



# Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Türkiye – January to June 2025

30 June 2025

## 13 January 2025

### **Exploratory talks on potential peace talks with the PKK**

After two MPs from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM) visited the imprisoned PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) leader Abdullah Öcalan in his prison cell on 28.12.24, press reports stated that on 07.01.25 a DEM delegation held exploratory talks with other political parties regarding possible peace talks with the PKK, which is classified as a terrorist organisation by Türkiye, the US and the EU.

In October 2024, Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the right-wing Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), which is in government with the Justice and Development Party (AKP), had suggested that Öcalan should call for an end to the PKK's decades-long struggle and its dissolution in return for the option of his release. At the time, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan described the proposal as a "window of historic opportunity".

The two DEM deputies Sırrı Süreyya Önder and Pervin Buldan had discussed this development at the meeting with Öcalan, the first political visit to Öcalan in ten years, and according to press reports, Öcalan had conveyed the message that he was ready to take the necessary positive steps and make the necessary call. He reportedly also spoke of an era of peace, democracy and brotherhood for Türkiye and the region. The DEM stated that Öcalan was ready to support a Kurdish-Turkish peace process and that he had also indicated his willingness to end the PKK's armed struggle.

According to a media report issued on 07.01.25, following the meeting with Öcalan, DEM delegates held talks with other political parties to discuss a possible peace process. Sırrı Süreyya Önder, Pervin Buldan and Ahmet Türk met with the chairs and representatives of the Republican People's Party (CHP), the Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA) and the New Welfare Party (YRP) on 07.01.24. The CHP Chair emphasised the need for a parliamentary commission involving all parties to guide potential peace talks. Talks had previously been held with the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), including with MHP Chair Bahçeli. In the context of possible peace talks, on 11.01.25, Önder and Buldan also paid a visit in prison to the former co-chair of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), Selahattin Demirtaş, who has been detained since 2016. They visited former co-chair Figen Yüksekdağ, who has also been detained since 2016, in prison on 12.01.25. After the meetings, the DEM delegates stated that Demirtaş and Yüksekdağ said they would support a peace process and want to contribute to its success. President Erdoğan declared his support for a possible peace process at AKP party congresses in Diyarbakır and Şanlıurfa on 11.01.25.

In parallel to the exploratory talks, security forces have arrested a total of 147 people in 41 provinces with suspected

links to the PKK since the beginning of January 2025, according to a statement issued by Minister of the Interior Ali Yerlikaya on 11.01.25. In 2015, a peace process between the government at the time and the PKK failed.<sup>1</sup>

### **NGO: 394 femicides in 2024**

On 03.01.25, the women's rights organisation We Will Stop Femicide Platform published its annual report on femicide and women who died under suspicious circumstances in 2024. According to the report, at least 394 women were killed and 259 women died under suspicious circumstances. This is the highest number of annual femicides since We Will Stop Femicide Platform began recording femicides in 2010. Three hundred and fifteen women were reportedly killed by men and 248 women died under suspicious circumstances in 2023.

In 2024, a total of 280 women were killed by their husband, former husband, partner, father, brother, son or another male relative and 57 percent of murder victims were killed at home. According to the report, 19 girls were also murdered by their fathers, nine of them together with their mothers. The report stated that 111 women were killed because they wanted to make decisions about their own lives, for example, they had wanted a divorce or had refused to marry. Two women were reportedly killed out of hatred. According to the report, it has not been possible to clarify under what pretext 233 women were killed.

The deaths under suspicious circumstances, for instance, include cases of women who went missing and were eventually found dead. For example, a female student was found dead on the shore of Lake Van, having been missing for 18 days. According to the woman's father, the authorities assumed that the death was a suicide, but the report stated that the family denied this claim and called for an investigation.<sup>2</sup>

### **Conviction of 58 journalists in 2024**

According to media reports, a member of parliament from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM) presented a report on the state of media freedom for the year 2024 at the beginning of January 2025. According to this report, a total of 58 journalists were sentenced to around 135 years in prison in 2024, 112 journalists were detained and 26 were arrested. The report states that journalists were also fined a total of TRY 261,820 (around EUR 7,209 as at 13.01.25) and that 872 journalists were prosecuted. It adds that five journalists lost their lives, however the circumstances of their deaths are not specified. The report says that 240 cases of threats and attacks against, or obstruction of, journalists were also documented.

The report accuses President Erdoğan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) of intensifying its efforts to suppress independent journalism and dissenting opinions. Türkiye ranks 158th out of 180 countries in the 2024 Press Freedom Index published by the NGO Reporters Without Borders.<sup>3</sup>

## **20 January 2025**

### **Arrest of mayor and co-mayors**

According to press reports, Rıza Akpolat, a member of the Republican People's Party (CHP) and mayor of the Istanbul municipality of Beşiktaş, was arrested on 13.01.25. He was accused, among other things, of bribery, and according to the Public Prosecutor's Office, he is a member of a criminal organisation. It was only a few days later, on 16.01.24, that an arrest warrant was finally issued against Akpolat. The CHP criticised the proceedings and described them as politically motivated.

According to media reports, two co-mayors from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM) had already been arrested during raids carried out in the Akdeniz district of Mersin province on 10.01.25. In addition to the co-mayors of Akdeniz municipality, Hoşyar Sarıyıldız and Nuriye Aslan, the police also detained three city council members. The detained co-mayors were replaced by trustees from the Justice and Development Party (AKP).

The reasons given for the arrest by the Public Prosecutor's Office included spreading propaganda for a terrorist organisation, membership of a terrorist organisation and violation of the Law on the Prevention of the Financing of Terrorism. On 10.01.25, the DEM held a rally and demonstration in front of the city council building in response to the arrest.

Since the local elections held on 31.03.24, trustees have been appointed in nine municipalities. In addition, according to a media report issued on 23.12.24, which is based on a report published by the opposition CHP, the

AKP government removed a total of 154 mayors from office between 2016 and 2024 and replaced them with trustees appointed by the government. The mayors were generally ousted due to allegations of terrorism, such as suspected links to terrorist organisations like the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).<sup>4</sup>

### **Arrests of suspected supporters of the Gülen movement**

According to media reports, security forces arrested around 200 people across the country between 07.01.25 and 17.01.25 for alleged links to the Gülen movement.

