

# Breaking News from Türkiye

## CHP's Özel to Erdoğan, "You are a local dictator"

Main opposition CHP leader Özgür Özel calls Erdoğan a "local dictator" at a 2 million İzmir rally, likening Silivri Prison to jails of Assad and Hitler.

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## Opposition Slams "Pickpocket Vote" in Judiciary

CHP leader Özel warns that AKP-MHP bent the rules to rig appointments to Türkiye's top judicial board, calling it a "constitutional theft" designed to tighten political control on DA and judge appointments.

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## İBB Hit With Two New Arrest Waves Targeting Opposition

22 officials in third and 49 in fourth wave of arrests from İstanbul's opposition-run municipality facing detention, in what critics call a politically driven purge aimed at weakening CHP and mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu ahead of 2028 elections.

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## Erdoğan Plans To Strip Opposition Mayors Of Power

Facing defeats at the ballot box, Erdoğan now eyes sweeping "reforms" that would hand municipal budgets and social programs to Ankara, sidestepping voters by shrinking local rule.

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## Parliament Crisis Over PM Can Atalay Ruling

Reading the Constitutional Court's decision to reinstate TİP MP Can Atalay triggered sanctions against opposition chairs, revealing escalating tension over judicial authority and parliamentary neutrality.

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AI-generated image

## Doctor Fired Over 'Insulting Erdoğan' Blaim

Dr. Ayşe Uğurlu, a human rights advocate and 35-year public servant, was dismissed for reading a women's rights statement deemed insulting to the president. She vows to return and "practice good medicine."

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## Top business leaders face jail under "disinformation" law

TÜSİAD's president and advisory chair are on trial for criticizing judicial decay, marking a first for Türkiye's top business figures have faced prison for political speech.

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## Amnesty leads EU call to confront Erdoğan crackdown

Fifty-eight groups urge Brussels to act on Türkiye's "extraordinary assault" on democracy after İmamoğlu's arrest, demanding sanctions, trial monitoring, and civil society support.

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## Backlash Over Minister's School Segregation Proposal

Education Minister Tekin's call to accommodate families opposed to co-ed classes draws sharp rebukes from the opposition, unions, and rights groups.

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## Turkish Opposition Leader Özel Calls Erdoğan a 'Local Dictator' at İzmir Rally

On 19 May, during a major rally in İzmir, Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Özgür Özel issued one of his most direct challenges yet to **President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan**, accusing him of authoritarianism and comparing **Silivri Prison** to notorious detention centers used to silence political opposition.

Addressing **hundreds of thousands gathered in Gündoğdu Square** at the "Protecting the National Will" rally, Özel declared:

*"You cannot be a global leader if you are not democratic at home. And I say this looking you in the eye: you are not a global leader, you are a local dictator."*

He described Silivri Prison, where many opposition politicians and activists are held, as a **"detention camp for dissidents,"** drawing stark comparisons to **Hitler's Stadelheim Prison** and **Assad's Sednaya facility**.

This rally marked the **sixth mass mobilisation organized by the CHP** since the **controversial arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu**, widely seen as Erdoğan's strongest opponent ahead of the 2028 presidential elections. Held on **19 May—Atatürk Commemoration and Youth Day**—the event carried significant symbolic weight, underscoring the opposition's message of **democratic renewal and national sovereignty**.

Özel's speech sharply criticized what he described as the **erosion of democratic institutions** under Erdoğan's rule.

*"There are two kinds of coups: military and civilian. The one in Türkiye today originates in Beştepe [the presidential complex], and its weapon is the judiciary,"* he said.

He also unveiled key elements of his **youth-focused political platform**, including pledges to:

- Abolish the Higher Education Council (YÖK)
- End the appointment of government trustees in place of elected officials
- Remove visa restrictions
- Improve internet access and increase student grants

*"We will establish a Türkiye free of bans and borders during our first years in office,"* Özel promised.



