

Breaking News from Türkiye

Two Months Since Presidential Candidate İmamoğlu's Arrest

What happened since March 19?

- **Massive Protests Erupt Nationwide**
 - The arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu on March 19 sparked the largest wave of protests since the 2013 Gezi Park demonstrations. Despite bans on public gatherings, tens of thousands rallied across major cities, including Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir, demanding his release and denouncing the government's actions.
- **Economic Turmoil Intensifies**
 - Following İmamoğlu's arrest, the Turkish lira experienced a sharp depreciation, and the central bank was compelled to implement an unexpected interest rate hike in April. These developments disrupted efforts to control inflation and led to a significant drop in foreign exchange reserves, eroding investor confidence.
- **İmamoğlu Secures CHP Presidential Candidacy**
 - While in custody, İmamoğlu was nominated as the Republican People's Party (CHP) presidential candidate, receiving over 14.85 million votes in the party's primary election. His arrest galvanized opposition supporters and highlighted concerns over the fairness of the upcoming elections.
- **Social Media Restrictions Implemented**
 - In response to the unrest, Turkish authorities imposed restrictions on several social media platforms. Notably, access to İmamoğlu's account on X (formerly Twitter) was blocked within Turkey following a court order, raising concerns about freedom of expression and information access.



Photo: cnn.com



Photo: The Atlantic

- **Student Arrests and Crackdown on Dissent**
 - In the wake of İmamoğlu's arrest, Turkish authorities detained over 1,100 individuals, including numerous university students, journalists, and activists, during nationwide protests. The government's response involved aggressive measures such as the use of tear gas, water cannons, and mass arrests to suppress demonstrations.
 - One notable case is that of Esila Ayık, a Turkish student at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent, Belgium. She was arrested in Istanbul on April 9 for allegedly carrying a sign referring to President Erdoğan as a "dictator" during a protest. Ayık's detention, despite her chronic health conditions, sparked international concern and calls for her release. She was released on May 15 following a court hearing.
- **Opposition-Led Economic Boycotts**
 - In response to the arrest of İmamoğlu and perceived government overreach, the opposition party, CHP, initiated economic boycott campaigns targeting businesses and media outlets with close ties to President Erdoğan's administration. Notably, a "Zero Shopping Day" was organized, urging citizens to refrain from non-essential purchases to protest the government's actions. The government condemned these boycotts as attempts to sabotage the economy, with President Erdoğan warning of legal consequences for those involved.
- **International Artists Cancel Concerts Amid Boycotts**
 - In solidarity with the pro-democracy movement and in response to boycott calls, international artists such as Muse and Ane Brun canceled their scheduled concerts in Istanbul. The cancellations were prompted by concerns over the concert promoter's perceived ties to the government.

As we mark two months since the events of March 19, the situation in Türkiye remains critical. While the release of students like Esila Ayık provides small victories for advocates of democracy and free speech, systemic pressures on opposition figures, media freedom, and academic independence persist. Ekrem İmamoğlu remains in custody, symbolizing a broader struggle for democracy and justice. This ongoing crisis underscores the importance of sustained international awareness and solidarity, as the global community continues to monitor and respond to developments closely.

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Another Kick to Soma: 11 Years & Still No Justice

It has been **11 years** since **301 miners** were murdered by corporate greed in **Soma**. What has changed? Not justice.

Soma Holding ramped up production, slashed safety, and turned a deadly mine into a profit machine. No insulation. No emergency exits. Expired gas masks. Then came the fire—and with it, one of the deadliest workplace disasters in Türkiye's history.

Fast forward to now:

- **The mine CEO, Can Gürkan, is free** after serving just 4.5 years.
- Judges and prosecutors were swapped, sentences reduced, justice erased.
- Fuzuli Aydoğdu, a judge who issued controversial rulings in the Soma case, has been nominated for the Council of Judges and Prosecutors with support from the ruling party, raising concerns about the integrity of the justice system.
- **Lawyers Can Atalay (an elected deputy) and Selçuk Kozağaçlı, who stood by the families, have been in prison since 2022 and 2017, respectively, despite the decision of the Constitutional Court.**

This is not just a failure of law—it is an attack on memory, dignity, and resistance. Soma is not just a past tragedy. It is a present-day betrayal.

We have not forgotten. We will not forgive.