On 14.01.25, one hundred and ten people were arrested in raids carried out in 23 provinces. These included 13 former police officers who had previously been dismissed for suspected links to Gülen, two non-commissioned military officers, two university employees as well as teachers, doctors, a retired police officer and military cadets. Those arrested were accused of being involved in Gülen-linked activities at universities, in the military and in other areas. Previously, on 08.01.25, Minister of the Interior Ali Yerlikaya had stated on the social network X that 63 people had been arrested in operations carried out in 38 provinces. They were accused of financially supporting the Gülen movement and spreading its propaganda.

According to a press report issued on 15.01.25, a further 17 people were arrested in Izmir for allegedly praising the leader of the Gülen movement, Fethullah Gülen, who died in October 2024 (cf. BN of 21.10.24), on social media.

According to a media report published on 17.01.25, a further 18 people were arrested for allegedly supporting the Gülen movement in Istanbul and Çankırı. Among other things, they are accused of using the ByLock app, which is considered by the government to be a tool of communication for supporters of the Gülen movement.<sup>5</sup>

## **27 January 2025**

### **Investigations against members of opposition parties**

According to media reports, Ümit Özdağ, the Chairman of the far-right Zafer Party (Victory Party), was arrested in Ankara on 20.01.25 for "publicly inciting hatred and hostility" and allegedly publicly insulting President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan due to his activities on social media.

According to press reports, the investigation by the Istanbul Public Prosecutor's Office was initiated due to statements Özdağ made during a meeting of the provincial chairmen of his party on 19.01.25. In his speech, the Chairman compared the damage that the Crusades had caused to Muslims and the Ottoman Empire with the damage allegedly caused by President Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP). He is also reported to have accused Erdoğan of infiltrating the state with spies, damaging the faith of the Turkish nation and alienating people from Islam. Erdoğan is also said to have divided the state among religious sects and communities and to have destroyed Turkish culture by allowing millions of refugees into the country. Özdağ said what is happening is "AKP fascism". After the investigation had been launched, Özdağ emphasised that he would repeat his speech.

He was taken to Istanbul by the police, and a court ordered his arrest on 21.01.25, but not for insulting the president. The authorities launched an investigation into his statements and initially charged him with insulting the president, but he was arrested on the separate charge of incitement to hatred. The court referred to posts on social media from the last five years. The Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office cited 11 tweets Özdağ had shared on the social media platform X as evidence in its indictment. The authorities argued that his comments, which were often directed against refugees and migrants, contributed to deepening social division and posed a threat to public order. Politicians from other parties criticised the actions of the judiciary. Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu of the Republican People's Party (CHP), for example, condemned the move as an example of political interference in the judiciary. İmamoğlu himself is under investigation for allegedly insulting Istanbul's chief public prosecutor and criticising the lack of independence of the judiciary on 20.01.25. The public prosecutor is overseeing several proceedings against CHP members. İmamoğlu is accused by the Public Prosecutor's Office of targeting officials allegedly engaged in the fight against terrorism and threatening the prosecutor. The investigation was launched after İmamoğlu criticised the arrest of the chairman of the CHP youth organisation on 20.01.25. The youth chairman had been arrested after he allegedly called the Istanbul public prosecutor a "mobile guillotine" on the CHP youth

organisation's account on the social media platform X. The youth chairman has been released from custody under judicial supervision.<sup>6</sup>

### **Arrest of journalists**

According to media reports, on 20.01.25, an Istanbul court ordered the arrest of six Kurdish journalists who had been detained on 17.01.25 during house searches in Istanbul, Van and Mersin. As part of the investigation conducted by the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office, the journalists are accused of membership of a terrorist organisation, in this case the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), due to their activities.

In addition, a Kurdish journalist was also arrested on 21.01.25 on charges of membership of a terrorist organisation. The authorities have accused her of having links to the PKK. The accusations are related to her reporting on the isolation of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, who has been detained on the prison island of İmralı since 1999 and has hardly any access to his family or his legal representatives. The authorities have cited this reporting as evidence of the journalist's alleged criminal activities.<sup>7</sup>

## **03 February 2025**

### **Reopening of court proceedings**

In a decision dated 22.01.25, the Turkish Constitutional Court ordered the retrial of former teacher Hasan Sarıcı, who was dismissed from his post by government decree following the attempted coup in 2016 and sentenced to six years in prison for membership of the Gülen movement. Sarıcı's conviction before the First High Criminal Court in Kırklareli was based on his membership of a Gülen-affiliated trade union, financial transactions at the now-closed Bank Asya and a subscription to the now-defunct Zaman newspaper. The court cited violations of constitutional rights and insufficient evidence as reasons for the retrial order. The decision emphasised that Sarıcı's alleged activities did not constitute a crime at the time of his conviction. Accordingly, the court could not establish a direct link between Sarıcı's actions – such as his use of a legally operating bank and his membership in a trade union – and alleged active participation in criminal activities. Furthermore, the court noted procedural gaps, in particular the lower court's failure to adequately address Sarıcı's statement that his financial and professional decisions were unrelated to the movement. The Constitutional Court emphasised that criminal liability requires clear evidence of intent and active participation in organisational activities. As part of the ruling, the court awarded Sarıcı compensation of TRY 30,000 (approx. EUR 810, as of 03.02.25) for the legal costs incurred.<sup>8</sup>

## **17 February 2025**

### **Arrest of opposition members**

According to media reports, a court in Istanbul ordered the arrest of 10 municipal employees from various municipalities in Istanbul on 13.02.25 after they had been detained on 11.02.25 on terrorism charges. Among those arrested are the deputy mayors of the districts of Kartal and Ataşehir as well as eight members of the city council, all of whom belong to the Republican People's Party (CHP). Specifically, they are accused of recruiting members or sympathisers of the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The CHP and the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM) worked together in the local elections held on 31.03.24 in the western Turkish provinces. The DEM supported mayoral candidates whose nominations were decided in consensus with other parties. In some areas, certain CHP candidates were elected with the support of the DEM. According to the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office, which is leading the investigation, the aim of this cooperation was to give Kurds a voice in city council decisions, to encourage their participation in local government and to create a political balance in western provinces and districts.

The arrests carried out on 13.02.25 follow a wave of investigations and arrests against CHP-governed municipalities in Istanbul, as a result of which two party mayors from the municipalities of Esenyurt and Beşiktaş were removed from office and arrested (cf. BN of 20.01.25).

According to press reports, Abdullah Zeydan, the DEM mayor of the city of Van, was also sentenced to three years and nine months in prison on 11.02.25 for supporting a terrorist organisation and spreading propaganda for a

terrorist organisation via the media. On 15.02.25, the Governor of Van was appointed as the trustee mayor of Van City by the Ministry of Interior and Zeydan was removed from office. The ministry justified the appointment of the trustee with the court judgement that had been handed down against Zeydan. Following the dismissal, protests took place in Van, during which the police arrested 127 people, including the mayor of Diyarbakır, who was however released.

