli Ağbaba who claimed that the President of Religious Affairs had cursed Atatürk and had in the past held positions as a director in the foundations of Fethullah Gülen, an exiled cleric who is alleged to be the perpetrator of the 15 July coup attempt, was blocked.

Evrensel newspaper Diyarbakır correspondent Cengiz Anıl Bölükbaş claimed he was approached by people who identified themselves as police and offered him agency on their behalf, and told him that they would keep on trailing him if he refused the offer.

Musician Melek Mosso stated that police was called to the venue Aqua Florya Hayal Kahvesi and that she was taken off the stage over her remarks that the “Istanbul Convention saves lives.”

RTÜK imposed a fine on TELE1 on the grounds of “praising and encouraging terror” and “justifying terrorist organisations” on account of broadcasting Evrensel newspaper’s 25th year anniversary video which showed a child holding a cheesecloth in yellow, red and green colors.

Musa Dinç, who mentioned child abuse in a children’s book *Gül ve Düşün* (Laugh and Think), was arrested on the charge of “publishing obscene publications about children, animals, dead bodies.”

The Izmir Governor’s Office banned the theater play *Kuvayi Milliye Destanı* (The Epic of the Independence War) organized by the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality to celebrate 30 August Victory Day on the ground of the coronavirus pandemic.

Paper carriers in Elazığ who were on their rounds with stacks of Evrensel daily were subjected to questioning and threats by people who identified themselves as police, but refrained from showing identification.

September 2020

TV channel Kanal D censored the words “magic,” “wizard,” “dementor,” and “goblin” during its broadcast of the film *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, released worldwide in 2009.

The Antalya Governor’s Office banned all public gatherings and demonstrations for 7 days across the province due to COVID-19 related restrictions. The Office cited “public morality” among the reasons of the said ban.

Police blocked a “peace chain” demonstration in front of Ankara Train Station to mark 1 September World Peace Day commemorating the victims of 2015 ISIS bomb attack; members of the press were prevented from taking pictures.

Access to a discussion topic on the Ekşi Sözlük website about Duygu Delen, who allegedly died after falling from the fourth floor of Mehmet Kaplan’s house, raising suspicions about the 17-year-old’s femicide, was blocked.

Turkish broadcasting watchdog RTÜK ordered Netflix to remove the French film *Cuties* from its local catalogue on the ground of “containing images of child exploitation,” or else face administrative fines.

Access to news reports about a street vendor who set himself on fire after municipal officers confiscated his stall was blocked on the grounds of “national security and protection of public order.”

The Batman Chief Prosecutor’s Office launched an investigation against Cumhuriyet daily columnist Işıl Özgentürk over her remarks in an article she penned about the death of İpek Er, who had committed suicide after being sexually assaulted by sergeant Musa Orhan.

Access to an online report by Turkish Medical Association (TTB) examining COVID-19 cases in Manisa Organized Industrial Zone and Vestel factory and the news stories covering the report was blocked.

The Board for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications, that served under the remit of Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Services, placed an age restriction on a children's book titled *Keloğlan Ak Ülkede* (Keloğlan in the White Land) that included a story about sexual assault, deeming it appropriate for readers over 18.

Access to news reports about the use of a piece of land in Istanbul that had been donated to the State Treasury on the condition that it would be the plot for a school building as the parking lot of a Medipol Hospital branch, founded by the Health Minister Fahrettin Koca was blocked.

Access to a news report in BirGün about AKP Izmir MP presumptive nominee winning the food tender of AKP-held Bahçelievler Municipality was blocked on the ground of "violation of personal rights."

Journalist Oktay Candemir was arrested for "insulting the memory of a dead person" over a Twitter post he had shared about the series *Diriliş Ertuğrul* (Resurrection: Ertuğrul), which depicted the father of the founder of the Ottoman state and aired on Turkish state broadcaster TRT.

Netflix removed the French film *Cuties* from its Turkish catalogue in compliance with the orders of the Turkish broadcasting watchdog RTÜK.

Access to news reports about the seizure of a sizeable loan that İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality received for a subway project, which is immune to levy, by construction firm Met-Gün to cover previous debts was blocked.

