# Turkey probes social network 'insults'

June 27 2013, by Suzan Fraser



Turkish protesters seen flanked by flags in Kugulu Park in Ankara, Turkey, Wednesday, June 26, 2013. Turkish police on Tuesday detained at least 20 people allegedly involved in violent protests, as Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan continued to lash out at protesters, and a BBC journalist, claiming they are part of a conspiracy to harm Turkey, and reiterating that the protests were orchestrated by forces wanting to prevent Turkey's rise. (AP Photo/Burhan Ozbilici)

(AP)—Turkish authorities are investigating people who allegedly insulted state officials or incited riots on social media, the deputy prime

minister said Thursday, in a sign the government is intent on meting out punishment over the massive protests that swept the country in June.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has faced tough international criticism over his government's heavy-handed crackdown on the unprecedented demonstrations. But in a possible attempt to soften the blow to the country's democratic reputation, his deputy also said the government would propose further checks on the country's historically powerful military.

The Aksam newspaper said police had provided to Istanbul prosecutors a list of 35 names of people who had allegedly insulted Erdogan or other officials on Twitter or Facebook. Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdag acknowledged the probe, but would not confirm the list. It was not clear exactly what the posts said.

Meanwhile, Facebook expressed concerned about Turkish proposals that would require Internet companies to provide user information to authorities.

Erdogan earlier this month branded Twitter a social "menace" for spreading lies after many people turned to the social networking site and Facebook for information. Many Turkish media outlets provided little coverage in the early stages of the demonstrations, likely intimidated into self-censorship by the government's previously tough approach to journalists.

Nearly three weeks of protests were sparked by a violent police crackdown on peaceful activists on May 31, with thousands expressing discontent over what they say are Erdogan's increasingly authoritarian ways. Erdogan who has shepherded Turkey to an [economic boom](link) and raised the country's international profile, rejects the charge and cites his broad support base.

The government has dismissed protesters' general calls for a more pluralistic society and has blamed the protests on a foreign-led conspiracy involving bankers and the media meant to stop Turkey on its tracks. It has also vowed to go after them.



Turkish protesters seen flanked by flags in Kugulu Park in Ankara, Turkey, Wednesday, June 26, 2013. Turkish police on Tuesday detained at least 20 people allegedly involved in violent protests, as Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan continued to lash out at protesters and a BBC journalist he claimed were part of a conspiracy to harm Turkey. Erdogan reiterated that the protests were orchestrated by forces wanting to prevent Turkey's rise.(AP Photo/Burhan Ozbilici)

Bozdag took aim at the social media users under investigation, claiming that there were many "profanities and insults conducted electronically" that were against the law. Turkish law bars insults to public figures.

"Crimes determined as such by the law don't change if they are carried out through Facebook, Twitter or through other electronic means," Bozdag said. "No one has the right to commit crimes under the rule of law."

On Wednesday, Turkey's transport and communications minister complained that Twitter was not cooperating with authorities and said the company has been asked to appoint a Turkey-based official to deal with requests.

Binali Yildirim suggested Facebook was more cooperative, but the company released a statement saying it had not provided user data to Turkish authorities in relation to the protests and was concerned about proposals that would require Internet companies to share information.

"We will be meeting with representatives of the Turkish government when they visit Silicon Valley this week, and we intend to communicate our strong concerns about these proposals directly at that time," Facebook said.

Human rights groups say dozens of people have been arrested and face trial for their involvement in the protests, which resulted in at least four deaths and thousands of injuries—including 11 who lost eyes or their eyesight from tear gas canisters fired by police.

But even as the government took a hard line on social media, it appeared to be trying to make some amends. Though the European Union decided to revive long-dormant EU membership talks with Turkey this week, it said it would delay them until later this year, citing the government's heavy-handed crackdown on the protests.

Bozdag said Parliament will consider a government-proposed proposal that would amend a regulation that the army has cited in the past as

The Turkish military has frequently intervened in politics in the past, and has staged three coups.

Though new democratic proposal came out of the blue, Erdogan has been at odds with the military for much of his 10 years in office. He has enacted reforms over the years that have curbed the powers of the military, winning him praise for strengthening democracy.

Earlier, this week, the government had also said it was considering a set of measures that would grant greater religious rights to the country's Alevi Muslim community—who have faced discrimination in Turkey.

Citation: Turkey probes social network 'insults' (2013, June 27) retrieved 26 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2013-06-turkey-probes-social-network-insults.html