

Why Starlink Has Not Been Approved to Operate in Turkey

Pending Spectrum Licensing and Regulatory Approval

Starlink **cannot operate in Turkey without an official license** from the country's Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK). SpaceX **applied for a license in 2023**, and Turkish officials held meetings with the company, but **approval has not yet been granted** ¹ ². Like any telecom provider, Starlink must obtain the *necessary spectrum allocations* and meet Turkey's regulatory criteria before offering service. In Turkey, radiofrequency use is tightly controlled – the Ku/Ka band frequencies Starlink relies on would need to be added to the national frequency plan and licensed by BTK ³. **Coordination with existing satellites** (such as Turkey's own Türksat satellites) is also crucial to prevent interference. Turkish authorities have indicated that **technical tests and safeguards are required to ensure Starlink's LEO signals won't disrupt other networks** ⁴. Until these licensing, spectrum, and technical conditions are satisfied, Starlink remains in a regulatory holding pattern (on Starlink's own availability map, Turkey is marked as "pending regulatory approval") ².

National Security and "Digital Sovereignty" Concerns

Turkey's government has signaled that **national security and control over communications** are major factors in its cautious approach to Starlink. Officials often refer to protecting "*digital sovereignty*" – the idea that Turkey must control its digital infrastructure and data just as it defends its physical borders ⁵. An independent satellite internet constellation like Starlink could allow users to bypass local internet gateways, making it harder for authorities to **monitor or restrict communications in Turkey**. In fact, analysts noted that some governments are wary of Starlink because it **cannot be easily controlled or shut down** like terrestrial networks, raising fears of misuse by illegal actors or loss of oversight ⁶. This concern was evident after the February 2023 earthquakes: Elon Musk offered to activate Starlink for emergency coverage, but Turkish officials **declined the offer**, citing that **Türkiye's own satellites (Türksat) could meet the need** ⁷ ⁸. Unofficially, experts speculated that authorities were nervous about deploying a foreign network they couldn't fully control, especially ahead of elections ⁹. The **official stance**, however, was that *existing national satellite capacity was sufficient*, so Starlink wasn't necessary in the disaster response ⁷. Overall, Turkey's regulators want to ensure that any internet service – including Starlink – **can be subject to Turkish laws, oversight, and security requirements** before it gets approval ⁵.

Requirement for Local Gateways and Data Localization

One specific regulatory hurdle is the expectation that Starlink **establish local infrastructure in Turkey**. Turkish policy makers and industry stakeholders have indicated that to operate legally, Starlink may need to **set up ground stations (gateway earth stations) on Turkish soil** and route Turkish users' internet traffic through them ¹⁰. Requiring a Turkish gateway is seen as crucial for both technical and legal reasons: it would ensure that data exchanged via Starlink **"lands" within Turkey**, where it can be monitored under

local law (for example, allowing compliance with lawful interception or content blocking orders). In late 2023, Turkish officials met with SpaceX and discussed these conditions; if an agreement is reached, **SpaceX building a Starlink gateway in Turkey is expected to be part of the plan** ¹¹. The Turkish Electronic Communications Authority will not permit Starlink to simply beam internet from satellites to Turkish users via foreign ground stations. In fact, a leading Turkish telecom association argued that *all low-Earth orbit (LEO) internet services should be required to downlink their Turkey data through domestic gateways for national security and public order* ¹⁰. This data-localization requirement means Starlink must invest in local infrastructure and perhaps partner with Turkish entities, which is a **condition not yet fully met** – contributing to the delay in approval.

