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Europe/Ex-USSR - Turkey

Censorship

Turkish media forbidden to mention 80 Turkish hostages in Iraq

19 June 2014

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The Turkish authorities have yet again reacted to a problem by imposing censorship. On 16 June, an Ankara court [banned](#) all Turkish media, including online media, from mentioning the abduction of 80 Turkish citizens in northern Iraq by the Jihadi militant group Islamic State in Syria and the Levant (ISIS).

The government's management of this crisis had been much criticized in recent days. Issued at the request of the Ankara prosecutor's office, the [court order's](#) official aim is to ensure "the safety of Turkish citizens kidnapped by the terrorist organization and taken to an unknown place." Failure to comply could lead to media being fined or suspended by the Radio and TV High Council (RTÜK).

"This blatant act of censorship violates the Turkish public's right to be informed about a subject of general interest," said Johann Bühr, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk.

"Even if the government is rightly concerned for the safety of the hostages, its policies in Syria are the [subject of public debate](#). Trying to suppress criticism instead of facing up to its responsibilities is unacceptable. We call on the courts to immediately lift this ban, which is out of all proportion."

When ISIS fighters [seized control of Mosul](#), in northern Iraq, on 11 June, they abducted 49 Turkish citizens from the Turkish consulate, including the consul, his wife and their children. A total of 31 Turkish truck drivers were taken hostage the next day.

The Turkish authorities, especially the defence ministry and the National Intelligence Organization (MIT), have been fiercely criticized by the opposition, which has accused them of [ignoring warnings](#) and failing to evacuate the Mosul consulate in time.

Two days before the Ankara court issued the ban, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan denounced the media critics and called on the media to "follow the [negotiations with ISIS] without agitating, without writing or saying too much, because agitation does not work in our favour, it works against us."

The Mosul abductions have also revived the debate about the government's policies in Syria and its alleged support for some of the anti-Assad factions – a sensitive issue that has given rise to similar censorship orders in recent months.

In February, a court [banned](#) any reporting about alleged arms convoys bound for Syria that may have been organized by Turkish intelligence. A court also [banned](#) coverage of two [lethal car bomb explosions in Reyhanli](#), a town on the Syrian border, in May 2013.

Turkey is ranked 154th out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

Also read: [First media victims of ISIS offensive \(16.06.2014\)](#)

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