

Internet and Political Transformation in Turkey

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Plan of the Presentation

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 - ❑ *The Justice for Children Initiative*
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Motivation of the research

- the implications of Internet diffusion on political space in Turkey
 - the place of internet as a new medium for social movements to emerge, organize and frame contention
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Internet and Political Space

- ❖ 21st century as an informational and technology based communication age (Alberts & Papp, 1997; Castells, 1996, 1997; Derrida, 1995).
 - ❖ An innovation to private and public realm with an increasing rise of citizen networks (Lipschutz, 1992; Thiele, 1993).
 - ❖ New discursive spaces with interactive communication with virtual communities for “netizens”.
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How do internet and communication technologies influence political space and social movements?

The optimist argument

- ✓ Decentralization and dissemination of information via internet
 - ✓ Reduction of the gap between privileged and disenfranchised groups with the low cost and use of telecommunication networks.
 - ✓ Esther Dyson, et al. (1994); Falk (1992, 1995); Mathews (1997); Archibudugi & Held & Kohler (1998), Dahl (1989); Grossman (1995); Negroponte (1995); Rheingold (1991)
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The optimist argument

- Broadening array of political participation with the ease of online citizen networks.
 - More participation in global decision making process from local levels (Falk, 1992, 1995; Mathews, 1997; Archibudugi & Held & Kohler, 1998).
 - A new era of democracy for some authors: “*electronic republic*” - Grossman (1995); “*the nation-state to evaporate*” - Negroponte (1995); “*the great equalizer*” - Rheingold (1991)
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The pessimist argument

- Internet as a counter-hegemonic instrument? Doubtful!
 - Digital divide between “haves” and “have-nots”
 - In the developing countries, only a small percentage of population benefits from communication and information technologies (Ebo 1998; Schultz 2001; Nulens et al. 2002; Huyer & Sikoska 2003; Warschauer 2003).
 - Poster (1995); Castells (1999); Ebo (1998); Schultz (2001); Nulens et al. (2002); Huyer & Sikoska (2003); Warschauer (2003)
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The sceptical argument