In addition, on 13.02.25, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning the dismissal and arrest of opposition mayors in Türkiye and calling for sanctions against the trustees and civil servants responsible for the appointment of the trustees. The resolution also called for the release, acquittal and reinstatement of all elected mayors in the absence of credible, court-confirmed evidence of wrongdoing and called for judicial reforms to abolish the trustee system.

Since the local elections held on 31.03.24, in which opposition candidates won in several cities, including Istanbul, the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) has dismissed 10 opposition mayors and replaced them with government-appointed trustees.<sup>9</sup>

## **24 February 2025**

### **Nationwide arrests of opposition members**

According to press reports published on 18.02.25 and 19.02.25, two hundred and eighty-two people in 51 provinces were arrested in large-scale raids conducted over a period of five days for suspected links to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). According to Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya, the detainees were specifically accused of spreading propaganda for the PKK, supporting it financially, recruiting members or taking part in violent street protests.

The arrests reportedly affected people from the left-wing political spectrum as well as journalists and politicians. It was reported that among those detained were activist and co-chair of the Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party (DSİP) Şenol Karakaş, human rights lawyer Nurcan Kaya, LGBTIQ activist Yıldız Tar and also members of other left-wing, socialist and pro-Kurdish organisations and parties, such as the Socialist Refoundation Party (SYKP).

According to media reports, a total of 52 people were arrested on 18.02.25 alone as part of an investigation targeting the Peoples' Democratic Congress (HDK), an umbrella organisation of left-wing and pro-Kurdish groups and parties. Those detained include Semiha Şahin and Mehmet Saltoğlu, members of the Central Executive Committee of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM), Sema Barbaros, the Labour Party (EMEP) Istanbul Province Chair, and the politically active singer Pinar Aydınlar.

The public prosecutor's office accuses the HDK of being a legal front organisation acting as an alternative, extra-parliamentary assembly to the Turkish National Assembly. It further accuses the HDK of following the instructions of the PKK and the Union of Kurdistan Communities (KCK), which is also banned. The authorities referred to a 2019 ruling by the Supreme Court of Appeal, which described the Democratic Society Congress (DTK), a pro-Kurdish organisation with close ties to the HDK, as a terrorist organisation. The authorities further stated that HDK members had also played a role in protests, such as the protests held in Kobane in 2014 and the unrest in southeast Turkey in 2015 following the collapse of peace talks between Ankara and the PKK.

The DEM, the largest pro-Kurdish party, as well as EMEP and other parties condemned the arrests and criticised them as an arbitrary and democracy-threatening approach on the part of the government.<sup>10</sup>

### **Arrests of suspected supporters of the Gülen movement**

According to media reports published on 17.02.25 and 18.02.25, seventeen doctors were arrested during raids conducted in 10 provinces. Fourteen of them are said to have worked at public hospitals and three at private hospitals.

The arrests were part of an investigation conducted by the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office targeting doctors who were suspected of having links to a Gülen-affiliated dormitory that allegedly offered preparatory courses for the medical specialty examination (TUS). The detainees are also accused of depositing money in Bank Asya, a bank linked to the Gülen movement, and of using the ByLock communication application and payphones, through which they are alleged to have been in contact with other suspected members of the Gülen movement.

According to a press report published on 15.02.25, a total of 103 people in 39 provinces were arrested back at the beginning of February 2025 for suspected links to the Gülen movement. Those arrested are accused of having

participated in Gülen movement activities at universities and in the military and of having been involved in the restructuring of the organisation. In addition, the detainees are accused of staying in so-called "secret" houses where alleged supporters of the Gülen movement are said to have hidden in order to avoid arrest. They are also said to have been in contact with other alleged members of the movement via payphones and to have used ByLock, which, according to the authorities, has reportedly served as an encrypted communication tool for alleged supporters of the Gülen movement.<sup>11</sup>

### **03 March 2025**

#### **Abdullah Öcalan's call for the dissolution of the PKK**

According to press reports, on 27.02.25, Abdullah Öcalan, the founder and leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), who has been imprisoned since 1999, issued a declaration, which was read out, calling for the laying down of arms and the dissolution of the organisation, which is classified as a terrorist organisation and banned in, among other places, the EU and Türkiye. The declaration was read out in both Kurdish and Turkish in an Istanbul hotel by a delegation of MPs from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM), which on 27.02.25 had visited Öcalan in prison for the third time since 28.12.24.

Specifically, Öcalan declared that all armed groups must lay down their weapons, and the PKK must dissolve itself. He also took historical responsibility for his call and thanked President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Erdoğan's coalition partner in the so-called People's Alliance, the leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), Devlet Bahçeli, for their support in achieving peace. In the declaration, Öcalan called on the PKK to voluntarily convene a congress and formally decide to lay down arms and dissolve the PKK. In his message, Öcalan also addressed the reasons for the PKK's armed struggle, including the state's refusal to recognise a Kurdish identity, and added that there was no longer any reason for an armed conflict. He stated that there was no alternative to democracy in the pursuit and realisation of a political system. He said that democratic consensus was the fundamental way. Öcalan did not say what steps, if any, the government should take to respond to Kurdish demands for more comprehensive political and cultural rights. He also did not mention any preconditions for the PKK to lay down its arms. A member of the delegation, who spoke the opening and closing words at the press conference on 27.02.25, stated that Öcalan had handed the delegation a note at the end of their meeting in prison. It stated, without Öcalan going into detail, that the renunciation of weapons and the dissolution of the PKK would undoubtedly require the recognition of democratic politics and its legal framework.

According to media reports, the reactions to Öcalan's call were largely positive. For example, in the Kurdish-majority city of Diyarbakır in the southeast of the country. Around 3,000 people had gathered in a square there to listen to an audio broadcast of Öcalan's appeal, and some people broke into spontaneous applause or tears. Politicians, such as the leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP) welcomed the call too, but also emphasised the need for a transparent and democratic process and dialogue.