Musician Ferhat Tunç was indicted for the artwork on the cover of his latest album *Marşlar ve Ağtlar* (Anthems and Elegies), which featured photographs of Deniz Gezmiş, Mahir Çayan, and İbrahim Kaypakkaya, three revolutionaries from the 70s.

Access to a news story about AKP Mayor of Afyonkarahisar assigning the former municipality culture desk chief to tackling weed was blocked.

The Izmir Governor's Office took steps to remove a picture of Mazlum

Doğan and a gallows installation from an exhibition themed *Ne Darbe Ne Diktatörlük* (Neither Coups Nor Dictatorship) to be organized by the Revolutionary '78's Federation to commemorate the people killed in 12 September 1980 military coup; the Federation canceled the exhibition.

Access to news reports about access-blocking decisions to news reports about First Lady Emine Erdoğan's bag and the relevant content in the Ekşi Sözlük website was blocked on the ground of "violation of personal rights."

İhlas News Agency reporter Murat Başal and Demirören News Agency reporter Emrah Kızıl were attacked by a group of people in Diyarbakır in the course of reporting. Assaulters were detained by police, and later released by the Public Prosecutor on Duty.

The government-appointed trustee to the Mardin Municipality banned veterinary İsmail Taş from public service on the grounds of "aiding terrorist organizations," "using public resources to aide terrorist organizations," and "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" over sharing Kurdish songs on social media.

Bilingual signposts in Kurdish and Turkish in Çaldıran district of Van province were removed by the government-appointed trustee to the municipality; in their stead, Turkish signposts were hanged.

Members of the press were prevented from attending a burial ceremony of a Kurdish worker who died in an armed attack against Kurdish construction workers in Afyon on the ground of the coronavirus measures.

Access to LGBTI+ dating and chat site gabile.com was blocked.

Grup Yorum members Emel Yeşilirmak, Ümit İlter and Caferi Sadık Eroğlu were released from prison after 18 months, and later arrested again upon an appeal by the İstanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office.

The Tunceli Governor's Office banned all public gatherings and demonstrations for 15 days across the province. The timing of the ban attracted a great

deal of attention as the announcement came at a time when protests against mining projects and press conferences regarding the suspicious disappearance of Gülistan Doku were taking place in the province.

Human Rights Association (İHD) Diyarbakır Branch Prison Commission recorded in their report on rights violations in Diyarbakır Women's Closed Prison that imprisoned women were threatened with administrative actions on account of singing in Kurdish.

RTÜK imposed an administrative fine and ordered the suspension of three episodes of a show called *Akıl Oyunu* (Mind Game) on Meltem TV due to anchor Erol Mütercimler's remarks about a child abuse case in Sakarya.

RTÜK imposed an administrative fine on FOX TV on the ground of violating the principle of "The rude, coarse, and vulgar use of language shall not be allowed" over the remarks of a prime-time news anchor about toll charges.

RTÜK imposed a maximum administrative fine and ordered the suspension of a show on Haber Global TV over the remarks of guest speaker Erol Mütercimler of Haliç University, who said on air "Look at those graduates from imam hatips, how they come across these days... Scammers, perverts, immoral."

Access to a news report in Cumhuriyet newspaper about the owner of a company that provided COVID-19 test kits to State Supply Office being "banned from the stock markets," and the CEO of the company being an AKP member was blocked.

Academic Bekir Tank was dismissed from his position at İstanbul Commerce University for "separatism" over an assignment handed to his students that required them to translate two texts into Kurdish, and his contract was annulled.

AKP District Municipality of Yakutiye, Erzurum, where the majority of the population is Kurdish, put up "Wear Your Mask" posters in 9 languages on billboards across the district. Kurdish was not one of those languages.

Evrensel daily columnist Yusuf Karataş was sentenced to 10 years and 6 months in prison on the charge of “establishing and leading an armed terrorist organization” as part of an investigation launched against numerous people who had attended panels, symposiums, conferences, and workshops organized by the Democratic Society Congress (DTK).

Batman’s Yılmaz Güney Movie Theater, which was demolished after a suspicious fire in 2017 burned down the hall, was reportedly being converted to an ornamental pool by the government-appointed trustee to the municipality.

During the broadcast of 27th International Adana Golden Boll Film Festival, state-run Anadolu Agency censored the acceptance speech of Lifetime Achievement Award holder Rutkay Aziz, who devoted his award to Turkish Medical Association (TTB) which was targeted for criticizing the implementation of the coronavirus related measures.

Ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations in Van province that had been in effect since 29 April 2019 was renewed for another 15 days.

An investigation was launched against academic Erol Mütercimler on the charge of “publicly degrading a section of the public on the grounds of social class, religion, sect, gender or regional differences” over his remarks about graduates of Turkey’s Islamic *imam hatip* schools in a TV show, demanding up to 1 year and 6 months of imprisonment.

Journalist Burcu Özkaya Günaydın was sentenced to 1 year and 3 months in prison on the charge of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” over her social media posts about Operation Peace Spring, the 2019 Turkish offensive into northeastern Syria.

Access to news reports that said the first action of the newly appointed rector to Bilecik Şeyh Edebali University in office was to rent a luxury car was blocked on the ground of “violating personal rights.”

Arrest warrants were issued for 24 persons, including writer Temel Demirer,

journalists Zeynep Kuray and Hakan Gülseven, Özen Kulaçoğlu, and actress Defne Halman as part of an investigation against the “İsimsizler Hareketi” (Anonymous Movement) account on Twitter.

An investigation was launched against Mesopotamia Cultural Center musician Weysi Ermiş on the charge of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” over his social media posts where he shared videos of himself singing in Kurdish during elections, Newroz celebrations, and in concerts.

Yeni Yaşam newspaper and Kurdish Xwebûn newspaper carrier Kemal Subaşı was detained in Şanlıurfa while doing his rounds; the newspapers copies were confiscated.

Access to the website of Yeni Yaşam newspaper was blocked without an official explanation.

Speak Platform was issued an access-blocking order over a news report on the platform's website Susma24.com about access-blocking order into an investigation against a Court of Cassation member.

A book titled *İfade Özgürlüğü, İlkeler ve Türkiye* (Freedom of Expression, Principles and Turkey), that counted among its writers the President of the Constitutional Court, was declared “suspect” and not let in the Diyarbakır Women's Closed Prison.

Access to the news site Siyasi Haber was blocked without an official reason.

October 2020

Access to news site sendika.org was blocked for the 63rd time, despite two prior judgments by the Constitutional Court that said the access-blocking decision issued to the site was a violation of freedom of expression.

Access to the websites of Mesopotamia Agency and Yeni Demokrasi newspaper was blocked.

Evrensel daily Izmir correspondent Eda Aktaş was fined TL 3,150 for “refusing to observe the rule of social distancing” during a press conference.

Access to a news report on OdaTV about the claim that Treasury and Finance Minister Berat Albayrak mediated for Zülfikarlar Holding to flow cash to abroad after the company received a loan from a public bank was blocked.

A letter from Özgür Karakaya, imprisoned at Izmir Şakran No.1 F-Type Prison, that read “We want fair trials” and sent to news portal bianet was censored by the prison administration.

Police prevented Mesopotamia Agency from filming the HDP press conference about Servet Turgut who died after being pushed out of a helicopter in Van province.

Habertürk newspaper removed an article by its columnist Nihal Bengisu Karaca, criticizing MHP deputy Erkan Haberal.

Interior Ministry banned NGOs and professional organizations from holding meetings and events due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Governor Türker Öksüz who was appointed as a trustee to Kars Municipality deleted all the posts about the previous HDP administration from the Turkish account and deactivated the Kurdish account of the municipality on Twitter, after abolishing the city council.

Alevi Net news portal was blocked completely, after access to two news stories

by the portal, "Writer Aziz Tunç answers to Doğu Perinçek" and "The Speaker of Religious Affairs, Our Circumstance, Our Circumstances" was blocked.

Mesopotamia Cultural Center-affiliated Teatra Jiyana Nû production *Bêrû*, among the private theaters to which the Istanbul City Theaters opened its doors due to the coronavirus pandemic was targeted by *Aydınlık* newspaper with a column titled "İBB stage handed over to PKK theater group."

Access to a news report on Speak Platform's website *Susma24.com* about access-blocking orders to news stories about the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) documents of the United States Department Treasury that looked into international money laundering and the role of banks was blocked on the ground of "violation of personal rights" upon the complaint of Berat Albayrak.

The Van Governor's Office declared a 15-day ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations across the province.

