

Turkey slaps advertising ban on Twitter, Pinterest

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Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaks to the media after Friday prayers, in Istanbul, Friday, Jan. 15, 2021. Turkey's president has criticized the United States for kicking his country out of the F-35 fighter jet program after Ankara purchased a Russian missile defense system. Speaking after Friday prayers in Istanbul, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey paid "very serious money" for the F-35 stealth jets and that America had committed "a very serious mistake" with its NATO ally. (Turkish Presidency via AP, Pool)

Turkey on Tuesday slapped advertising bans on Twitter, Periscope and Pinterest over their non-compliance with a controversial new law that requires social media platforms to appoint legal representatives in the country.

The law—which human rights and media freedom groups say amounts to censorship—forces social media companies to maintain representatives in Turkey to deal with complaints about content on their platforms.

Companies that refuse to designate an official representative are subjected to fines, followed by advertising bans and could face bandwidth reductions that would make their platforms too slow to use. The ban is on selling online space for ads, which is what many social media companies make their money from.

Facebook avoided the advertising ban after it announced Monday that it had begun the process of assigning a legal entity in Turkey, joining LinkedIn, YouTube, TikTok, Dailymotion and the Russian social media site VKontakte, which have agreed to set up legal entities in Turkey.

"We hope that Twitter and Pinterest which have still not announced their representatives will rapidly take the necessary steps," said Omer Fatih Sayan, the deputy minister in charge of communications and infrastructure, after the advertising bans for Twitter, its live video-streaming app, Periscope and on the image sharing network, Pinterest, were announced on Turkey's Official Gazette.

Sayan added: "It is our last wish to impose bandwidth reductions for social networks that insist on not complying with their obligations."

There was no immediate comment from Twitter and Pinterest over the advertising ban.

Under the law that came into effect in October, the local representative of social media companies would be tasked with responding to individual requests to take down content violating privacy and personal rights within 48 hours or to provide grounds for rejection. The company would be held liable for damages if the content is not removed or blocked within 24 hours.

The law also requires social media data to be stored in Turkey, raising concerns in a country where the government has a track record of clamping down on free speech.

Rights groups have said the decision by international tech companies to bow to Turkish pressure and appoint representatives would lead to censorship and violations of the right to privacy and access to information in a country where independent media is severely curtailed. The Freedom of Expression Association says more than 450,000 domains and 42,000 tweets have been blocked in Turkey since October.

Facebook said Monday it remained committed to maintaining free expression and other human rights in Turkey.

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