Photo: EuroNews

## OP-ED



### Commentary | "Local Dictator": A Charge with a Case File

When CHP leader Özgür Özel called Erdoğan a "local dictator," he echoed a growing consensus shaped by decrees, prosecutions, and overturned elections. This piece argues that the label now comes with evidence, written into court records, official gazettes, and mayoral dismissals.

### Opinion | When Power Consumes: The Anatomy of Dictatorship

From Hitler to present-day strongmen, dictators rise through legal means and public trust, only to dismantle democracy from within. This essay traces the chillingly familiar patterns—rewritten laws, crushed dissent, and silenced media—that transform elected leaders into unchecked rulers.

### Analysis | When Law Is a Weapon: Youth Protests for Justice and the Future

Istanbul's protests following Mayor İmamoğlu's arrest highlight how the law is increasingly used as a tool to suppress dissent and control politics. Led largely by young people, these demonstrations reflect deep demands for justice and urgent concerns about the future amid a shrinking space for fair legal processes.



## Turkish Opposition Warns of a "Made-to-Order" Vote in the Judiciary Watchdog

CHP leader Özgür Özel says parliament's latest ballot for the **Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSK)** bends the constitution **"past breaking point"** and has vowed to ask the Constitutional Court to halt the results.

Under the charter, lawmakers must try two rounds requiring successively lower super-majorities and, if still deadlocked, settle the seat **by drawing lots between the top two vote-getters**. Özel argues the **ruling alliance** between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) bloc sidestepped that rule by **staging an unscripted third vote with only its own nominees**, ensuring both finalists would be government-aligned. He likened the manoeuvre to a "pickpocket job against the constitution."

**CHP lawyers will file for an injunction** "as soon as the count is closed," Özel told reporters, adding that the episode caps a pattern of improvised procedures that erode judicial independence.

Although government MPs insist they merely followed parliamentary by-laws, critics note that the HSK appoints and disciplines almost every judge and prosecutor in Türkiye; thus, **tilting its seven parliament-elected seats can tilt the courts themselves**.

The dispute occurs as prosecutors launch yet another graft sweep at Istanbul's opposition-run city hall, **a coincidence Özel called "hard to miss" and symptomatic** of a justice system being pulled into politics one workaround at a time.



## Third Wave of Arrests Hits Istanbul Municipality in Escalating Political Crackdown

- On May 20th and 23rd, Turkish authorities issued detention warrants for **22 and 49 officials from the opposition-led Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İBB)** consecutively, marking the third and fourth waves of arrests in a sweeping and controversial corruption probe. Among those targeted are **Taner Çetin, head of İBB's Press and Public Relations Department**; his assistant **Arzu Can**; **Public Relations Director Serap Karay**; and Deputy Director **Mustafa Karaoğlu**. Prosecutors allege that Çetin rigged municipal tenders and accepted bribes, though critics argue the charges lack substantiation.
- This operation follows earlier waves widely criticized as **politically motivated attempts to weaken the main opposition party, CHP, along with its presidential candidate and Istanbul mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu**. The timing of the detentions, occurring before any formal indictment, has raised serious concerns about the erosion of judicial independence and democratic norms in Türkiye.
- These developments underscore the **increasing authoritarianism** in Türkiye and the **government's use of state power** to target political opponents.



## Fourth Wave of Arrest Raids Widens Crackdown On Istanbul Municipality

The **fourth wave** of operations targets Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality: **49 detention orders were issued**, including those for Mayor İmamoğlu's Secretary, Security Chief, and several municipal executives. Of these, **42 have been detained**.