Mesopotamia Agency Van Bureau workers were detained during police raids on their homes. Among the detainees was Cemil Uğur who broke the news about two citizens who were thrown from a helicopter after they were detained by military officers.

Etkin News Agency (ETHA) reporter Pınar Gayıp was detained pending trial in Istanbul as part of an investigation launched against the journalist for reporting on a funeral service held in Istanbul's Gazi district.

The Batman Governor's Office renewed its decision that stipulated all public gatherings and demonstrations held in the province would be subject to prior permission for another 15 days on the grounds of "national security" and "protection of public order and safety."

A court issued an interim ruling at the latest hearing of "MIT trucks trial," ordering Can Dünder's assets to be permanently seized.

Access to Turkish website of multilingual news agency Rudaw was blocked.

Access to the news site Nupel was blocked.

Ayşegül Doğan, former program coordinator of the shuttered TV station İMC TV, was hit with an indictment on the charge of “membership of a terrorist organization,” citing her interviews with DTK executives.

Journalist and documentary filmmaker Fatih Pınar was acquitted in a case where he was tried on the ground of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” over a social media post where he shared a photograph taken in 2014 Newroz celebrations with the hashtag “#NewrozPirozBe (Kurdish, Happy Newroz).

Access to a website which published an article written with the assistance of Health Ministry detailing how people who were hospitalized in Tarsus Medical Park Hospital in February tested positive for COVID-19 was blocked.

Ötekilerin Gündemi website columnist and poet Muazzez Avcı was detained as part of an investigation launched against her for “inciting the public to discrimination, hostility or violence.”

Kurdish play *Bêrû*, a Teatra Jiyana Nû production, was banned by the Gaziosmanpaşa District Governor’s Office in Istanbul at short notice on the ground of “endangering general public order.” The play had been targeted by Aydınlik newspaper.

Police forcefully dispersed a gathering to read out a press statement in Ankara to present the findings of “Report on COVID-19 in its 7th Month” by Health and Safety Labor Watch-Turkey; many were detained.

The Istanbul Governor’s Office declared that an investigation was launched against Kurdish theater play *Bêrû*, adapted from Dario Fo’s classic *Trumpets and Raspberries* by Teatra Jiyana Nû, on the ground that “the setup of the play was fashioned on the prompting of transforming it into terrorist propaganda, disseminated by the PKK Terrorist organization against our country.”

Four members of Grup Yorum were detained during a police raid on İdil Cultural

Center, where the banned left-wing music band rehearsed.

An investigation was launched against Gerger Firat newspaper news director Özgür Boğatekin on the allegation of “targeting people who have fought against terrorism” over a social media post where he shared an altercation between an HDP deputy and a gendarmerie stationed at a checkpoint.

The shuttered Özgürlükçü Demokrasi newspaper’s former editor-in-chief Yılmaz Yıldız and responsible editor İshak Yasul were sentenced to prison for 10 months each on the charge of “publishing and distributing publications of a terrorist organization.”

Türk Telekom’s digital TV platform Tivibu censored the film *Ahlat Ağacı* (The Wild Pear Tree) by acclaimed director Nuri Bilge Ceylan, blurring the breasts of a mermaid statue during its broadcast.

Access to news items about Agriculture and Forestry Ministry’s irregular purchase of lighting columns in its campus from a company owned by First Lady Emine Erdoğan’s cousin was blocked.

An investigation was launched against actor Nejat İşler for “praising the crime and the criminal” over a tweet he posted about the 15 July failed coup attempt.

Yeni Yaşam newspaper’s former distributor Mikail Tunçdemir was arrested as part of an investigation against the journalists who were imprisoned pending trial after covering the story of two citizens thrown off a military helicopter.

With the exception of reporters for AA, DHA, İHA, Habertürk and DW Türkçe, journalists were not allowed in the courtroom for the first hearing in the retrial of Tahir Elçi’s killing as they were not “accredited” due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Ersan Pekin was sentenced to 5 months in prison on the ground of “obscenity” (TCK 226/2) over his book titled *Bu Kadınlar Yedi Bitirdi Beni* (These Women Have Eaten Me Up), essentially a work of fiction about a nymphomaniac.

Ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations that had been in effect in Van province for the past 1500 days was renewed for another 15 days.

