

## A Turkish Law Raises Questions About Government and the Internet

Welcome to the VOA Learning English program, As It Is! I'm Mario Ritter in Washington. Today we explore the issue of freedom of the Internet. First, we turn to Turkey and a new law that critics say gives the government too much control of the Internet. Later in the program, we hear how the Committee to Protect Journalists has added cyberspace to its list of places where media freedom is at risk.

The committee's new media freedom report and Turkey's Internet law are next on As It Is.

### Two Views of Turkey's New Internet Law

Opposition parties in Turkey have called on President Abdullah Gul to veto new government controls on the Internet. The Turkish parliament approved a bill to set up the new restrictions last week. The measure has raised concerns in many countries about freedoms and rights in Turkey. Christopher Cruise has more on the story.

Turkish President Abdullah Gul is under pressure to veto the bill. It gives the government the power to block websites without a court order. The legislation also gives the government the ability to examine user information for up to two years.

The leader of the main opposition party called on the president to take a "position on democracy and veto the law."

International pressure is growing. Emma Sinclair Webb is a researcher at Human Rights Watch. She says the group is calling on the president to take action.

"We are calling for the president to veto the new law. It has passed through parliament very quickly without consultation, without sufficient expert input."

Both the European Union and the Council of Europe have called for the measure to be withdrawn.

Saturday night, police used tear gas and rubber bullets to break up a large protest against the Internet legislation. Turkey's main business alliance also has called for the law's cancellation.

Last month, President Gul noted the importance of freedom of the Internet, especially social media. However, he is also a founding member of the ruling AK Party.

Kadri Gursel writes about diplomatic issues for a Turkish newspaper and a website. He says the president is attempting a political balancing act with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

"[Mr.] Gul has positioned already himself as the natural alternative to [Prime Minister Recep Tayyip] Erdogan from within the Islamist conservative political movement."

Speaking in Istanbul recently, Prime Minister Erdogan strongly defended the new Internet law and denounced its critics. He said the new rules do not establish any controls on the Internet, but make it safer and freer instead. He said those protesting against the law were part of, what he called, the "pornography lobby."

He also repeated a warning to the country's business leaders by saying they will face investigations by tax officials.

Cengiz Aktar of the Istanbul Policy Forum is a political scientist. He says President Gul is facing a major decision.

"This will be a real yardstick about his intentions—whether he will challenge now Prime Minister Erdogan or not."

Even if the president vetoes the bill, he would be required to sign it into law if the government passed it a second time without changes. But observers say such a veto would likely increase opposition to the legislation. I'm Christopher Cruise.

## **The Committee to Protect Journalists Now Follows Risks in Cyberspace**

The Committee to Protect Journalists has begun to measure press freedom on the Internet. The committee recently added the Internet as a category, or grouping, on its yearly risk list. The list identifies places where press freedoms are decreasing. Steve Ember has VOA's report.

The Committee to Protect Journalists says violence and repression continue to threaten the work of reporters around the world. But it says laws governing the Internet and information-gathering programs are also starting to affect the flow of information.

The list of countries with the biggest drop in media freedom includes Egypt, Bangladesh, Syria, Ecuador and Liberia. Zambia, Russia, Vietnam and Turkey were also named.

Geoffrey King works for the Committee to Protect Journalists. He says Turkish officials have taken strong actions against reporters. "Turkey is the leading jailer of journalists in the world. People have been shot with less-lethal rounds and tear-gassed around and sprayed with high-pressure water cannon in the streets in protest of this bill."

Geoffrey King says new amendments to Turkey's Internet law will make the situation worse. He says the legislation would make it much easier for the government to block websites, sometimes without a court order.

Turkish officials have answered the CPJ report. They told VOA the amendments were made to improve the law. They said Parliament wanted to balance freedom of expression, individual rights and protection of privacy.

The media rights group says five reporters have been killed in Egypt since the military seized power last year. It says 30 more reporters have been attacked, and 11 news organizations raided. And Egyptian officials recently detained 20 reporters, including four from Al Jazeera television.

Reporter Anna Therese Day says she left Egypt because it is not safe. She told VOA on Skype that Egypt is now very different from what it was during the revolution.

"I worked there freely. I worked by myself. I worked with short sleeves on; I didn't cover my hair most of the time. Now, that would be unheard of for someone that looks like me."

Wars are still the biggest threat to reporters' lives. But Geoffrey King of the CPJ warns that efforts by governments to watch what reporters are doing could become more damaging to their work.

“Not just targeted surveillance of individual suspects but mass surveillance across societies in many countries. That’s why it’s cyberspace and not one particular country being named. And so different countries do it with varying levels of rule of law and due process but it’s quickly becoming very easy for governments to spy on their critics.”

The Committee to Protect Journalists says reports about intelligence-gathering programs by the United States could hurt newsgathering efforts. It says such programs may frighten away possible news sources. The group says these individuals need to be protected against legal or other action. I’m Steve Ember.

I’m Mario Ritter. Thank you for listening. Tell us what you want to hear about on a future As It Is program. To leave a comment, go to our webpage, [learningenglish.voanews.com](http://learningenglish.voanews.com), and click the Contact Us button.