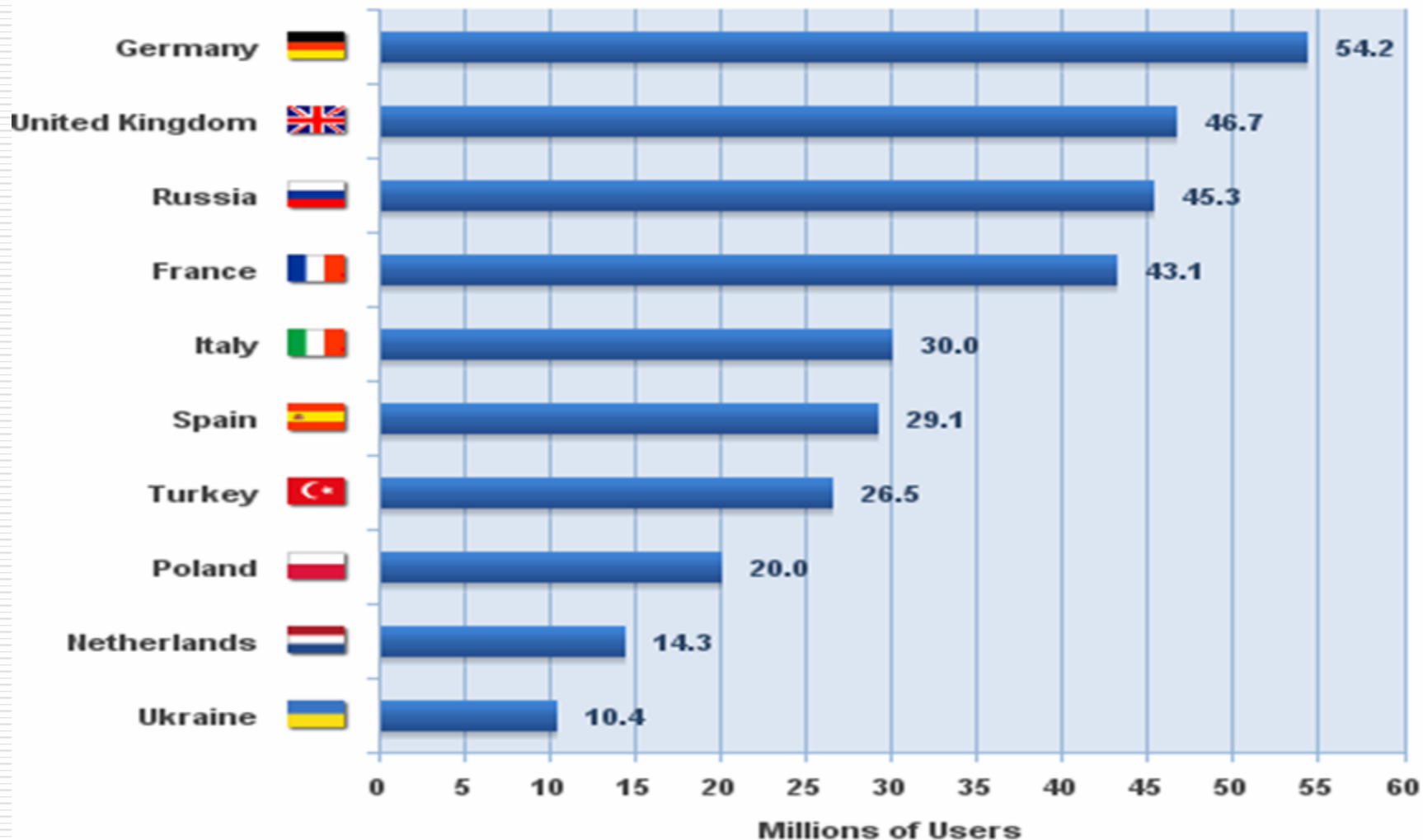
- The collective is essential to build up social movements (Tarrow, 1998).
 - The importance of face-to face contact to construct sense of sympathy and responsibility for reconciliation (Mansbridge, 1980)
 - “*Accelerated pluralism*” - the structure of political power is altered but not revolutionized or qualitatively transformed (Bimber, 1998: 136)
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Turkey as a Case Study

- ✓ Introduced in 1993, Internet has expanded with increasing speed especially since 2000.
 - ✓ Turkey has 26,5 million internet users, nearly %36.5 of total population. (Internet World Statistics)
 - ✓ Turkey is within the top 10 countries for internet use in Europe. (Even though not liberalized entirely with a strong state monopoly)
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Some illustrating examples for Internet diffusion in Turkey