Esila Ayık (C) (Photo: X)



Emrah Gurel/AP/Press Association Images

Arrested for a Protest Sign: Esila Ayık & the Fragility of Power

In April 2025, during a youth concert in Istanbul's Kadıköy district, three university students—Esila Ayık, Arda Öğüşlü, and Mehmet Efe Erdoğan—were arrested for holding a sign that read "Dictator Erdoğan." Charged with "insulting the president," they faced potential prison sentences of up to four years and eight months.

Esila Ayık, a photography student studying in Belgium, lives with **chronic heart and kidney conditions**. She is on daily meds. In prison, she was **denied access to her medication**, risking her life for holding up a cardboard sign for a photo.

Esila explained in court that she picked up the sign briefly for a photo, unaware of the legal implications. Despite the prosecutor's request to continue their detention, the judge ordered their release pending trial.



Photo: Mahir Akkoyun

This incident underscores the ongoing challenges to freedom of expression in Türkiye, where even a fleeting moment captured in a photograph can lead to serious legal consequences.

After being released, Esila's statement to the press drew attention. In her own words, she emphasized that young people need to continue dreaming, young people need to remain free, and they should not be silenced. She also shared her feelings, expressing that her only wish was for her other student in detention to be released as soon as possible.

Police Detain Dozens as Boğaziçi Students Protest Cleric Known for Controversial Views on Women & Children

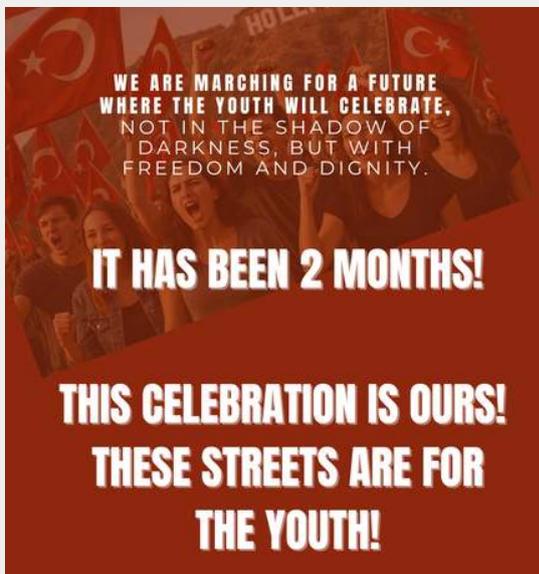
On May 13, Boğaziçi University witnessed a harsh police crackdown as nearly 100 students were detained for protesting the university's invitation of Nureddin Yıldız, a cleric known for advocating child marriage and domestic violence. Yıldız had been invited to speak as part of a theology symposium organized by the university's Theology Club.

Yıldız has drawn widespread condemnation for claiming that girls as young as six can be married, and for stating that beating women is permissible under Islam. The presence of such a figure on a university campus sparked immediate backlash from student groups, feminist organizations, and human rights advocates.

The protest began peacefully in front of the President's Office building, with students reading a press statement and chanting slogans such as "Boğaziçi will not host misogyny" and "No to sharia, no to fascism, no to darkness." However, shortly after the protest began, riot police intervened with overwhelming force. A total of 97 individuals were detained, including Can Öztürk, a journalist from Bianet who was there to report on the protest.

Among those expressing support for the students was the Workers' Party of Türkiye (TİP), which condemned the detentions and the continued silencing of critical voices on university campuses. TİP members emphasized that the students were exercising their constitutional right to protest against hate speech and fundamentalism, and called for the immediate release of all detainees.

Boğaziçi University, once a stronghold of academic autonomy, has become increasingly politicized since the government-appointed rectoral coup of 2021. This latest incident is another stark reminder of the shrinking space for free expression and democratic resistance in Türkiye higher education system.



bianet.org

Protests Across the U.S. This Week For Democracy and Justice in Türkiye

On Sunday, May 18, Turkish communities across the United States will take to the streets to commemorate Atatürk and to demand democracy and justice for jailed presidential candidates and youth activists in Türkiye. These coordinated protests are organized in solidarity with those facing political repression.

The common slogan for the protests organized in several cities on May 18th will be "Gençliğimiz Var" (Our Youth is Here), as part of the celebrations for May 19th, Atatürk Memorial, Youth and Sports Day. Additionally, during the commemoration of the two-month mark since the arrest of Ekrem İmamoğlu on March 19th, there will be calls for "democracy" and freedom for political prisoners.