On 28.02.25, President Erdoğan commented on Öcalan's call and described it as a historic opportunity to come closer to the goal of a Türkiye without terrorism. Erdoğan also stated that Türkiye would monitor the situation closely to ensure that the talks to end the insurgency were brought to a successful conclusion. He also warned of delays in the peace process and that the military would continue the fight against the PKK if promises were not honoured. He said that no member of the Turkish nation, whether Turkish or Kurdish, would forgive anyone who blocked this process through ambivalent speeches or actions, as had happened in the past. Likewise, on 28.02.25, the spokesperson for President Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) issued a statement. In it, he said that all groups associated with the PKK, including the People's Defence Units (YPG) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), must be disbanded. He said that this included ending the presence of the PKK both in Türkiye and in its neighbouring regions, particularly in Iraq and Syria. He stated that there was no room for negotiations on the characteristics of the state and added that there would be no compromises in the peace process.

On 01.03.25, the PKK Executive Committee announced an immediate and unilateral ceasefire with Türkiye as its first response. This would pave the way for the realisation of Öcalan's call for peace and a democratic society. In

addition, they said they agreed with the content of the call and would follow and implement it. Furthermore, they stated that none of their "forces" would take armed action unless they were attacked.<sup>12</sup>

### **Arrest of CHP mayor**

According to media reports, the mayor of Beykoz Municipality, Alaattin Köşeler, a member of the main opposition party CHP (Republican People's Party), and 20 other people were arrested on 27.02.25 in raids carried out by the Istanbul Financial Crimes Division. The Public Prosecutor's Office has issued arrest warrants and search and seizure warrants for the 20 other suspects, including five municipal employees and 15 people who do business with the municipality, on charges of forming a criminal organisation, membership of a criminal organisation and aiding and abetting its activities. Köşeler's arrest has been criticised and condemned by CHP officials and has been described as an attempt to defy the will of the electorate.

The arrests on 27.02.25 follow a wave of investigations and arrests targeting CHP-governed municipalities in Istanbul, as a result of which two CHP mayors from the districts of Esenyurt and Beşiktaş were removed from office and arrested. Ten municipal employees, all of whom are members of the CHP, including two deputy mayors and eight members of various city councils, were also arrested on 13.02.25 on terrorism charges (cf. BN of 17.02.25).<sup>13</sup>

## **10 March 2025**

### **Arrest of suspected supporters of the Gülen movement**

According to press reports, security forces arrested 353 people in 31 provinces for alleged links to the Gülen movement back on 21.02.25 as part of an investigation into a large restaurant chain.

According to Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya, six business associates of Maydonoz Döner, including founder and owner Ömer Şeyhin, his employees and 10 civil servants were arrested as part of the investigation. The company, which was founded by Şeyhin in 2018, has around 400 branches in Türkiye and other countries. Yerlikaya announced that the detainees were accused of distributing funds to the Gülen movement via the restaurant chain. According to the minister, the company operates under a franchise system that allows people previously under investigation for their links to the Gülen movement to enter into unofficial business partnerships in return for payment. He said the company reportedly also only accepts new partners with references from the Gülen movement. In addition, the franchise branches are to be used to employ and financially support people close to the movement, with part of the income allegedly going to the Gülen movement.

Of the 353 people arrested, 83 had previously been dismissed from public service, and court proceedings had already been initiated against 197 in connection with the Gülen movement. In addition, 102 people were found to have allegedly used the ByLock smartphone app. According to Yerlikaya, some franchise branches were also used for secret meetings attended by people wanted by the government for their links to the Gülen movement.

Further investigations undertaken by the Financial Crimes Investigation Board (MASAK) revealed that the company was financed by individuals who allegedly disguised financial transfers as so-called product purchases in order to transfer money to alleged supporters of the Gülen movement. The company is also alleged to have had a transaction volume of around TRY 220 million (around EUR 5,570,400 as of 10.03.25) with individuals who are allegedly known to be supporters of the Gülen movement. Following the arrests, the government appointed a board member of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) as a trustee for Maydonoz Döner, who now manages the company.<sup>14</sup>

### **Detention of individuals and ban on demonstration to mark International Women's Day**

According to media reports, the Beyoğlu district governor's office in Istanbul declared on 07.03.25 that demonstrations or marches in the central district of Beyoğlu and its surroundings to mark the occasion of International Women's Day on 08.03.25 were banned for 24 hours. Thus, no meetings, protests, sit-ins, marches, leaflet distributions or demonstrations were reportedly allowed to be held in places or on streets in this area, including Taksim Square and Gezi Park. In addition, according to the office, the planned Women's Day march was banned out of concern for public order and national security, as well as to prevent criminal offences and protect the rights and freedoms of others.

Women's rights organisations, which had already organised the march, declared that they were determined to hold the rally despite the ban, as they do every year. Despite the ban, 3,000 people gathered in Istanbul on 08.03.25 and

marched through the city centre. The march ended without incident, but according to the organisers, the security forces rounded up 200 demonstrators and arrested 112 of them, all but one of whom were released after interrogation on 09.03.25. According to media reports, there was also a rally in the Kadıköy district of Istanbul at which nine participants were arrested. There were also demonstrations in other cities such as Ankara and Diyarbakir, which according to press reports largely went off peacefully. Since 2003, demonstrators have marched along İstiklal Street on the evening of 8 March to denounce violence against women and demand equal rights for women.<sup>15</sup>

## **17 March 2025**

### **Femicides**

According to media reports, five women were killed by their male partners, some of them former partners, between 10.03.25 and 12.03.25. In this context, the women's rights organisation We Will Stop Femicide Platform stated that 21 women across the country were killed by a male relative or acquaintance, including four by their husbands, in February 2025.

Women's rights organisations have repeatedly pointed out that by declaring 2025 the Year of the Family, the government wants to strengthen traditional domestic roles instead of tackling social challenges such as domestic violence.<sup>16</sup>

### **Cybersecurity law passed by parliament**

According to press reports, the Grand National Assembly passed a controversial cybersecurity law on 12.03.25. Opposition politicians and legal experts had warned that it could enable comprehensive surveillance, restrict freedom of expression and lead to possible abuse of power.

The 21-article law, which was adopted by 246 votes to 102, introduces new state surveillance mechanisms and expands the powers of the Cybersecurity Directorate, which was established in January 2025. Critics expressed concern in advance that the law grants the executive excessive powers that could potentially undermine privacy. The cybersecurity board that is to oversee the implementation of the law will be made up of government representatives, including the president, the vice president and the heads of key ministries and security agencies. Opposition members argue that this structure places cybersecurity policy under the direct control of the president and precludes independent oversight.

The law provides for prison sentences of up to five years for individuals who create or disseminate false information about cybersecurity-related data breaches in order to incite fear or target institutions or individuals.

