Freedom of the Net 2017 Report Prepared by the Freedom House Summary of the Parts Concerning Turkey

In November 2017, the Freedom House[1] published a report titled *Freedom of the Net 2017*[2] which assesses the internet freedom around the world making country-based evaluations.

According to the Report, Turkey falls into the category of **"Not Free"** in 2017. Together with Egypt and Ukraine, **Turkey is in the top three countries who declined most** compared to the last year. Turkey and Russia are both ranked as 15th among 65 countries falling behind countries such as Myanmar, Sudan and Venezuela.[3] The Report refers to different applications in Turkey many times showing that **the State has been taking considerably restrictive measures**.

Especially in 2017 thousands of people were **arrested and/or taken into custody for downloading a mobile communication app** called ByLock reasoning that coup plotters allegedly used the same app as well. The Report highlights that the app was **easily accessible** as well as **publicly available** in different app stores.

According to the Freedom House, the Turkish government has not only been using the internet to accuse government critics of serious crimes, but also to **manipulate public discussions** and **control particular agendas**. As per the allegations, around 6,000 people were employed to achieve these aims. To illustrate, many dissident journalists and academics have been dealing with online harassment by pro-government troll accounts through social media websites. Disinformation methods used by the State vary including **paying government commentators (without explicit sponsorship), maintaining pro-government media and propaganda, hijacking politically dissent websites (such as social media accounts and news sites), and lastly creating fake news around elections intentionally to affect voters**.

Besides these direct methods, the Turkish government uses indirect restrictions as well to control the use of the internet. To exemplify, WhatsApp as the most common mobile communication app was throttled many times especially right after significant political events and **became almost inaccessible**. Moreover, Turkey has taken measures to **limit and control VPNs channels** which enable internet users to reach banned websites and content. For example,

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[1] Freedom House is a US based non-governmental organization "dedicated to the expansion of freedom and democracy around the world."; "About Us." *Freedom House*, freedomhouse.org/about-us.

[2] Freedom House, *Freedom of the Net 2017*, Nov 2017, available at: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FOTN_2017_Final.pdf

[3] It must be noted that these 65 countries represent 87% of the world's internet users.

Tor which is one of the most secure VPNs has been targeted by repressive governments. The Report emphasizes that Turkey has also applied new blocking orders to limit the use of Tor network making it harder for users to reach.

The Report specifies topics and content censored by the Turkish government; some of which can be listed as **criticisms of authorities, corruption, conflict, political opposition, satire as well as mobilization for public causes**. Out of 9 types of key internet controls categorized by the Freedom House, Turkey has been applying 7 of them including **blocking of online communication tools, network shutdowns, increasing censorship through new laws, arrest and imprisonment of opposing internet users.**

To sum up, the Freedom of the Net 2017 report illustrates how Turkey has been using the internet to serve the government's own interests and also to limit individual freedoms such as freedom of expression and right to privacy.