Here are the confirmed protest locations and times:

- New York City, May 18, Sunday – 1:00 PM
- ✦ Union Square Park
- Boston, May 18, Sunday – 1:00 PM
- ✦ Government Center (T Station)
- Chicago, May 18, Sunday – 1:00 PM
- ✦ Pioneer Court, 401 N Michigan Ave
- Philadelphia, May 18, Sunday – 12:00 PM
- ✦ 911 Schuylkill Memorial Front
- Houston, May 18, Sunday – 1:00 PM
- ✦ Discovery Green Park, McKinney St @ LA Branch St
- Washington, DC, May 18, Sunday – 2:00 PM
- ✦ In front of the Atatürk Statue
- Atlanta, May 18, Sunday – 2:00 PM
- ✦ Dockside Visitor Center, Piedmont Park
- Los Angeles, May 18, Sunday – 1:00 PM
- ✦ 8400 Gregory Way
- Ft. Lauderdale, FL, May 18, Sunday – 5:15 PM
- ✦ Las Olas Blvd, Cheesecake Factory
- Charlotte, NC, May 18, Sunday – 4:00 PM
- ✦ The Bowl, Ballantyne

These actions are part of a growing global outcry against authoritarianism, in defense of political prisoners, and in support of Türkiye's democratic future.

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Controversy Over Ekrem İmamoğlu's University Diploma Intensifies

Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu's undergraduate degree from Istanbul University (IU) was annulled on March 18, 2025, alongside those of 27 other alumni, due to alleged irregularities dating back to their 1990 university transfers. Legal experts question the authority of IU's administrative board to revoke degrees, highlighting potential political motivations. The revocation, announced just one day before İmamoğlu's arrest on unrelated charges, could disqualify him from presidential candidacy, raising significant concerns about political interference.

In response to the university's actions, a **complaint has been submitted to the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), pointing out Istanbul University's political interference that undermines academic freedom and violates core accreditation standards.** The complaint highlights the diploma revocations, especially that of Mayor İmamoğlu, as politically motivated, casting doubt on the university's commitment to impartial scholarship.

"This is a clear overreach and politicization of academic credentials by an institution that should be committed to impartial scholarship," stated the anonymous authors of the complaint. They warn that allowing such actions to stand could damage AACSB's credibility by endorsing institutions that fail to uphold academic integrity and governance.

The complaint also calls attention to the case of **Prof. Dr. Naciye Aylin Ataay Saybaşı, a respected academic with a doctorate from the Sorbonne and department head at Galatasaray University, whose undergraduate degree from IU is now also invalidated.** This move threatens her career and could disrupt global academic partnerships, particularly with AACSB-accredited institutions.

The complaint alleges that the AACSB's accreditation principles emphasize **academic freedom, integrity, and independent governance, all of which have been compromised.** The forced resignation of a dean over the issue further underscores the severity of the situation.

"This is not just an internal issue within Türkiye," the complaint states. **"These actions reverberate across the global academic community."** The complainants urge AACSB to review the IU Faculty of Business's accreditation and, if political influence persists, to consider revoking the university's accredited status.

Our Opinion

The retroactive annulment of academic degrees decades after graduation and targeting political figures and leading academics sets a dangerous precedent. It raises serious concerns about academic independence, institutional credibility, and the erosion of democratic norms. Istanbul University now finds itself at the center of a growing international debate about the integrity of higher education and its vulnerability to political pressure.



Photo: Catalin Nitica

May 19: Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth & Sports Day

May 19 marks a turning point in Turkish history. It was on this day in 1919 that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk arrived in Samsun, launching the War of Independence against occupying forces. The date is officially celebrated as **"Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth and Sports Day"** (Atatürk'ü Anma, Gençlik ve Spor Bayramı).

Atatürk dedicated this day to the youth of the country, **viewing them as the future guardians of the republic.** Celebrations traditionally include student parades, sports events, concerts, and official ceremonies, especially in cities like Samsun and Ankara. It's also a time when many Turkish citizens reflect on democratic values and the founding principles of the Republic.

In recent years, May 19 has also become a day of protest and remembrance for those calling for freedom, justice, and a return to democratic norms in Türkiye—especially when basic rights and youth voices are under threat.



Photo: The Institute of Turkish Revolution History

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