In addition, cybersecurity service providers must comply with government-approved regulations and report security breaches to the authorities, with non-compliance resulting in heavy fines and potential criminal liability.

One of the most controversial provisions, Article 8, originally provided for the head of the cybersecurity board to be granted far-reaching powers to conduct searches, seize data and copy digital records. In response to objections, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) revised the bill and cancelled this clause completely. Another important change was made to Article 16, which originally criminalised the dissemination of false information about data leaks. After concerns were raised that this could be used to silence whistleblowers and journalists, the wording was adapted to specifically address data leaks related to cybersecurity. Despite these changes, there are still concerns about the potential impact of the law.

Critics point to the vague wording, which could criminalise legitimate reporting of cybersecurity incidents, while the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) is preparing to challenge the law in the Constitutional Court. The CHP deputy for Bursa, Orhan Sarıbal, criticised the law during a press conference in parliament, saying it targets press freedom and the right to privacy as well as other democratic rights. The Turkish Journalists' Association (TGC) also criticised the wide-ranging powers granted to the cybersecurity board and the vague wording of the law, arguing that its main purpose is to cover up the truth and silence journalists. Law professor Bahadır Erdem also

criticised the new regulation and warned that it could lead to the imprisonment of people who criticise the government.<sup>17</sup>

## **24 March 2025**

### **Arrest and dismissal of Istanbul's mayor**

On 19.03.25, Ekrem İmamoğlu of the Kemalist, social democratic Republican People's Party (CHP), mayor of the metropolitan municipality of Istanbul, was arrested along with over 100 other people from the worlds of politics, journalism and business.

He is accused of corruption and supporting the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). He was remanded in custody on 23.03.25 and suspended as mayor. The University of Istanbul had previously revoked his degree on 18.03.25, meaning that he was no longer allowed to stand as a presidential candidate. His lawyers announced that they would take legal action. In addition, a construction company in which he is involved was confiscated. Despite his arrest, the CHP elected İmamoğlu as their presidential candidate for 2028 by a large majority on 23.03.25.

The government banned demonstrations in Istanbul and other cities, closed roads and restricted social media. Nevertheless, mass protests have been taking place since 19.03.25. According to the authorities, over 700 people had been arrested by 23.03.25. The police used tear gas and water cannons, and numerous demonstrators and police officers were injured. The media reported violence against journalists. Security forces carried out raids in which 11 journalists, including an AFP correspondent, were arrested.

İmamoğlu rejected the accusations as politically motivated and declared that the people had "had enough" of Erdoğan. The president, in turn, condemned the protests and accused the CHP of dividing the country. One year after the local elections that were held on 31.03.24, six of the 27 CHP mayors in the greater Istanbul area have now been arrested.<sup>18</sup>

## **31 March 2025**

### **Ongoing protests after the arrest of Istanbul's mayor**

The nationwide protests following the arrest and dismissal of Ekrem İmamoğlu (cf. BN of 24.03.25) continue.

However, a court did not grant the request filed by the public prosecutor's office to arrest İmamoğlu for supporting terrorism, specifically for supporting the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). According to the public prosecutor's office, the PKK had attempted to expand its influence through cooperation between İmamoğlu's Kemalist, social democratic Republican People's Party (CHP) and the pro-Kurdish Equality and Democracy Party (DEM). However, İmamoğlu was arrested for founding and leading a criminal organisation, bribery, extortion, unlawful recording of personal data and manipulation of a tender.

According to press reports, on 29.03.25, a rally organised by the CHP took place in the Istanbul municipality of Maltepe, at which CHP party chairman Özgür Özel, among others, gave a speech. He called for regular demonstrations on Wednesdays and Saturdays. In addition, companies and TV stations close to the government were to be boycotted. According to the organiser, more than two million people took part in the rally. The information cannot be independently verified.

According to the Ministry of Interior, almost 1,900 people had been arrested as part of the protests by 29.03.25. According to media reports, 260 of those arrested were subsequently remanded in custody, while hundreds were conditionally released.

There were also renewed violent clashes between the police and demonstrators during the nationwide demonstrations. Some demonstrators accused the security forces of ill-treatment and sexual harassment. The allegations were confirmed in reports by the human rights organisation İHD and the Izmir Bar Association, among others. The bar association announced that it would press charges. Depending on which media reports you read, an indictment has been prepared against at least 74 people who took part in the protests in Istanbul on 23.03.25. In the indictment, those arrested are reportedly accused of taking part in the demonstration despite the Istanbul

City Council's ban and failing to disperse despite warnings. The public prosecutor's office demanded up to three years in prison.<sup>19</sup>

### **Crackdown on journalists during the demonstrations**

According to press reports, numerous journalists were among the demonstrators arrested in the wake of İmamoğlu's arrest.

In addition to the arrest of local journalists (cf. BN of 24.03.25), a Swedish journalist working for a Swedish daily newspaper was arrested on 27.03.25 and detained on 28.03.25. He was charged with being a member of an armed terrorist organisation and insulting President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Prior to this, a BBC journalist had been arrested on 26.03.25 and deported from Türkiye on 27.03.25 for allegedly endangering public order after reporting on the protests for the BBC.<sup>20</sup>

## **07 April 2025**

### **Criticism of detention conditions**

Various Turkish and foreign media reports have related to detention conditions of people contrary to human rights who have been arrested in connection with the apprehension of the mayor of the metropolitan municipality of Istanbul Ekrem İmamoğlu (cf. BN of 24.03. and 31.03.25).

The deputy secretary general of the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Mahir Polat from the Kemalist and social democratic Republican People's Party (CHP), was arrested on 23.03.25, as was İmamoğlu. According to Polat's lawyer, his client was in constant danger of suffering a heart attack or brain haemorrhage. Given the fact that his health condition had worsened in detention, and that he had been hospitalised several times, his lawyer called on 04.04.25 for Polat to be released immediately. The allegations were rejected by the Justice Minister on the same day.

In a further case, according to the statement of a lawyer of 03.04.25, a student detained in Silivri Prison who had taken part in demonstrations was being denied vital medicines. Furthermore, his client's fundamental needs could not be met in the prison. There had also been violent attacks on him during a prisoner transfer.

The Turkish Medical Association meanwhile stressed that it was a crime to deny prisoners their right to health.<sup>21</sup>

### **Action against media**

According to media reports issued on 20.03.25 and 27.03.25, the state media supervisory authority RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council (Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu)) is said to have imposed fines and broadcast bans on several stations because they had reported on the demonstrations after the arrest of Ekrem İmamoğlu (cf. BN of 24.03.25).