Internet Top 10 Countries in Europe September 2009

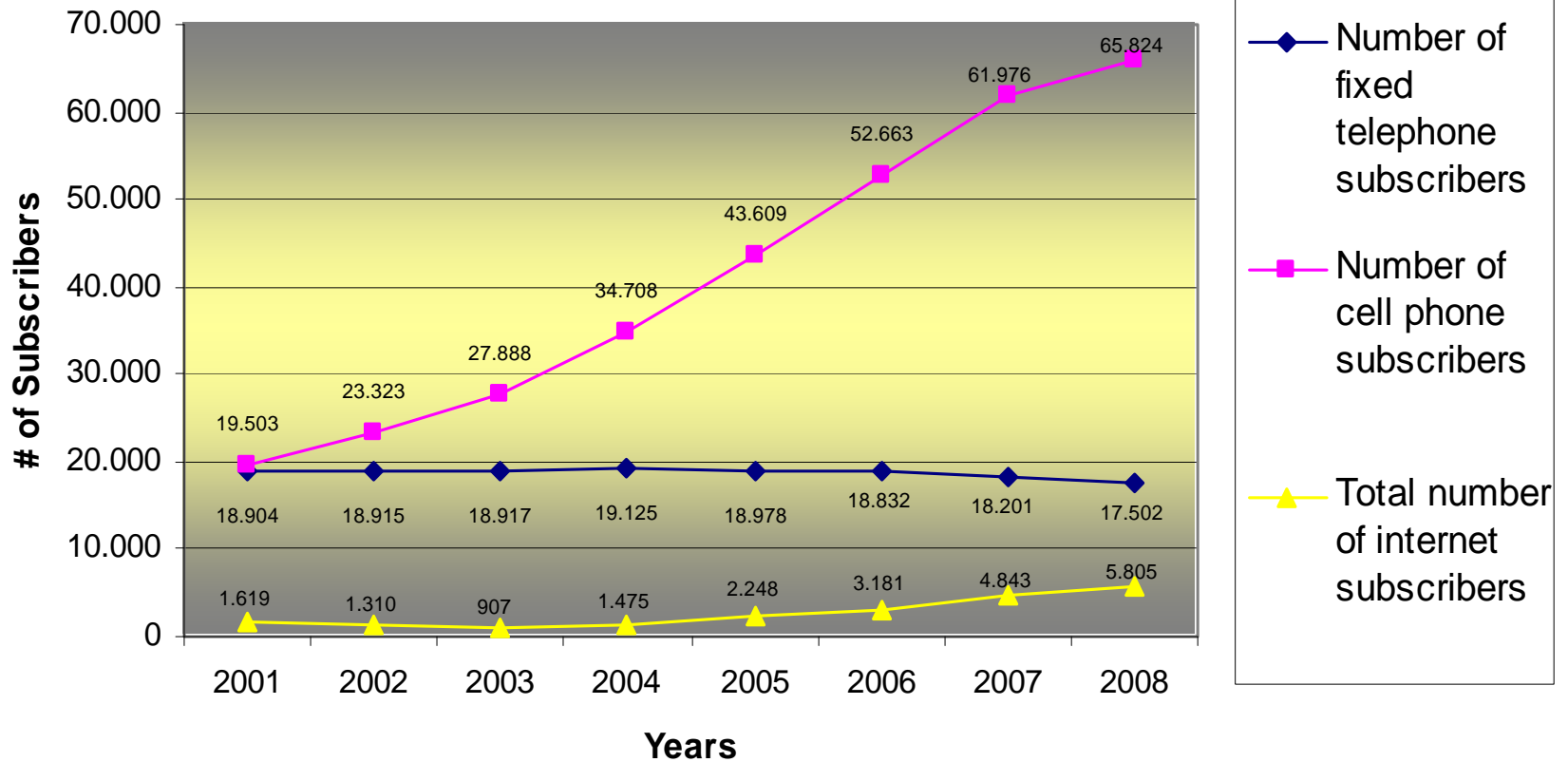


Source: Internet World Stats - www.internetworldstats.com