A criminal case was filed against persons who shot a music video in Istanbul Karacaahmet Cemetery on the charge of “publicly degrading religious values of a section of the public.” Yeni Akit newspaper had targeted the incident with an item titled “LGBTI pervert shot a music video trampling down on Ottoman graves.”

Journalist Sabiha Temizkan was sentenced to 1 year and 3 months in prison for “making propaganda for a terrorist organization,” over sharing a news story in a social media post in 2014.

Access to Jinnews, Etkin Haber, Politez Haber, and Yeni Demokrasi newspaper was blocked on the ground of “national security and protection of public order.”

The booklet *21 Soruda FETÖ'nün Siyasi Ayağı* (The Political Branch of FETÖ in 21 Questions), the collected speeches of People's Republican Party leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, was banned from publication, distribution and sale on the allegation of “inciting the public to hatred and enmity.”

Gazete Fersude co-editor-in-chief Hayri Tunç was sentenced to prison on the allegation of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” over a number of photographs he shared on social media taken when reporting on a news story.

Access to news reports about the criminal complaint of a member of public in Fethiye district of Muğla against the Mayor and his bodyguard on the allegations of defamation and abuse was blocked.

Access to news stories about cryptocurrency firm Turcoin, that was reported as the last ring of a fraudulent company, and its owner Sadun Kaya was blocked on the ground of “violation of personal rights.”

Parts of an article titled “Coronavirus and Isolation” penned by former HDP

Co-Chair Figen Yüksekdağ who was imprisoned at Kandıra Prison were censored by the prison administration.

An investigation was launched against journalist and writer Burhan Ekinci on the charge of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” over a photograph he had taken in 2014 in Kobane border and shared in a social media post.

November 2020

Access to Twitter account of French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* was blocked in Turkey on the ground of “violation of personal rights.” Access to the website of the magazine has been blocked in Turkey since 2015.

Access to news reports about a hit and run case involving Çemişgezek District Governor Mehmet Güler published in *Artı Gerçek*, *BirGün*, and *Cumhuriyet* newspapers was blocked on the ground of “violation of personal rights.”

Access to a news report in *Cumhuriyet* daily titled “the FETÖ case shelved in exchange for a mansion overlooking the Bosphorus by the police chief” was blocked.

Access to the website of Jinnews was blocked for the 12th time.

It emerged that Istanbul Bookseller, a network of city-owned bookstores, that is operated under the umbrella of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality did not sell books published by Kurdish publishers and did not offer Kurdish language books in any of its stores due to “certain sensitivities.”

Writer and translator Fahriye Adsay was arrested and taken to Anti-Terror Branch of Diyarbakır Provincial Directorate of Security to give her statement for reasons unknown.

Research associate Adem Yıldırım was expelled from the Adıyaman University for translating and interpreting an interview with the Co-Chair of the People's Council in Rojava Abdulsalam Ahmed for social sciences and philosophy magazine *Kampfplatz*.

Filmmaker Kutbettin Cebe was sentenced to 2 years and 4 months in prison on the charge of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” over his documentary *Roza İki Nehrin Ülkesi* (Roza The Country of Two Rivers) about the fight against ISIS in northern Syria.

An organization called Turkish Family Council filed a criminal complaint against

Amnesty International executives on the charges of “inciting the public to hatred and animosity,” “obscenity,” “establishing a terrorist organization,” and “espionage” over a children’s book published by the organization titled *Feminist Alfabe* (Feminist Alphabet).

Sendika.org editor Ali Ergin Demirhan was sentenced to prison for “insulting the president” over 6 of his Twitter posts.

The booklets *Arpalık Aile Şirketi* (Sinecure Family Business) and *10 Maddede Kıdem Tazminatında Fon Aldatmacası* (The Deception of the Severance Pay Fund in 10 Points) published by the Republican People’s Party (CHP) were banned from printing, distribution and sale. Police confiscated all the print copies.

Access to a news item titled “Former executive of the shuttered FETÖ bank was made director in Religious Affairs” in Cumhuriyet newspaper was blocked on the ground of “violation of personal rights.”

Access to news reports about access-blocking orders to news reports about agricultural credit cooperatives in Milli Gazete was blocked.

