

Turkey still hopes Twitter will open local office

April 17 2014, by Fulya Ozerkan



Protesters hold placards reading, "Do not touch my Twitter", "Communication right is a basic human right" and "Censorship to Internet! A dream comes true" during a demonstration against the Turkish government in Ankara on March 22, 2014

Turkey's government said on Thursday it still hopes Twitter will open an office in the country, a day after the social networking site ruled out any such move.

In a statement following several days of talks with Twitter executives, Communication Minister Lutfi Elvan said Turkey had suggested that the company open a "liaison office" to improve coordination with the [government](#).

"Twitter officials said they cannot make any immediate decision and would decide after evaluations at its headquarters," Elvan said in a written statement.

Elvan added that the country's telecommunications authority would now pixelate all text and images on Twitter deemed inappropriate.

The site has had a tense relationship with the Turkish government in recent weeks, having been banned in March after it was used to spread corruption allegations against Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his allies.

Turkey has also criticised the San Francisco-based company for not opening a physical office in the country and paying domestic taxes.

Twitter has rejected charges of tax evasion, saying it has a reseller in Turkey which pays applicable taxes.

A delegation led by Colin Crowell, Twitter's head of global public policy, travelled to Turkey this week in a bid to ease tensions.

But there was no agreement on opening a local office following meetings on the matter on Wednesday, Crowell said.

"Making greater investments here to grow our business has a relationship to whether or not we can count on the continuity of our service," he told AFP.

"And an investment climate in which our service has been shut off would give any company reservations about making an imminent investment."

- New court challenge -

On Thursday, the company's @policy feed read: "Productive and informative meetings this week with government officials and NGOs in Ankara and Istanbul".

Erdogan's government had to unblock Twitter on April 3 after the country's top court ruled that the ban breached constitutional guarantees on free speech—a ruling condemned by the [prime minister](#), who sees the judiciary as packed with political opponents.

The government has accused Twitter of ignoring "hundreds of court orders" to remove links deemed illegal.

According to Elvan, Twitter officials said more than 200 items had been removed from the network over the last couple of weeks, and that "concrete progress" had been made in talks on Monday and Tuesday.

The ban on Twitter—which has 12 million users in Turkey—was part of a wider crackdown on the Internet ahead of local elections on March 30, in which Erdogan's Islamic-rooted AKP party scored a crushing victory in spite of the corruption allegations.

YouTube has been blocked in Turkey since March 27 despite two separate court orders to lift the ban.

The Internet bans have sparked outrage at home and abroad and been condemned by opponents as the result of legislation passed in February that increases government control on the Internet.

On Thursday, the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) appealed to the Constitutional Court to annul the Internet law, saying it violated freedom of expression.

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