Photo: Twitter/X (İBB)



Photo: Medyascope

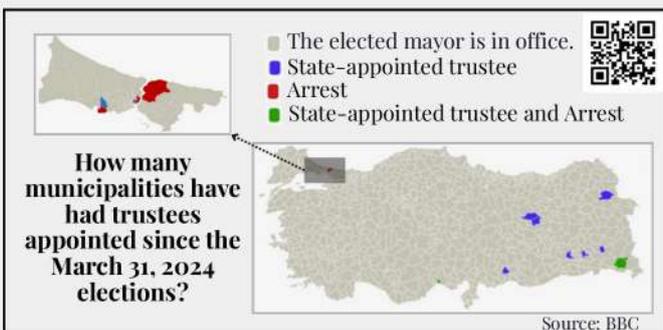
## Erdoğan Signals Major Overhaul to Centralize Local Governments Beyond Politics



President Erdoğan signaled a new regulatory framework for municipalities during the AKP parliamentary group meeting. Key highlights from his remarks are as follows:

- **Allegations of Corruption and Crime in Municipalities:** Erdoğan described the ongoing investigation into the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality as an "unprecedented organized crime network" threatening national security. He claimed this network extends beyond Istanbul to various municipalities, institutions, and individuals across the country and even internationally.
- **Call for Reform in Local Governance:** He emphasized the need to resolve the authority conflicts between metropolitan and district municipalities, especially regarding the delivery of services in remote areas. Erdoğan proposed establishing a new administrative structure to address these challenges.
- **Greater Role for Governors and District Governors:** Erdoğan suggested that the roles of governors and district governors should become more active and called for a review of the current provincial administrative structure.
- **Trustee Appointments:** He stated that the practice of appointing trustees (kayyum) to municipalities should once again become an exception rather than the norm.
- **Financial Issues in Municipalities:** Erdoğan pointed out that most municipalities are heavily indebted. He criticized the allocation of large budgets to concerts and advertising while social security contributions remain unpaid. He stressed the need for medium- and long-term financial planning.
- **System-Based Perspective:** Erdoğan claimed his criticism was not politically motivated but stemmed from a systemic need for reform. He urged all political parties to address the issue with a nonpartisan approach.

During his speech, Erdoğan also harshly criticized CHP and its leader, Özgür Özel, rhetorically asking, "How many more CHP members will be lost?"





## Constitutional Ruling Sparks Parliamentary Clash Over Jailed PM Can Atalay

Tensions within the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) have intensified following the Constitutional Court's ruling on 16 April 2025, which **declared the revocation of Workers' Party of Türkiye (TİP) Hatay Deputy Can Atalay's parliamentary status as null and void.** Deputy Speaker Gülizar Biçer Karaca of the Republican People's Party (CHP) facilitated the reading of this decision during a General Assembly session, leading to immediate backlash from TBMM President Numan Kurtulmuş of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Kurtulmuş accused Karaca of abusing her authority and violating parliamentary procedures, **barring her from presiding over future sessions.**

In a significant show of cross-party support, **238 members of parliament** from the CHP, Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM), Good Party (İYİ), New Path (Yeniyol), and Labour Party (EMEP) submitted a joint petition to the TBMM Presidency on 21 May 2025. The petition **demands the immediate registration of Can Atalay's parliamentary status** in the official records, emphasizing the need to uphold democratic principles and the rule of law. TİP spokesperson **Sera Kadigil highlighted the urgency of rectifying what she described as an unconstitutional act that undermines national sovereignty.**

These developments underscore the deepening divisions within the TBMM over the enforcement of Constitutional Court decisions and the status of imprisoned lawmakers like Can Atalay.



Photo: OdaTV



## Turkish Business Leaders Face Trial Under Controversial 'Disinformation' Law

Istanbul prosecutors have charged TÜSİAD president **Orhan Turan** and High Advisory Council chair **Mehmet Ömer Aras** with "publicly disseminating misleading information" and "attempting to influence a fair trial" after they warned that recent judicial actions threaten Turkey's democracy. TÜSİAD's members account for roughly 85% of Turkey's foreign trade and contribute 80% of its corporate tax revenue, making this prosecution a stark warning that **even mainstream business voices can be silenced** under the 2022 disinformation law. Critics say targeting these figures represents a troubling **erosion of free speech and judicial independence**, risking investor confidence and stifling the open debate essential to a healthy democracy. Proceedings resume on 23 September 2025.