Compliance with Turkish Data Protection and Telecom Laws

Finally, Starlink must show that it will **comply with Turkey's legal and data protection frameworks**. Operating an internet service in Turkey entails obligations under laws like the Electronic Communications Law (No. 5809) and various regulations that ensure government oversight. For example, providers are expected to enable lawful interception of communications and to obey any content restrictions or court orders under Turkish law. **Personal data handling is another critical area:** Turkey's data protection law, *Kişisel Verilerin Korunması Kanunu* (KVKK, Law No. 6698), imposes strict rules on transferring personal data abroad. In general, **personal data cannot be sent outside Turkey without explicit user consent or other legal safeguards** approved by Turkey's Data Protection Board ¹². A Starlink network that funnels user data through offshore servers or foreign gateways could run afoul of these rules if not properly addressed. Turkish officials have stressed that Starlink **must "obey the rules and regulations" of Turkey in order to operate** ¹³ – this presumably includes **data privacy requirements, cybersecurity standards, and possible data localization mandates**. In practice, Starlink has already taken steps like establishing a local Turkish entity (and reportedly appointing a country manager) to interface with regulators ¹. However, the service will likely also need to store certain user data in Turkey or demonstrate compliance with cross-border data transfer restrictions in KVKK. Until Starlink's operating model aligns with **Turkish laws on licensing, spectrum use, and data protection**, regulators are unwilling to give it the green light. In summary, Turkey is not outright "banning" Starlink; rather, **the service is on hold pending fulfillment of legal requirements** – from licensing and spectrum coordination to security assurances and local data handling – that **SpaceX has to meet under Turkish law** ².

Sources: Turkish government statements and news reports have outlined these issues. For instance, the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure noted that Starlink **must obtain all required permits and build the necessary technical setup before launching service in Turkey** ². Officials like the Presidential Digital Transformation Office head have emphasized *Turkey's digital sovereignty*, insisting that any outside internet provider adhere to Turkey's rules for data and security ⁵ ¹³. A Turkish telecom industry report similarly recommended that **Starlink be required to install local gateways and keep Turkish internet traffic within Turkey's borders for national security reasons** ¹⁰. In practice, this means compliance with spectrum licensing, **establishing local ground stations**, and obeying laws such as KVKK that govern personal data transfers ¹². Until Starlink satisfies these **legal and technical conditions**, Turkish authorities have withheld approval for its operation in the country.

¹ ² Starlink Türkiye'de yasak mı, neden yok? - Antalya Hakkında

<https://www.antalyahakkinda.com/haber/24718539/starlink-turkiyede-yasak-mi-neden-yok>

3 10 telkoder.org.tr

<https://telkoder.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/22-004.pdf>

4 5 Dijital Dönüşüm Ofisi Başkanı Koç: Dijital egemenlik kurallarımıza uyan her türlü firmaya kapımız sonuna kadar açık

<https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/dijital-donusum-ofisi-baskani-koc-dijital-egemenlik-kurallarimiza-uyan-her-turlu-firmaya-kapimiz-sonuna-kadar-acik/3003662>

6 Where Starlink Is Available - Voronoi

<https://www.voronoiapp.com/technology/Where-Starlink-Is-Available-4412>

7 8 Anadolu Ajansı

<https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/teyithatti/blog/elon-muskin-starlink-uydulari-afet-icin-turkiyede-faaliyette-iddiasi/1815420>

9 Musk'ın Starlink teklifi reddedildi: 'Hükümet, kontrol altına alamamaktan endişelenmiş olabilir'

<https://www.freewebsite.com/muskin-starlink-teklifi-reddedildi-hukumet-kontrol-altina-alamamaktan-endiselenmis-olabilir>

11 SpaceX 'Starlink' için izin talep etti - Son Haberler - Milliyet

<https://www.milliyet.com.tr/ekonomi/spacex-starlink-icin-izin-talep-etti-7008999>

12 Cross-Border Data Transfers under the Turkish Data Protection Law: Changes with the 8th Judicial Package | Rödl & Partner

<https://www.roedl.it/it/temi/data-protection-bites/3-2024/cross-border-data-transfers-under-turkish-data-protection-law-changes-8th-judicial-package>

13 Starlink must obey Türkiye rules to operate here: Official – Middle East Monitor

<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230929-starlink-must-obey-turkiye-rules-to-operate-here-official/>