Basis: 418,029,796 estimated Internet Users in Europe for September 30, 2009

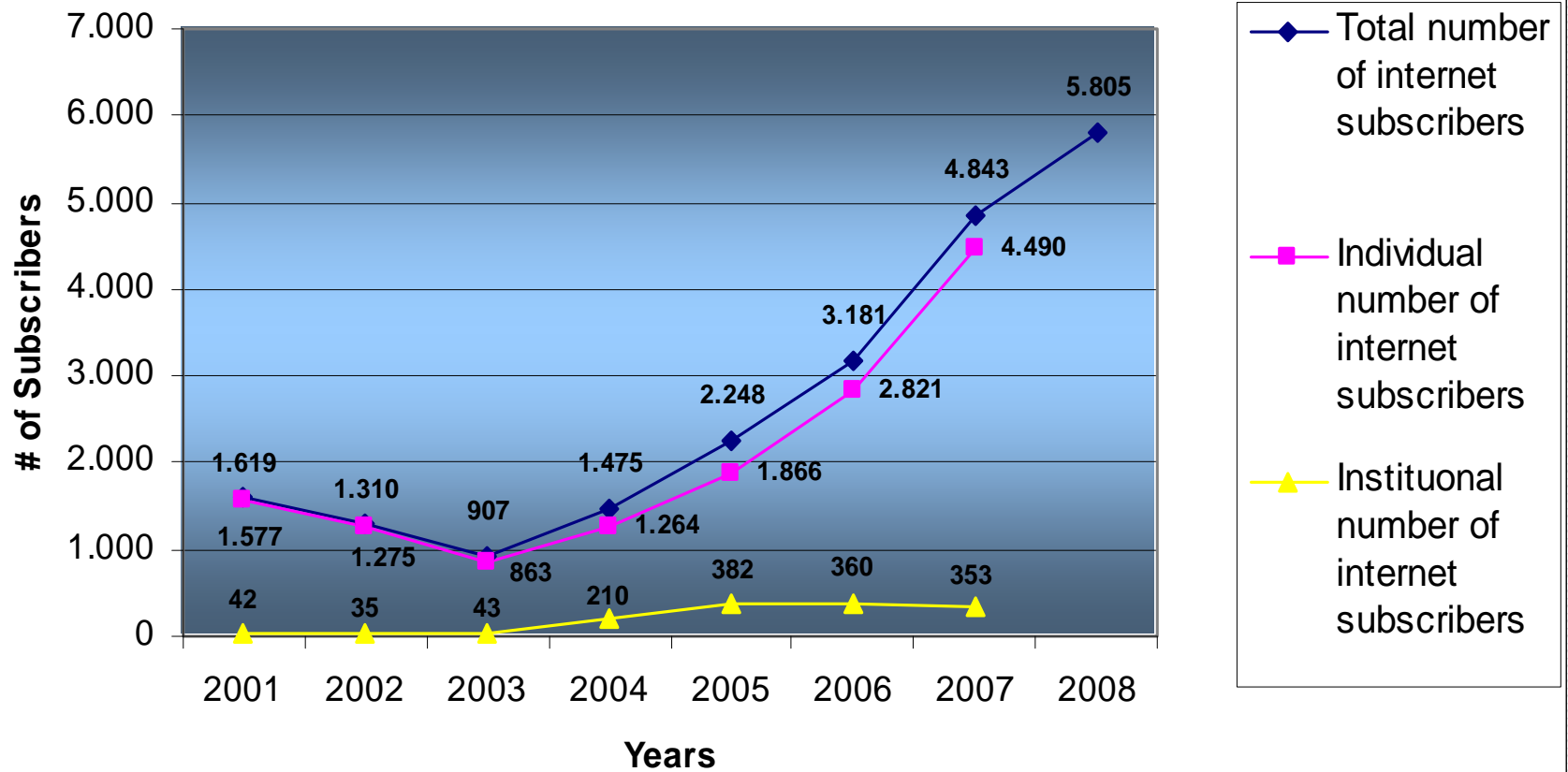
Copyright © 2009, Miniwatts Marketing Group

Communication Activities (000s)



