

Turkish high court to review Wikipedia appeal against ban

September 11 2019, by Suzan Fraser



Wikipedia logo.

Turkey's highest court on Wednesday began considering an appeal by Wikipedia aiming to reverse the Turkish government's more than two-year ban on the online encyclopedia.

Turkey blocked Wikipedia in April 2017, accusing it of being part of a "smear campaign" against Turkey, after the [website](#) refused to remove content that allegedly portrayed Turkey as a country supporting the Islamic State group and [terrorist organizations](#).

Access to Wikipedia and all its language editions was blocked under a law that allows the government to ban websites it deems pose a national security threat.

Wikipedia declined to remove content from the community-generated site, citing its opposition to censorship. It petitioned the Turkish Constitutional Court in May 2017 after talks with Turkish officials and a challenge in lower courts failed. Wikipedia is also appealing the ban at the European Court of Human Rights.

A group of five justices took up Wikipedia's case on Wednesday but decided to submit it to the high court's plenary assembly for deliberations. The court will decide whether the government's blanket blocking order on Wikipedia violates freedom of expression. It was not immediately clear when a decision would come.

"We did not comply with the demand to remove the articles because we believed that the content in question was legally protected [free expression](#) and because we defend our volunteer editors' decisions about what information should be included on Wikipedia," said Samantha

Lien, the communications manager for Wikimedia Foundation, which runs the website.

"Despite the block, the articles in question have continued to be edited and improved with more reliable sources from volunteers around the world," Lien told The Associated Press in an email.

Last year, Wikipedia launched a social media campaign with the hashtag "WeMissTurkey" to press for the removal of the block.

"Wikipedia is richer, more representative and more accurate when many people can contribute to its articles," Lien said. "If we lose one country, region, or culture's participation on Wikipedia, the entire world is poorer for it."

Turkey has a poor record on censorship and suppression of free speech, which intensified following a failed military coup in 2016 against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government. Tens of thousands of people were arrested or dismissed from government jobs and thousands of media organizations or [civil society groups](#) were shut in a clampdown in the aftermath of the coup attempt.

The Turkish Journalists Syndicate says a total of 131 journalists or other media workers are currently in jail.

Access from Turkey to tens of thousands of other websites is also blocked. In 2008, Turkey prevented access to YouTube for two years over videos insulting the Turkish republic's founding leader. Twitter, meanwhile, says it receives more requests for content removal from Turkey than from other countries.

Many Turks have found ways to circumvent the ban on Wikipedia and other blocked websites, including the use of Virtual Private Network and

mirror websites.

Currently, Wikipedia is also blocked in China.

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Citation: Turkish high court to review Wikipedia appeal against ban (2019, September 11)
retrieved 2 May 2024 from

<https://techxplore.com/news/2019-09-turkish-high-court-wikipedia-appeal.html>

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