Photo: Sendika.org

## Dr. Ayşe Uğurlu Dismissed For Allegedly "Insulting the President"



Dr. Ayşe Uğurlu, a member of the Executive Committee of the Human Rights Branch of the Turkish Medical Association (TTB), has been dismissed from public service following an investigation launched by the Ministry of Health on **charges of "insulting the President."** The investigation stemmed from her reading a statement by the Ankara Women's Platform.

The Ministry of Health filed a criminal complaint against Dr. Ayşe Uğurlu for the remarks in the statement she read, which included: **"As women who do not surrender to male-dominated alliances, we have words for the dictatorship regime and the power to overthrow this system."** She was charged with "insulting the President," and the investigation concluded with her expulsion from civil service.

Dr. Ayşe Uğurlu stated that she was investigated and dismissed for reading a statement at a women's rights press conference, which she insists falls under constitutional freedom of expression. She believes the real reason behind the investigation is her commitment to good medical practice and human rights. She announced plans to take legal action and emphasized her determination to return, saying, **"I will return and continue to practice good medicine."** (Source: Sendika.org)

The Ankara Medical Chamber (ATO) condemned her dismissal, stating it is incompatible with democracy and the principles of a social state of law. It noted her 35 years of dedicated public service and commitment to human rights.



Photo: Independent Turkish



## Amnesty Rallies EU Pressure Over Türkiye's Democratic Backsliding

On May 16, 2025, Amnesty International and 57 other human rights organizations, media freedom groups, and legal associations issued an open letter to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President António Costa. The coalition expressed deep concern over what they described as an "extraordinary assault" by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government on political participation, the rule of law, and human rights in Türkiye.

The letter highlights the recent imprisonment of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, following the annulment of his university diploma—a move perceived as politically motivated. İmamoğlu's detention, which coincides with his selection as the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP)'s candidate to challenge Erdoğan in the upcoming election, is seen as a significant escalation in efforts to suppress political opposition. The coalition notes that this incident is part of a broader pattern of repression, including the targeting of journalists, civil society activists, and other critics of the government.

The coalition calls on the European Union to take firm political, economic, and societal action. Their demands include:

- Publicly condemning Türkiye's assault on political freedoms;
- Using upcoming high-level dialogues to demand democratic reforms;
- Making human rights a central demand during trade and investment negotiations;
- Insisting on compliance with European Court of Human Rights rulings and calling for the immediate release of Selahattin Demirtaş, Figen Yüksekdağ Şenoğlu, and Osman Kavala;
- Stipulating urgent, independent inquiries into rights violations during protests, including torture and unfair trials;
- Monitoring trials targeting journalists, activists, and peaceful protesters;
- Expanding financial and political support for civil society groups and human rights defenders facing repression.

The letter emphasizes the EU's legal obligations under Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union to uphold human rights in its foreign policy.

Whether these demands will lead to real improvements remains to be seen. However, the coalition warns that meaningful change is unlikely without sustained pressure and concrete consequences.



Photo: Amnesty International

## Girls-Only Schools? Minister's Pitch Meets a Chilly Reception



Turkish Minister of National Education Yusuf Tekin recently made a significant statement concerning girls' access to education. He pointed out that some families choose not to send their daughters to co-educational schools, resulting in girls being denied their right to education. According to Tekin, one of the primary concerns expressed by these families is their discomfort with girls studying alongside boys.

To address this challenge and promote equal educational opportunities, Tekin proposed the potential establishment of girls-only schools. He stated, "The primary argument of families who don't send their daughters to school is: 'I don't want my daughter to attend a school with boys.' So, in order to persuade such families, we should be able to open girls-only schools."

Tekin added that the Ministry of National Education is open to shaping education policy in response to such concerns and will explore all possible solutions to ensure that girls are not deprived of their right to education.

The proposal has sparked debate around gender equality in education. Supporters argue that girls-only schools could help eliminate barriers for some students, particularly in more conservative communities. Critics, however, raise concerns about the long-term implications for gender integration and social cohesion.



Photo: Anadolu Agency

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