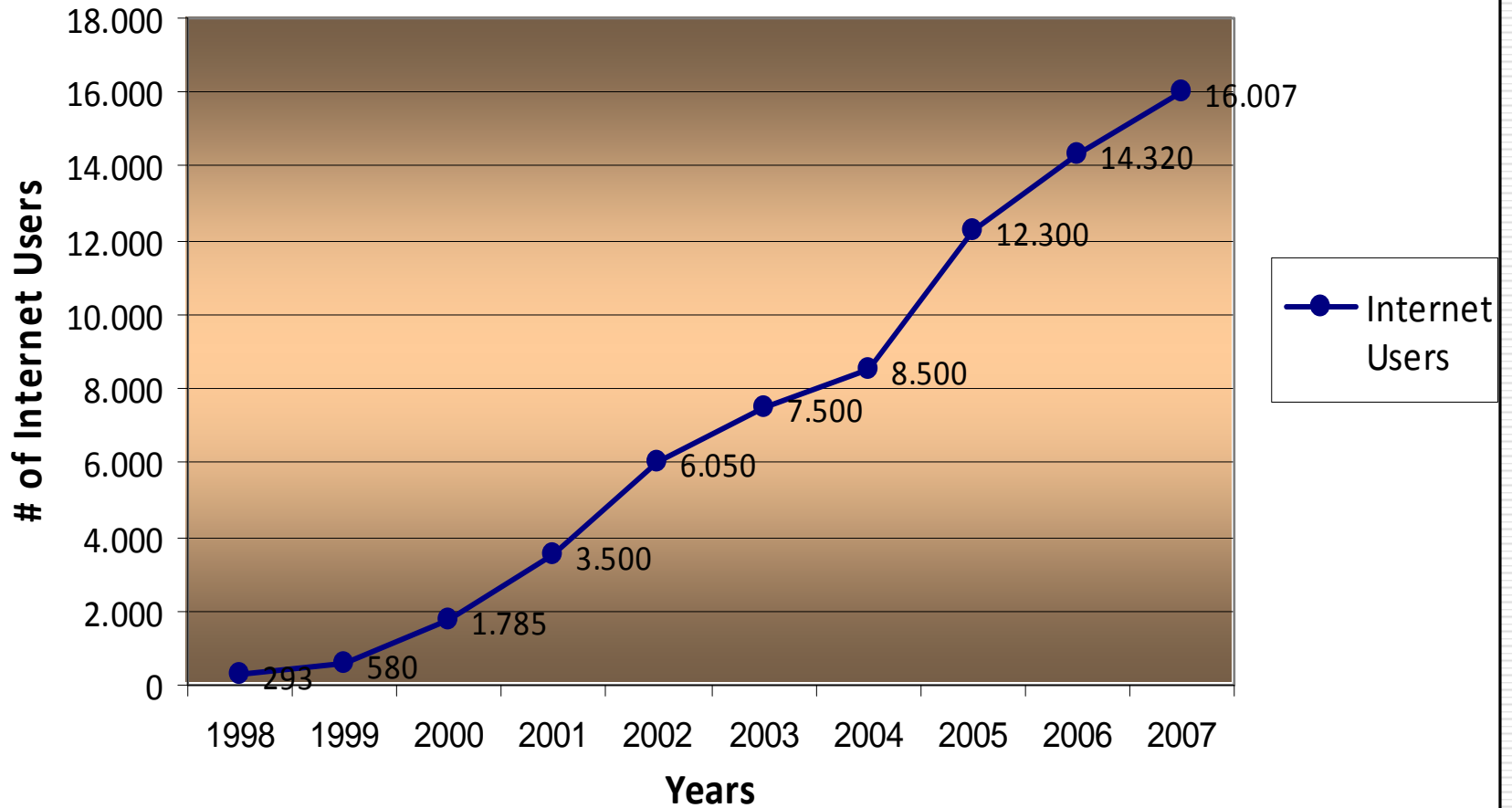
Source: Information and Communication Technologies Authority, Turkey

Number of Internet Subscribers in Turkey (000s)