Furthermore, since İmamoğlu's detention, according to press reports some accounts of journalists and opposition members in the social media had been blocked by the Meta internet group on order from the Turkish government. It was said that a fine had nonetheless been imposed on Meta on 01.04.25, since not all user accounts that the Turkish government had demanded to be blocked had been included.<sup>22</sup>

## **14 April 2025**

### **Increasing pressure on media professionals**

According to press reports of 09.04.25, Istanbul's prosecutor general is calling for up to three years' imprisonment for media professionals reporting on the protests that took place in the wake of the apprehension of the mayor of the metropolitan municipality of Istanbul Ekrem İmamoğlu (cf. BN of 24.03., 31.03. and 07.04.25).

According to the prosecutor's office, there is no evidence that the defendants were simply carrying out their duties as journalists. They are accused of violating Article 32 of Law No. 2911 on Meetings and Demonstrations, participating in an unlawful demonstration, and refusing to disperse despite a warning. Investigations are also underway against two well-known investigative journalists. They had most recently reported of irregularities in the investigation proceedings against İmamoğlu and other mayors of the Kemalist and social democratic Republican People's Party (CHP).

Reporters sans Frontières and journalists' associations are speaking of a deliberate attack on freedom of the press.<sup>23</sup>

### **Charges against students**

According to media reports of 08.04.25, a total of 139 individuals, mostly students, are charged with violating Law No. 2911 on Meetings and Demonstrations. They are said to have resisted law enforcement, obstructed officers and insulted the president. There were calls for up to a three-year prison sentence. They are also faced with punishment in accordance with Article 53/1 of the Turkish Criminal Code, such as disqualification from public service or withdrawal of the right to stand for office and to vote. According to a lawyer defending several of the students, the charges themselves are unlawful, as they were based on the presumption of a lawful protest ban. The defendants had exercised their fundamental right to assemble and demonstrate in accordance with Article 34 of the Turkish Constitution. A CHP member of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, who is a lawyer himself, argued that Art. 42 of the Turkish Constitution and Art. 75 of the Turkish Prison Act, which protected the right to education, had been violated. The students were now unable to attend lectures or sit the interim examinations scheduled for them.<sup>24</sup>

## **28 April 2025**

### **Human rights violations report from Istanbul Bar Association**

The Centres for Human, Children's, Women's and Lawyers' Rights, which form part of the Istanbul Bar Association, published on 22.04.25 reports on rights violations committed after the apprehension of the mayor of the metropolitan municipality of Istanbul Ekrem İmamoğlu (cf. BN of 24.03.25).

The total of 66 pages documented incidents targeting demonstrators in the period from 19.03. to 29.03.25. It was claimed amongst other things that there had been excessive police force, arbitrary detentions, sexual assaults and denial of a legal hearing. There were allegations of serious irregularities in the police, judiciary and prisons. These are said not to be individual cases, but systematic, multi-layered breaches of the law in violation of international human rights standards and Turkish constitutional law.<sup>25</sup>

### **Regulation partially banning caesarean deliveries**

On 19.04.25, a new regulation was published in the Official Gazette banning planned caesarean deliveries at specific medical centres. At a meeting held on the same day, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan expressed his concern regarding the falling birth rate. He stated that the declining population was a greater threat to the country than a war. Both young people who did not marry, as well as the construction industry which was reacting to this by building smaller homes, were said to deserve criticism.

In a television interview of 24.04.25, health minister Kemal Memişoğlu confirmed the government's regulation. Spouses should have several children in order to be a proper family.

On 15.04.25, players ran onto the field during a Süper Lig football game with a banner of the health ministry propagating vaginal birth and condemning medically-unnecessary caesarean deliveries. Women's rights organisations consider the moves to be particularly an encroachment on women's rights of self-determination.<sup>26</sup>

## **05 May 2025**

### **Demonstrations and detentions on Labour Day**

According to media reports, more than 400 people were detained in Istanbul on 01.05.25 when they tried to march to Taksim Square on International Labour Day. In the days leading up to May Day, trade unions and NGOs had called for protests and marches to be held all over Istanbul. The government had previously banned gatherings in the area around Taksim Square and closed several metro stations and tram stops.

While the demonstrators had attempted to get to Taksim Square, violent clashes broke out with the police, as a result of which demonstrators were detained, accused of violating Law No. 2911 on Meetings and Demonstrations. According to press reports of 02.05.25, 372 of the 419 people who had been detained based on the documents submitted had been released after one day, while 36 of them remained in police custody. Among the detainees

were ten minors and eleven lawyers. Another eight persons were handed over to the anti-terror department. 286,584 persons in 78 provinces took part in May Day protests across the country.<sup>27</sup>

### **159th place in world press freedom index**

According to the international 2025 World Press Freedom Index published on 02.05.25 by NGO Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Türkiye ranks 159th out of 180 countries. RSF particularly cites the increasing pressure being exerted on media workers, for instance via censorship, police violence and arbitrary detentions, since the detention on 19.03.25 of the former mayor of the metropolitan municipality of Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu of the Republican People's Party (CHP) (cf. BN of 24.03., 31.03., 07.04., 14.04. and 28.04.25).

In general terms, the ongoing censorship, politically-motivated arrests, and state control of the media, are cited as key factors for the continuing decline in the freedom of the press in Türkiye. In 2024, Türkiye ranked 158th out of 180 countries. According to RSF, 90 percent of Turkey's national media is under direct or indirect government control. It can also be observed that authorities scaled up their activities against critical journalism following the 2023 presidential elections. Police violence and mass arrests were used against media professionals covering political rallies and street protests. Online censorship, politically-charged trials and criminal court judgments have become tools of the state, according to the report. Journalists may find themselves stripped of their press credentials, particularly those working for opposition or independent media outlets. Media professionals who criticise government officials, judges or religious figures often also face charges of "insult".<sup>28</sup>

## **12 May 2025**

### **EU accession process to remain frozen**

According to a press release, the European Parliament (EP) decided on 07.05.2025 not to resume Türkiye's EU accession process. EU membership is said to be about democracy, but Türkiye was pushing ever further towards an autocracy, according to a report adopted by the EP. Türkiye's strategic and geopolitical importance for the European Union could not make up for the fundamental democratic shortcomings, or indeed backsliding. The EU's accession criteria such as the rule of law, democracy, stable institutions, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, good neighbourly relations, compliance with international law and alignment with the EU's common foreign and security policy were not up for negotiation. The suppression of critical voices in Türkiye, referred to as relentless, was said to be highly concerning. The arrest of the mayor of the metropolitan municipality of Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu, has been referred to as a politically-motivated move, and the actions taken by the security authorities in the peaceful mass protests, as well as the prosecution of hundreds of protesters through hasty mass trials, has met with criticism (cf. BN of 24.03. - 05.05.2025).<sup>29</sup>