Journalist Çağlar Tekin was detained over a social media post where he shared a news report which was published and later withdrawn by the state-run Anadolu Agency about the operation of Turkish Armed Forces vehicles by ISIS militants in Syria.

A member of public and a YouTuber were called in for questioning after a street interview was uploaded to YouTube, where the citizen said, “He made something on-point. They were a family business, his father-in-law must have directed him,” on account of the resignation of the then Treasury and Finance Minister Berat Albayrak.

A criminal case was filed against veteran actress Nilüfer Aydan for “insulting the president” in her social media posts demanding up to 4 years and 8 months of imprisonment.

Police stopped Mesopotamia Agency reporter Emrullah Acar and Yeni Yaşam

newspaper worker Hamdullah Bayram in the street, forcing the journalists to snitch for them.

Narin Gezgör was sentenced to 7 years and 6 months in prison on the charge "membership of a terrorist organization" in the Rosa Women's Association trial due to her attendance in press conferences, interviews with members of the press and statements by an anonymous witness.

Writer Yılmaz Özdil was sentenced to five months in prison for "provocative insults aimed at destroying confidence in commanders," due to his remarks about Minister of National Defense Hulusi Akar. Özdil had said "I wouldn't even go for a walk with Hulusi Akar," then-Chief of General Staff in a TV show he attended in 2017.

A citizen in Antalya who criticized the ruling party and the economy administration in a street interview was detained during a raid on his home, and later imprisoned pending trial on the charge of insulting the president.

The layout of a children's playground in Istanbul was torn down after it was renewed by the district municipality on the ground that the colors red, green, and yellow in the flooring resembled PKK symbols; prosecutor's office launched an investigation into the incident, ordering an inquiry into "terrorist connections" of the persons responsible for the maintenance work.

The Izmir Governor's Office Provincial Disaster and Emergency Directorate asked the mayors and mukhtars in the city in official writing to refrain from making statements to the press in the aftermath of an earthquake in the province.

The Hakkâri Governor's Office banned all public gatherings and demonstrations for 15 days on the grounds of COVID-19 pandemic and "possible social incidents."

A preliminary examination was launched against İstanbul mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu over the posters, reading "Either Kanal or İstanbul" and "Who Needs Kanal İstanbul," in protest of Kanal İstanbul project on the allegation that printing costs were covered by public resources by the Civil Inspection Board of Interior Ministry.

Access to news reports about criminal charges against TV100 owner and its media group head for “coercion, plundering, and extortion” was blocked.

Poet and writer Nezir Çakan, also Kurdish PEN member and head of Kurdish Literary Association, was jailed pending trial as part of the “Kobane investigation” launched by Ankara Public Prosecutor’s Office.

The 10th edition of Malatya International Film Festival was canceled after the organizers announced the festival would hand out a “Best Performance” award on a gender-neutral basis instead of “Best Actor Award,” and “Best Actress Award” by the Municipality of Malatya, which announced the cancellation was due to COVID-19 and “certain statements that offend our national sensitivities.”

A criminal complaint was filed against five journalists who were detained on the charge of “attending illegal public gatherings and marches unarmed and refusing to disperse on their own accord despite warning” while covering the protests after the takeover of the Mardin Municipality by a government-appointed trustee.

The Van Governor’s Office renewed a blanket ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations that had been in effect across the province for the past four years for another 15 days.

Jinnews Kurdish editor and Kurdish PEN member Roza Metina, Mesopotamia Language and Culture Research Center member Salih Şimşek, and writer Mehmet Sait Arzu were arrested as part of the operations against the Democratic Society Congress (DTK).

The Kocaeli Governor’s Office declared a 30-day ban on demonstration marches across the province on the ground of the coronavirus pandemic, following the announcement that metal workers who had been dismissed without compensation after joining Birleşik Metal-İş (The United Metalworkers’ Union) would march to Ankara.

Access to Jinnews, which defines itself as “the first women’s news agency

in Turkey,” was blocked again on the grounds of “national security and protection of public order.”

Access to news reports that revealed a gold mine company that had been using cyanide in its extraction process was advised by a former advisor to President Erdoğan was blocked.

An investigation was launched against journalist Melis Alphan on the grounds of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” and “showing off a flag symbolizing the terrorist organization” over a Twitter post where she shared a photograph that had been taken in 2015 Newroz celebrations in Diyarbakır.

