

Twitter rules out Turkey office amid tax row

April 16 2014, by Dilay Gundogan



A picture representing a mugshot of the twitter bird is seen on a smart phone with a Turkish flag in Istanbul on March 26, 2014

Social networking company Twitter on Wednesday rejected demands from the Turkish government to open an office there, following accusations of tax evasion and a two-week ban on the service.

Speaking after two days of closed-door talks with Turkish officials, Colin Crowell, Twitter's head of global public policy, told AFP: "We did not agree on opening an office in Turkey."

"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 said.

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

The Twitter delegation was in Turkey to ease tensions after Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused the firm of tax evasion and blocked it.

"Twitter, YouTube and Facebook are international companies established for profit and making money," Erdogan said on Sunday. "Twitter is at the same time a tax evader. We will go after it."

Turkey had criticised Twitter for not opening a physical office in the country and paying domestic taxes.

But Twitter has rejected charges of [tax evasion](#), saying the company already has a reseller in Turkey which pays the applicable taxes.



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"That relationship is similar to many companies which do business here," Crowell said.

The spat between the powerful social networking tool and Turkey reached its height when Erdogan attempted to block the service after it was used to spread audio recordings implicating the [prime minister](#) in corruption.

The much-criticised ban was lifted on April 3 after the country's top court ruled the blockade breached the right to free speech.

The government estimates that Twitter generates \$35 million (25 million euros) a year in advertising revenue in Turkey.

'Opening channels of communication'

Ankara also accuses Twitter of ignoring various court orders to remove links deemed illegal, which was the main sticking point in the talks.

Crowell declined to comment on media reports that Twitter had shut down some accounts after meeting Turkish officials but said that the content was being suspended "in response to due process in the courts, not in response to requests from government."

He talked about a company policy known as "country-withheld content", which allows Twitter to withhold accounts in Turkey but leave them visible elsewhere.

"Part of our discussion was explaining these practices (to the government)—that you do not have to turn off the service to millions of users—and opening channels of communication if issues arise that they would like to discuss with us," Crowell said.

The ban on Twitter—which has 12 million users in Turkey—was part of a wider crackdown on media that sparked outrage among the country's NATO allies and international human rights groups.

YouTube was blocked in Turkey three days before key March 30 local elections, which gave Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) a crushing victory despite graft claims.

But Crowell said he hoped that both parties could put the controversy behind them and stressed: "Looking forward, we have a bright future in Turkey".

"It was clear to us that there was a disconnect and we needed to find a remedy to this disconnect," Crowell said.

"They (the government) now have a better appreciation of our policies and practices and how to interact with us."

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Citation: Twitter rules out Turkey office amid tax row (2014, April 16) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-04-twitter-turkey-office-tax-row.html>

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