### **Dissolution of the PKK and end of armed conflict**

A statement by the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was released on 09.05.2025. The PKK was said to have taken historic decisions during its congress held between 05.05. and 07.05.25. Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated in a speech held on 10.05.25 that the country was advancing with a confident stride on the road to a "terror-free Türkiye". On 12.05.2025, the PKK announced its dissolution and the end of the armed struggle. The PKK would lay down its arms as part of a peace initiative with Türkiye.<sup>30</sup>

## **19 May 2025**

### **Peace process between the government and the PKK**

After the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) on 12.05.2025 had announced its dissolution and the end of the armed conflict (cf. BN of 12.05.25), according to media reports the Turkish government stated on 14.05.25 that it intended to take legal and technical steps to end the decades-long conflict. On 14.05.25, president Erdoğan furthermore pledged to meticulously monitor whether the PKK's promises were kept.

In the meantime, the government continues to take military action against the PKK. According to an announcement by the defence ministry of 15.05.25, the military is to continue its operations in areas where the PKK is active until it is certain that all threats have been eliminated. The Turkish intelligence service Millî İstihbarat Teşkilâtı (National

Intelligence Organisation – MİT) furthermore stated according to a newspaper article of 14.05.25 that it would supervise the process of the PKK's laying down of its arms and monitor the steps towards the practical implementation of the resolution in Türkiye, Syria and Iraq. According to MİT, this should be completed by the end of June 2025. To this end, it will register the arms surrendered and the identities of the fighters internationally, in coordination with the Syrian and Iraqi authorities.

On 13.05.25, the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party) furthermore urged the government to take confidence-building steps, such as freeing political prisoners or easing prison conditions for detained PKK founder Abdullah Öcalan. According to press reports, the government is working on a proposal that could ease prison sentences in general. A report is to be submitted to parliament by June 2025 which provides for the conditional release of all those in pre-trial detention for offences committed before 31.07.23. There are said to also be plans to release to house arrest those who are sick, or women with children, if they are serving sentences of less than five years. According to media reports, these moves could affect more than 60,000 people. Justice minister Yılmaz Tunç stated at the same time that these measures should not be interpreted as a general amnesty, which was not on the agenda.<sup>31</sup>

### **Protests and detentions at university in Istanbul**

According to press reports, on 13.05.25, a total of 97 persons were detained at a student-organised demonstration at İstanbul's Boğaziçi University. They were protesting against a campus event featuring Islamic preacher Nureddin Yıldız. Yıldız has previously attracted public condemnation for comments he made in an online video from 2015 in which he said that Islamic law does not impose a minimum age for marriage and that children as young as six could be legally wed.

His appearance on the university campus sparked protests from students who saw Yıldız' views as incompatible with human rights and child protection standards. According to information from the İstanbul governor's office, 13 police officers were reported to have been injured in the clashes with security forces. According to media reports, 82 of the 97 detainees were released after initial processing. 15 individuals, including a media professional from a Turkish news outlet, were referred to court on 14.05.25. Prosecutors had accused the suspects of resisting police efforts to disperse the protest, and requested their formal arrest. Six students were thereupon formally arrested, whilst another nine were released under judicial supervision and banned from leaving the country.

Several MPs belonging to the Republican People's Party (CHP) criticised the intervention of the security forces using teargas, and accused them of acting partially.<sup>32</sup>

## **26 May 2025**

### **Further detentions of people associated with the mayor of the metropolitan municipality of Istanbul Ekrem İmamoğlu**

According to media reports, there were fresh detentions on 20.05. and 23.05.25 of people associated with the detained mayor of the metropolitan municipality of Istanbul Ekrem İmamoğlu. A total of 71 former and current employees of İstanbul's municipal administration have been detained. The allegations brought by the İstanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office include abuse of office and taking bribes, as well as unlawful tendering procedures and contract awards, amongst other things.<sup>33</sup>

### **Erdoğan calls for constitutional amendments and rules out running again for office**

In an interview of 22.05.25, president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called on the Republican People's Party (CHP) to take part in the drafting of a new constitution. He claimed not to be following any personal political agenda in doing so, as he had no intention of running for the office of president again. Erdoğan referred to the current constitution, which came into force in 1982, as "written by coup leaders" as a result of the 1980 military coup. He said that his goal was to create a civil, democratic, libertarian fundamental order.<sup>34</sup>

### **Alleged members of the Gülen movement detained**

According to media reports of 23.05.2025, simultaneous raids were carried out in 36 provinces against alleged members of the Gülen movement. As part of the investigations carried out by the İstanbul chief public prosecutor's

office, 56 regular soldiers were placed in pre-trial detention. In a written statement, the chief public prosecutor's office declared that the "Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation (FETÖ)" constituted the greatest threat to national security. The number of its unidentified members within the armed forces remained high after the failed coup attempt of 15.07.16, and in fact exceeded those who were already known to have been involved. 1,915 operations had been carried out across the country since the coup attempt in which 28,194 suspects had been identified. 25,801 of these had been detained, 8,992 imprisoned, 13,968 released subject to conditions, and 2,841 released unconditionally. 2,393 people were on the run. 37 % of the detained suspects had confessed. 9,533 of those who had been released were said to have provided important information on other members and organisational structures in order to benefit from effective remorse provisions.<sup>35</sup>

## **2 June 2025**

### **Officials arrested in municipalities governed by CHP**

According to media reports of 31.05. and 02.06.25, warrants were issued for the arrest of a total of 30 city officials in Istanbul municipalities governed by the Republican People's Party (CHP), including three CHP district mayors and a former CHP deputy. The arrest warrants were based on four separate sets of corruption investigations centred on İstanbul. A total of 47 persons were arrested across the country, including two other CHP mayors from Adana province.