Mesopotamia Agency reporter Dindar Karataş was jailed pending trial in a raid on his home in Van. Shortly after Karataş’s arrest, the agency’s offices in Van was also raided, during which police confiscated the agency’s laptops and hard disks.

The Mardin Governor’s Office declared a ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations for 30 days across the province due to COVID-19 pandemic measures ahead of 25 November International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

RTÜK issued a warning to singer İrem Derici on the ground of obscenity for the music video *Senin Hastan* (Mad About You) featuring Brazilian model Diogo Fedrizzi which climbed to the top of the YouTube Trending Videos list.

What Has Speak Up Platform Done?

Some of the activities we did were as follows:

Speak Up Gatherings

Current Affairs in Freedom of Expression Panel – 29 November 2020

We conducted a panel about the extent of censorship in arts and the digital media with journalist Mehveş Evin, Avesta Publications founder Abdullah Keskin, Professor Yaman Akdeniz of İstanbul Bilgi University's Faculty at Law, actress Pervin Bağdat and documentary filmmaker-producer Ayşe Çetinbaş.

Speak Up Annual General Assembly - 29 November 2020

We shared the findings of our third annual Censorship and Self-Censorship in Turkey Report that covered the violations of freedom of expression in culture, arts, and media in 2019 with the participants of our platform and the general public.

Panel on the Effects of Trustee Policies on Culture and Arts – 22 February 2020

Hosted by Amed City Theater, we held a panel discussion in Diyarbakır in co-operation with The Association of Middle East Cinema Academy on the effects of the government-appointed trustees in culture and arts in Kurdish provinces. Moderated by Speak Up Platform's Diyarbakır representative Özkan Küçük, the panelists were film critic Şenay Aydemir, theater player Firuze Engin of Bereze Performance House, Batman Yılmaz Güney Movie Theater former director Dicle Anter, theater player Rüknettin Gün of Amed City Theater.

Pandemic, Access to Information and Censorship Webinar – 31 May 2020

Forensic medicine specialist and human rights defender Şebnem Korur Fincancı and academic and writer Can Ertuna came together for the online event, moderated by our coordinator Ayşen Güven, to talk about the right to access to information and discuss how the spread of fake news and disinformation became a threat during the coronavirus outbreak.

Culture and Arts in Batman from Past to Present Webinar – 28 October 2020

Moderated by our Diyarbakır representative Özkan Küçük, the webinar brought together Batman Yılmaz Güney Movie Theater former director Dicle Anter, Şêrzat from Bahar Cultural Center and Yakup Selimoğlu of New Stage to reflect on the vibrant history of culture and arts in Batman and the effects of government-appointed trustee policies on the arts scene.

Member Meetings

On the occasion of the Pride Week, we talked about the impact of rising hate speech and the coronavirus pandemic on organizing, and solidarity networks in provinces with QueerAdana, Muamma LGBTI+ Association, Çanakkale LGBTI+ Initiative and Kocaeli LGBTI+ Initiative on 4 June 2020
Together with *Yeni Film* Magazine, Mesopotamia Cinema Association, Documentarist, *Altyazı* Cinema Magazine, and *Altyazı* Fasikül, we talked about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on cinema publishing, the industry, movie theaters and film festivals on 22 July 2020.

World Premier of the Books Banned by Coups Video

Within the scope of Kiraathane Book Festival, we have prepared an exclusive video to mark the 40th anniversary of 12 September 1980 military coup in Turkey. Writers, publishers, and poets came together to talk about and read from books that were deemed objectionable, banned, and confiscated after military coups. Ayşegül Tözeren, Gaye Boralıoğlu, Mehmet Altan, Ragıp Zarakolu, and Orhan Alkaya talked about Duygu Asena, Sevgi Soysal, Ahmet Altan, Dido Sotiriou, Can Yücel and their books respectively.

Poet İlhan Çomak: “What I invite to my cell is life itself”

On 20 September 2020, together with PEN International Board Member Burhan Sönmez and academic İpek Özel, we talked about poet İlhan Sami Çomak who has been imprisoned for 27 years, his poems, unlawful practices he's had to face, his anticipation of justice, and solidarity campaigns under his name. Moderated by our coordinator Ayşen Güven, the event included a screening of *Anatomy of Freedom: İlhan Sami Çomak*, produced by Erkut Torkman and Erkan Karakiraz of Open Poetry Movement.