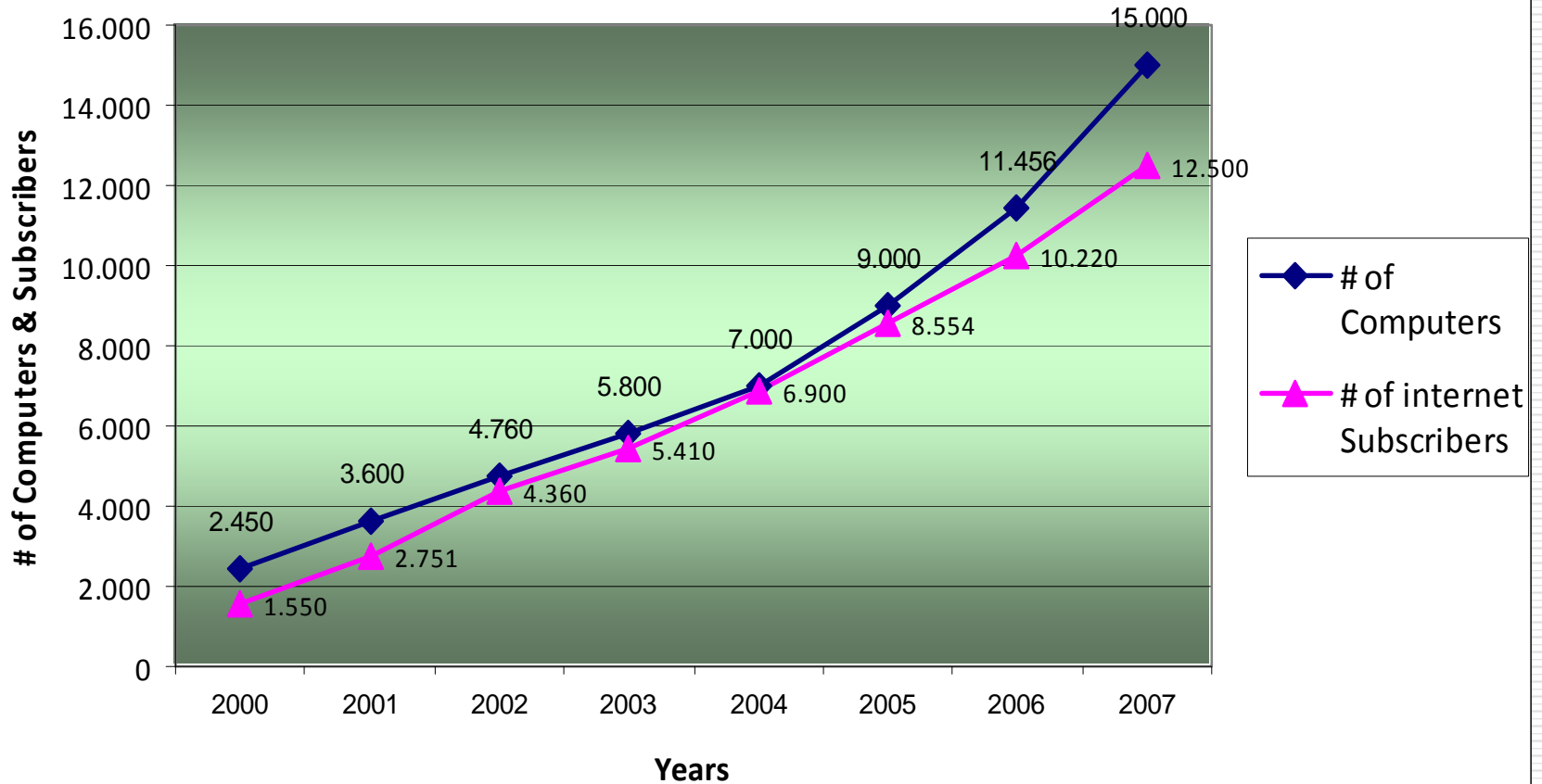
Source: Information and Communication Technologies Authority, Turkey

The Development of Internet Usage in Turkey (000s) (1998-2007)



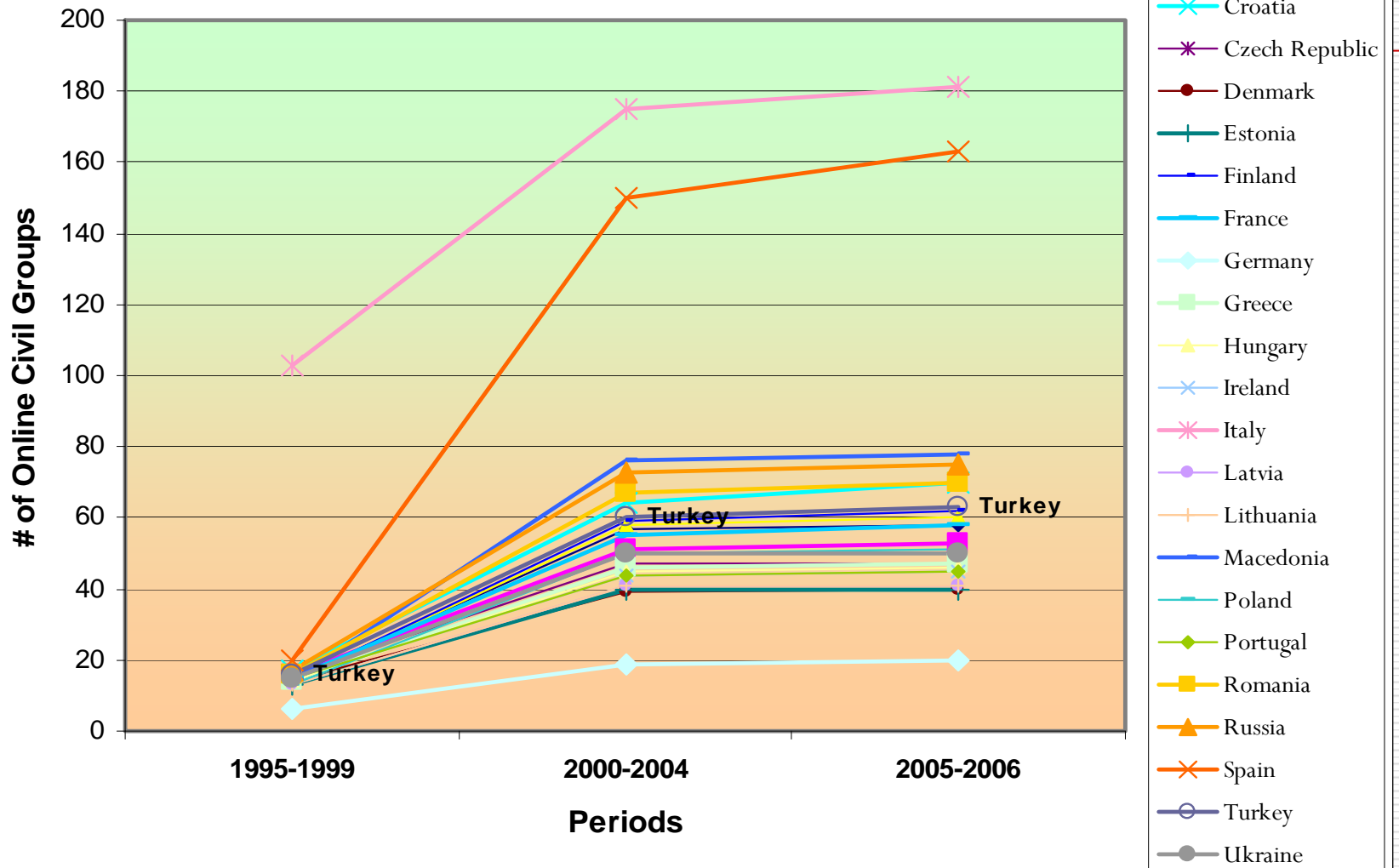
Source: Information and Communication Technologies Authority, Turkey

