

# Turkey president loses Twitter followers over web law

February 19 2014, by Fulya Ozerkan

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Turkey's President Abdullah Gul is shown at the presidential palace in Budapest on February 17, 2014

Turkish President Abdullah Gul has lost tens of thousands of Twitter followers after signing into force a controversial law voted in by parliament that would tighten controls over web use.

Gul, a frequent user of social media, lost almost 80,000 followers after

he tweeted late Tuesday that he had approved the contested bill.

He said the government had assured him that it would soften two disputed articles of the legislation, which the opposition and rights groups say infringes citizens' freedoms.

"I am aware of the problems mainly on two points... These concerns will be taken into account in the new [law](#)," said Gul, who still has 4.3 million Twitter followers.

Nonetheless, the move triggered an angry response on Twitter.

"Good morning/First thing to do today#unfollow@cbabdullahgul," tweeted one user using the name mevan.

"President Gul approved Internet law. Welcome to the censorship era on Internet," wrote another, named @tanikunal.

@zuhalayla wrote: "Mr. Gul approved the Internet censorship law in Turkey. Freedom of speech is the worst circumstance than ever before".

The Internet bill has sparked outrage both at home and abroad and fuelled concerns over the state of democracy under Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Erdogan has however vehemently denied accusations of online censorship, and boasted that the number of Internet subscribers in predominantly Muslim Turkey has swelled to 34 million from 20,000 since the AKP came to power in 2002.

Under the new law, the Telecommunications Communications Presidency (TIB) can demand that Internet providers block pages deemed insulting or considered an invasion of privacy.

But the government is now proposing that the TIB will have to inform a judge about any decision to block a web page.

The judge would then have to issue a ruling within 48 hours or the TIB move would be deemed invalid.

Turkey's all-powerful leader since 2003, Erdogan is openly suspicious of the Internet, branding Twitter a "menace" for helping organise mass nationwide protests in June in which six people died and thousands were hurt.

Observers say Gul, who hails from Erdogan's Islamic-rooted Justice and Development Party (AKP), has been stuck between his political career and conflicting views with the premier's conservative policies.

The president, who has portrayed himself as an Internet fan, tweeted in 2011: "Anyone who wants it should be able to roam freely on the Internet".

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