Workshops

Workshop on crowdsourcing for artists and culture professionals

We organized a three days workshop (May 28, June 3-5), facilitated by media anthropologist Assoc. Prof. Dr. Suncem Koçer, with the objective to help artists and culture professionals find new ways to overcome financial restrictions and censorship they have faced more and more recently.

Culture and Arts publishing in the Digital Realm: Censorship and Alternatives Workshop

On 9 December 2020, Ramazan Subaşı and Şevket Uyanık of Common Knowledge and Communication Association came together to discuss how the newly enacted laws on social media, Internet, and RTÜK would affect online culture and arts publishers, artists and readers, in addition to the alternatives.

Advocacy

We jointly sent a written report with Freemuse on the violations of freedom of artistic expression in Turkey between 2015 and 2019 to the United Nations Human Rights Council.

As part of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process in Geneva, we informed the member states of the United Nations with regards to the recommendations detailed in our report, and kindly requested them to submit these recommendations to the government of Turkey ahead of Turkey's review at an upcoming session.

In cooperation with Human Rights Agenda Association, Equal Rights Association, and Etkiniz, we organized a meeting to watch the UPR session on 28 January together with more than 40 civil society representatives. During and following the session, we ran a social media campaign with the hashtag #BMTavsiyeleriKabulEdilsin (#AcceptUNRecommendations) to inform the public and ensure the implementation of the recommendations.

In one-on-one meetings with lawmakers and civil society representatives, we presented the findings of our annual censorship and self-censorship report and our recommendations to improve the situation.

Together with Freemuse, we published a series of calls and videos to end the illegitimate restrictions of Grup Yorum's freedom of artistic expression.

As members of Internet is Life Platform, we called for an end to internet censorship, condemning the Internet bandwidth throttling of social media and instant messaging platforms and the legal actions against dissenting accounts on social media after the death of 33 Turkish Armed Forces soldiers in the northwestern province of Syria, İdlib.

Exclusive Content

We have continued to raise awareness and build a wide-ranging digital archive on censorship and self-censorship practices by reporting on violations of freedom of expression in Turkish and English at our website susma24.com. Our interview with Buket Uzuner on the account of her book *Ayin Çıplak Yüzü* (The Most Naked Day of the Month) being declared an obscene publication; a roundtable talk with critic Seçkin Selvi, dramaturgist Özlem Hemiş, theater player Gülhan Kadim, and playwright Ebru Nihan Celkan, in which we discussed “the golden age of theater” and self-censorship; the interview where we talked about the censoring of Turkey’s longest-running LGBTIQ+ publication *Kaos GL* magazine with the then editor of the publication and its lawyer; the interview with scriptwriters about how censorship and self-censorship operated on television and online platforms were just some of the exclusive content we published.

We published a number of interviews on our website with various organizations and projects which open up new spaces for culture and arts, all the while struggling against censorship and self-censorship:

With this in mind, we’ve talked with the following: Actor’s Union of Turkey about their new project to confront censorship; alternative rock band Peyk about Olta Dayanışma Albümleri initiated to give room to musicians whose conditions are aggravated by the pandemic; with its illustrators about Turkey’s first ever Kurdish children’s comic book *GOG*; Yolcu Theater about their new play *Gomidas*, the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on theaters, and the solidarity campaign they launched.

We have prepared more video news and interviews this year and published them on YouTube. We talked with Amed City Theater actors, who opened their own place after being expelled from the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality by the government-appointed trustee, about the current circumstances and their new stage. We talked with Anadolu Kültür director Asena Günal, İlhan Çomak’s guardian İpek Özel and lawyer Murat Deha Boduroğlu about the draft law on criminal enforcement, that was passed in the parliament in April and excluded journalists, politicians, rights activists, etc. We talked with Yaman Akdeniz of Istanbul Bilgi University’s Faculty at Law, Şevket Uyanık of Common Knowledge and Communication Association and Pirate Party Movement, Evrensel newspaper information

and technology columnist İbrahim Gökhan Bayram, and Turk-internet.com founder and Internet activist Füsün Nebil about the scope of the new social media law and its ramifications.

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