The Number of Computers & Internet Subscribers in Turkey (000s)



Source: Information and Communication Technologies Authority, Turkey

The Number of Online Civil Groups



Implications of internet on political space in Turkey

Three major events that occurred in last 2 years with important political implications

- **Justice for Children Initiative (JCI) for Kurdish children that are sentenced for stone throwing to security forces**
 - **The online public appeal for Armenian Genocide named as “We Apologize”**
 - **2007 intervention of Turkish military forces to presidential elections via online memorandum**
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Justice for Children Initiative



Justice for Children Initiative

- **Kurdish problem is one of the most important and fragile questions of Turkey.**
 - **Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) carries on an armed struggle against Turkish state in Eastern Turkey and the Northern Iraq.**
 - **Kurdish children have been participating to Kurdish demonstrations and protests especially since 2006.**
 - **According to Turkey's Anti-terror Law, more than 500 children between the ages of 12 – 18 are sentenced for the imprisonments ranging from 10 months to 161 years by Heavy Penal Courts the crime of being a member of the terrorist organization that is the PKK.**
-

Justice for Children Initiative

- **Justice for Children Initiative was founded in December 2007 by more than 40 human rights activists and civil organizations.**
 - **JCI collaborated widely with celebrities, journalist and organized demonstrations for their cause.**
 - **JCI launched an online petition campaign for the a fair trial according to the specific procedures of in Convention on the Rights of the Child and United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice.**
-

Justice for Children Initiative

- Under the pressure, the government submitted a bill to re-judge these children that was approved in July 2010.
 - The bill was insufficient and only released nearly 100 children in jails.
 - Children are still judged by Heavy Penal Courts. Now, they are accused not of being a member of PKK but of hazardous acts during demonstrations.
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We Apologize Campaign

- ❖ The campaign initiated by renowned intellectuals and academicians via a web site www.ozurdiliyoruz.com after the murder of Hrant Dink, an Turkish-Armenian journalist in Turkey.
 - ❖ The campaign aimed to collect online petitions from subscribers under this apology : “ *My conscience does not accept the insensitivity showed to and the denial of the Great Catastrophe that the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915. I reject this injustice and for my share, I empathize with the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers and sisters. I apologize to them.*”
-

