

# **LAST WEEK IN TÜRKİYE**



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April 20, 2026

# THIS WEEK IN HISTORY



Erdoğan's constitutional referendum abolished the office of prime minister and handed him near-unlimited executive power, passing by a razor-thin 51.4% margin held under a state of emergency with journalists behind bars and hundreds of media outlets already shut down.



After losing Istanbul's mayoral election by 13,000 votes, Erdoğan's AKP pressured the Supreme Election Board to annul the result and force a re-run. The re-run backfired: İmamoğlu won by 800,000 votes. Six years later, Erdoğan had him arrested instead.



Mass trials of 189 student protesters began in Istanbul, with hearings lasting minutes each. Seven journalists were charged as protesters for doing their jobs.



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# IT'S BEEN...

**11 DAYS** since the senior judge Yüksel Kocaman was linked in court documents to a payment from an aide to crime boss Ayhan Bora Kaplan. No investigation announced.

**21 DAYS** since Esra Işık was arrested for defending Akbelen.

**30 DAYS** since İsmail Arı, BirGün reporter, was arrested under the disinformation law

**34 DAYS** since Justice Minister Gürlek was shown to hold 452 million lira in real estate on a judge's salary. He hasn't explained it. Three officials who looked up his records were arrested instead.

**60 DAYS** since Alican Uludağ, Deutsche Welle correspondent, was arrested for social media posts criticising Erdoğan.

**399 DAYS** since İmamoğlu was arrested the day he was named the CHP's presidential candidate.

**1,461 DAYS** since Can Atalay was elected to parliament from prison. The Constitutional Court ordered his release three times. He has never taken his seat.

**2,313 DAYS** since the ECHR ordered Demirtaş's release.

**2,323 DAYS** since ECHR ordered Kavala's release.



# TWO SCHOOL SHOOTINGS, TEN DEAD



Two school shootings in two days shook Türkiye this week. On April 14, a 19-year-old ex-student opened fire at a vocational high school in Siverek, Şanlıurfa, wounding 16 before taking his own life. The next day, a 14-year-old student at a school in Kahramanmaraş arrived with five guns and killed nine people — eight children aged 10 and 11 and their 55-year-old teacher — before dying at the scene. His father, a police officer, was detained. The shooting in Kahramanmaraş is the deadliest in Türkiye's modern history.



# TEACHERS SAY: EDUCATION MINISTER TEKIN MUST RESIGN



Thousands of teachers took to the streets across Türkiye on April 16 demanding the resignation of Education Minister Yusuf Tekin after the Kahramanmaraş shooting killing eight children and their teacher. This is not the first time children have died on his watch: at least 85 minors died in workplace accidents in 2025 under his MESEM vocational program, which critics call institutionalised child labour. When students protested those deaths in December, 16 were arrested. Now teachers are in the streets again. Unions called a two-day national strike. Tekin remains in office.



# CHP MUNICIPALITY RAIDS CONTINUE



Once again, police raided CHP-run municipalities across western Türkiye. On April 15, 12 people were arrested in Yenisehir, Mersin – a district the CHP won with 62% of the vote. On April 17, Ataşehir Mayor Onursal Adıgüzel and 17 others were detained in Istanbul in an overnight operation. On April 20, 29 more were detained in an expanded Uşak probe. Since the CHP swept local elections in March 2024, 22 of its mayors have been arrested – 20 remain jailed. The pattern is consistent: the CHP wins a district, the government opens a corruption investigation, the mayor is arrested, and the municipality quietly passes to AKP control.



# ALL 81 CHP CHAIRS DEMAND EARLY ELECTIONS



All 81 CHP provincial chairs gathered in Ankara this week and issued a joint statement condemning what they called a "systematic siege" against their party, demanding early elections. Istanbul provincial chair Özgür Çelik read the statement, declaring the investigations an attack on the "national will." The CHP said the crackdown has affected municipalities covering more than 8.8 million voters, with 85 municipalities now having changed hands through arrests, trustee appointments or forced council changes.



# KILIÇDAROĞLU SENTENCED FOR INSULTING ERDOĞAN



A Mersin court on April 14 sentenced former CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu to 11 months and 20 days in prison for remarks he made about Erdoğan in 2013. The sentence was suspended pending appeal. Critics have long questioned Kılıçdaroğlu's opposition credentials – he lost every election he contested as CHP leader and reportedly sought to be appointed trustee of the İBB after İmamoğlu's arrest rather than fight for his release. Some observers see the prosecution less as genuine persecution and more as political theatre: a way to give Kılıçdaroğlu the appearance of a victim while the real opposition remains behind bars. Prosecutors had originally sought up to 11 years and a political ban across five merged files.



# AKP SPENT \$153 MILLION LOBBYING IN WASHINGTON



According to US Justice Department FARA records and a 2026 Congressional Research Service report, Türkiye spent over \$153 million on lobbying firms in Washington between 2015 and 2025 – \$48 million paid directly by the AKP government, and a further \$105 million funneled through foundations and civil society groups including the Türken Foundation. That places Türkiye among the top 10 most active foreign lobbying clients in the US over two decades, alongside Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar. The question nobody in Ankara has answered: what exactly did 105 American lobbying firms deliver for \$153 million of taxpayer money?



# DOCTORS VOTE AGAINST GOVERNMENT IN ALL THREE CITIES



Medical chamber elections in Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir this week all went against pro-government slates. In Istanbul on April 19, the Democratic Participation Group won with 60% of the vote, defeating a joint list backed by AKP and MHP-aligned groups; police had to separate the factions after the government-backed group began chanting religious slogans when early results came in. In Ankara, the Çağdaş Hekimler (Progressive Physicians) group won. In İzmir, the Çağdaş Hekim group also won.



# GÜLISTAN DOKU CASE BREAKS OPEN



Gülistan Doku disappeared in Tunceli on January 5, 2020. The state called it a probable suicide and closed the case. This week it emerged that the cover-up ran through the governor's office itself. Tuncay Sonel — Erdoğan's appointed governor at the time, who also replaced Tunceli's elected mayor as government trustee — was detained for allegedly ordering the deletion of data from Doku's phone. His son Mustafa Türkay Sonel was arrested the next day on murder, sexual assault and evidence destruction charges. After Doku's disappearance, Sonel was promoted twice by presidential decree. He was still working as a senior Interior Ministry inspector when arrested this week.



# SERIK MAYOR DEFECTS TO AKP WITH ERDOĞAN'S BADGE



Kadir Kumbul, the CHP mayor of Serik in Antalya – a district the opposition had won for the first time in 74 years in 2024, with 42% of the vote – resigned from the CHP on April 14 and flew to Ankara, where President Erdoğan personally pinned an AKP badge on him at parliament. Eight CHP council members defected with him, flipping the council majority to the ruling coalition and handing the municipality to AKP without a vote. CHP deputy mayor Mehmet Balık immediately resigned in protest, saying: "People who used to flee the country when they did wrong now just join the AKP instead."



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# MERSİN VILLAGERS DEFEND CITRUS AND OLIVE GROVES



The people of Davultepe in Mezitli have farmed the same citrus and olive groves for generations. This week they were forced onto the streets again after the government moved to rezone their land — despite a court already blocking a previous attempt on the same grounds. Residents and ecologists submitted a petition to the environment ministry demanding it stop. It is the same story playing out across Türkiye: land communities depend on, reclassified by decree, handed to outside interests



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# RESOURCES

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