According to press reports, 36 suspects had previously been referred to court on 26.05.25 as part of the corruption investigation initiated by the İstanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office targeting the İstanbul metropolitan municipality, 25 of whom a court had ordered to be arrested. According to media reports of 27.05.25, the İstanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into İstanbul's acting CHP mayor, Nuri Aslan, for preventing the fulfilment of public duty after he allegedly threatened security personnel at the İstanbul courthouse. A television station which is close to the CHP reported on this that nine district mayors out of a total of 39 had now been arrested and were being held in custody. İmamoğlu, his party's presidential candidate for the next election, was detained on 19.03.25 and later arrested on corruption charges (cf. BN of 24.03. to 26.05.25).<sup>36</sup>

### **Further actions against alleged members of the Gülen movement**

According to press reports, subsequent to apprehensions which took place on 23.05.25 (cf. BN of 26.05.25), a court in İstanbul on 26.05.25 ordered the arrest of 61 detained members of the military. They were accused of maintaining contact with alleged members of the movement via payphones.

According to media reports, on 27.05.25 a total of 23 further alleged members of the Gülen movement were detained. The operation in Samsun province focused on the Maydonoz and Kral döner restaurant chains. Both are accused of acting as financial fronts for the Gülen movement.

Over and above this, according to press reports raids were carried out on the dessert chain Antiochia Künefe on 26.05.25. That operation involved 33 suspects being detained in five provinces on allegations of raising funds for the Gülen movement. A court ordered on 30.05.25 that 13 of those detained be arrested.<sup>37</sup>

### **Up to 87 protesters detained in İstanbul**

According to media reports, 18 persons were detained on 28.05.25 in İstanbul's Taksim Square who were holding a non-violent commemorative event marking the anniversary of the 2013 Gezi Park demonstrations. The demonstrators stood silently in the square without banners or chanting. The detainees were accused of violating law no. 2911 on meetings and demonstrations. According to press reports of 01.06.25, the number of detentions had risen to 87 after further rallies had taken place on 31.05.25.

The Gezi Park movement was a nationwide wave of demonstrations in May and June 2013 which took its name from the plan to demolish Gezi Park in Taksim Square, and in which millions took to the streets to denounce what

they viewed as then-prime minister and current president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's increasingly authoritarian leadership.<sup>38</sup>

## **16 June 2025**

### **Structural and media discrimination against minorities**

On 12.06.2025, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), an institution established by the Council of Europe, published its sixth report on Türkiye. The report documents a major increase in hate crime against persons of the Alevi faith, Kurds, LGBTIQ persons, Roma and non-Muslim minorities, as well as refugees. Hate speech against these groups of individuals is also said to be widespread in media reports, as well as in political rhetoric. The state's protection measures are referred to as inadequate and ineffective.

ECRI calls for the Turkish government to enact clear, lasting reforms in order to safeguard human rights and the protection of minorities.<sup>39</sup>

### **Media workers arrested**

According to press reports, several media workers were detained on 13.06.25 as part of an investigation being carried out by Artvin Chief Public Prosecutor's Office and taken to the provincial capital Artvin in the province of the same name in the northeast of the country.

The police carried out raids on homes in response to a court order. The investigation alleges membership of a banned organisation. Nothing is yet known as to the precise allegations, however, since a confidentiality order was issued for the case file. The two NGOs Reporters without Borders (RSF) and the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DISK) criticised the actions. The measures were said to have been arbitrary and journalism not to be a crime.<sup>40</sup>

## **23 June 2025**

### **Well-known journalist arrested for threat and physical attack on the president**

According to media reports, the well-known journalist Fatih Altaylı on 21.06.25 was detained and subsequently arrested on the basis of comments made in a video on social media. Altaylı had referred in the video to a survey according to which 70 % of the Turkish population was opposed to president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan remaining in office for life. He cited historical examples from Osman history in which the people had got rid of unpopular rulers. Istanbul chief public prosecutor's office deemed this as constituting a threat and a physical attack on the president. In its written statement, Istanbul bar association referred to the arrest as arbitrary and unlawful. The judiciary was said to be distorting the provisions of criminal law in the interest of those in political power, and using this as a means of exerting pressure to silence society, and media workers and lawyers as well as politicians in particular. The state Centre for Countering Disinformation (DMM), by contrast, defended the action, rejecting any criticism as manipulative. Altaylı's comments were said not to be covered by freedom of expression; the arrest had been lawful, and the judiciary was not politically motivated.<sup>41</sup>

### **Ekrem İmamoğlu's defence lawyer arrested**

According to media reports of 20.06.25, Mehmet Pehlivan, the lawyer representing the suspended İstanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu (cf. BN of 24.03. to 26.05.25), has been arrested. Pehlivan is accused of membership in a criminal organisation and influencing witness testimony. The Union of Turkish Bar Associations (TBB) and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) sharply condemned the action taken. The ICJ stressed that the accusations that had been levelled related to a lawyer's legitimate professional activities, and therefore did not give grounds for criminal prosecution. The state had unlawfully encroached on the independence of the legal profession, as well as on the rights to personal freedom and a fair trial. The Turkish state was thus said to be in violation of the UN's Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the

European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). This was said to be no isolated case, but a pattern in which defence lawyers in politically-contentious proceedings were also targeted by the Turkish authorities.<sup>42</sup>

### **Actions against LGBTIQ: detentions and website blocked**

On 22.06.25, several LGBTIQ supporters were taken into custody in İstanbul's Kadıköy district at an event linked to the 11th Trans Pride March.

Well-known journalist and party member İrfan Değirmenci on 28.06.25 held a speech about his coming-out as a homosexual and its consequences at an event organised by the socialist political party Türkiye İşçi Partisi (TİP, Workers' Party of Turkey). The İstanbul police interrupted Değirmenci, and detained him, along with 41 others. On the same day, the governor of İstanbul Davut Gül (AKP) stated that gatherings or marches by marginal groups which endangered public order would not be tolerated as they disturbed the peace of society and stood in contradiction to the image of the family and moral values.

On 29.06.25, the date of the 23rd İstanbul Pride March, the authorities consequently shut down access to some central locations such as Taksim Square and public transport. Large numbers of people nonetheless gathered in various places in the city, and there were several more detentions.

Access to the website of "Kaos GL", Türkiye's oldest LGBTIQ rights organisation, was blocked following a court decision of 26.06.25. This action was criticised as censorship.<sup>43</sup>

### **Fresh charges against Ekrem İmamoğlu**

According to media reports of 24.06.25, further charges have been levied against suspended İstanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu (cf. BN of 24.03. to 26.05.25). İmamoğlu criticised the public prosecutors on 23.03.25, who had accused him of supporting terrorism. This was considered to constitute insult of an official. He potentially faces up to four years' and one month's imprisonment and a ban on political activity.<sup>44</sup>

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