We Apologize Campaign

- ❖ The campaign attracted a lot of counter reactions and indignations.
 - ❖ The office of the director of public prosecution initiated an investigation to this campaign for “*insulting Turkishness and Turkish nation*”.
 - ❖ The government declared this online campaign as detrimental for the normalization of relations with Armenia
-

We Apologize Campaign

- ❖ Against this website, another website www.ozurdilemiyoruz.biz (We do not apologize) was opened as an opposition platform with the help of opposition parties' deputies.
 - ❖ The announcement of their online petition campaign was: *“History has lived, written and adjudicated. There is no guilt we have to be ashamed and no culprit we have to apologize for. Those people who have the bravery to start this dirty campaign, can't cover themselves as intellectuals. They have to know that they can't speak in the name of the Turkish nation and that they are not able to adjudge them.”*
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E-coup D'etat

- ❖ During the process of election of the President of Republic in 2007, Turkish general staff announced this declaration on its website on 27 April 2007 at 23:00 :

“The problem that emerged in the presidential election process is focused on arguments over secularism. Turkish Armed Forces are concerned about the recent situation. It should not be forgotten that the Turkish Armed Forces are a party in those arguments, and absolute defender of secularism. Also, the Turkish Armed Forces is definitely opposed to those arguments and negative comments. It will display its attitude and action openly and clearly whenever it is necessary.”

E-coup D'etat

- ❖ This declaration was a reaction to the conservative candidate of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), the party of majority in the government with an Islamist conservative background. AKP could have majority to elect the President of the Republic on its own.
 - ❖ This declaration was published online, neither addressed to media nor declared before the Turkish Public contrary to the previous coup d'etats.
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E-coup D'etat

- The Republican People's Party (CHP) which is the main opposition party and republican civil society organizations supported the memorandum during their demonstrations against the Justice and Development Party (AKP).
 - It was named by several titles as cyber memorandum , internet memorandum, web memorandum.
 - However, the interference of Turkish general staff provoked a counter reaction within public opinion and increased the vote of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). It rose again to power obtaining %46 of total votes in July 2007.
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Discussion

- **Internet and Social Movements**
 - **Internet and Political Space**
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Discussion

- ✓ In Offe's standards, a social movement seeks to politicize the institutions of civil society. It reconstitutes a civil society that is no longer dependent upon ever more regulation, control and intervention of representative-bureaucratic political institutions.
 - ✓ Four criteria by Della Porta & Diani (1999) to define social movements:
 - a) informal interaction networks
 - b) shared beliefs and solidarity
 - c) collective action focusing on conflicts
 - d) use of protest
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Discussion

- ✓ The E-memorandum encouraged Republican civil society organizations for their cause against conservative candidate for presidential elections.
 - ✓ The JCI achieved public mobilization and turned into a social movement with street demonstrations and public support with the help of civil society and public support.
 - ✓ “We apologize” campaign could not turn into collective action and protest according to Della Porta & Diani (1999) criteria.
 - ✓ However, these three online acts contributed deeply to politicizing of society and created a more free public space as Habermas (1989) notes to debate fragile and taboo issues of Turkey.
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Conclusion

- ✓ Castells notes that "it is in the realm of symbolic politics, and in the development of issue-oriented mobilizations by groups and individuals outside the mainstream political system that new electronic communication may have the most dramatic effects." (Castells 1997, 352)
 - ✓ Internet is not only a symbolic struggle in cyberspace, it also conditions power instruments and transforms mainstream political system.
 - ✓ It is also a mean of reproducing the mainstream political system as the e Coup d'Etat illustrates.
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Conclusion

- ✓ This virtual public space turned into a political space of struggle for politicians, local actors, marginalized and disenfranchised groups.
 - ✓ In Turkish example, the virtual public space contributes to qualitative transformation of the real public space.
 - ✓ However, structural obstacles persist and this real public space is mostly constrained by representative-bureaucratic political institutions.
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A little fun!

A caricature of e-memorandum

The commander of Turkish Staff and the Prime Minister are talking on web messenger and the commander indicates his discomfort with the conservative-Islamic candidate of the Justice and Development Party.



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Thank you for your kind interest!

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