[TR] Türkiye blocks access to Instagram for nine consecutive days

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On 2 August 2024, access to the social media platform Instagram was blocked on the basis of a decision taken by the Turkish Information and Communication Technologies Authority (ICTA) that same day.

Although the ICTA did not provide a specific reason for the blocking decision, it was stated later by government officials that the decision to block the platform was taken on the grounds that the social media platform did not abide by Turkish laws, in particular those regarding “catalogue crimes” and, furthermore, that it did not comply with the values and sensitivities of Turkish society. Pursuant to Article 8, paragraph 1 of the Turkish Internet Law, “catalogue crimes” include, *inter alia*, incitement to suicide, the sexual abuse of children, facilitating the use of drugs or stimulants, supplying substances which endanger health, obscenity, prostitution, providing a venue and opportunity for gambling, crimes specified in Law No. 5816 concerning crimes against Atatürk, and illegal betting offences.

Among the reasons often cited by the Turkish media for blocking access to the platform are claims that in the aftermath of the assassination in Iran of Ismail Haniyeh, political bureau chief of the Palestinian militant group Hamas, Instagram applied censorship by blocking posts related to Haniyeh. Following these developments, Fahrettin Altun, the President of Türkiye's Communications Directorate, also made statements criticising Instagram.

As a result, Instagram, one of the most widely used social media platforms in Türkiye with an estimated user base of approximately 58 million, ranking fifth in the world after India, the United States, Brazil and Indonesia, suddenly became inaccessible nationwide for nine consecutive days.

According to an official statement by Abdulkadir Uraloğlu, Türkiye’s Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, on 10 August 2024, on his social media account on X (formerly Twitter), the ban was subsequently lifted since Instagram’s parent company, Meta Platforms Inc. (Meta), had cooperated and agreed to comply with Turkish laws. In particular, according to Mr Uraloğlu’s statement, Meta promised the removal of content and posts that fall under the category of “catalogue crimes” if they carry elements of certain crimes or “terrorism propaganda”, and also – with regard to Instagram’s internal policy on content moderation – “to

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protect the rights and accounts of Turkish users", "not closing accounts without prior warning" and "reactivating accounts that were closed by Instagram without warning". As a result, in the event of violations of the law, a quick and effective intervention would be in place. Neither Instagram nor its parent company Meta gave any statement or explanation regarding the matter.

The ban prompted protests from individual users and small e-commerce businesses conducting their commercial activities, both groups claiming the negative social and economic impact that resulted from the ban. According to Emre Emekçi, Vice Chair of the Turkish Board of the Electronic Commerce Operators Association (ETİD),10% of total e-commerce in Türkiye is conducted on social media corresponding to a value of TRY 930 million (EUR 24 million) per day. Together with influencers who generate traffic to the platforms, a volume of TRY 1.9 billion (EUR 50 million) per day could be affected. The ban of Instagram for nine days could have affected an estimated 500 000 small businesses suffering losses in excess of EUR 400 million.

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