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# Civic Freedom Monitor: Türkiye

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## Recent Developments

In the months following a series of high-profile investigations and detentions involving opposition-affiliated officials, Türkiye's political climate remains strained heading into 2026. These actions have continued to fuel domestic and international concern about democratic backsliding and the rule of law, particularly regarding the perception of selective enforcement. Large-scale public gatherings, including protests on economic conditions, women's rights, and university autonomy, also drew attention to the authorities' handling of assemblies in late 2025 with excessive violence and restrictions.

*While we aim to maintain information that is as current as possible, we realize that situations can rapidly change. If you are aware of any additional information or inaccuracies on this page, please keep us informed; write to ICNL at [ngomonitor@icnl.org](mailto:ngomonitor@icnl.org).*

## Introduction

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a significant role in Türkiye. As of December 1, 2025, there were 101,810 registered associations and 6,294 foundations operating in the country alongside many informal organizations, such as platforms, initiatives, and groups. Their work is concentrated primarily on social solidarity and social services, education, health, vocational training, sports, and religion. According to the Directorate General for Relations with Civil Society (DGRCS), as of December 2025, only 1.5 percent of registered associations (1,543 associations) were active in the fields of rights and advocacy.

The operating environment for civil society in Türkiye is marked by shrinking civic space and increasing restrictions on fundamental freedoms. Türkiye operates under a civil law system. While the Constitution generally protects the freedoms of association, expression, and assembly, restrictive laws, such as the Law on Associations, the Law on Collection of Aid, and counter-terrorism legislation, continue to impose bureaucratic hurdles and vague limitations on CSO operations, funding, freedom of speech, and public assembly.

In addition, civil society operates under growing pressure from both administrative and political authorities. Since the Gezi Park protests in 2013, the coup attempt in 2016, and the transition to a presidential system in 2018, the government has increasingly used security-based narratives and emergency-style governance tools to justify restrictions on fundamental freedoms. Peaceful protests are frequently banned or dispersed, with demonstrators subjected to arbitrary detention, police violence, and judicial harassment. CSOs also face tight scrutiny over their activities, partnerships, and sources of funding, with many targeted by politically motivated audits, investigations, and administrative sanctions.

***This Civic Freedom Monitor (CFM) country note was made possible through the research conducted by the Third Sector Foundation of Türkiye (TÜSEV).***

## Civic Freedoms at a Glance

<b>Organizational Forms</b>	Associations and foundations
<b>Registration Body</b>	<b>Associations:</b> Ministry of Interior, Directorate General for Relations with Civil Society <b>Foundations:</b> The courts, with possible review made by the Directorate General of Foundations
<b>Barriers to Formation</b>	<b>Associations:</b> At least seven founders required to establish an association. Executive board of at least five people required. Majority of the board must reside in Türkiye. Foreigners can be board members provided they reside in Türkiye. Foreigners can be members of board provided they reside in Türkiye. <b>Foundations:</b> The minimum endowment amount for foundations is TRY 2,000,000 (USD 48,400 as of September 2025).
<b>Barriers to Operations</b>	Standard annual reporting forms and numerous mandatory books are cumbersome and time consuming. All associations and foundations are obliged to obtain permission from the governorship of the city in which they will be conducting the fundraising activity and indicate the exact amount of money they aim to collect. Requirement to complete standard forms before receiving or using foreign funding or opening new branch offices.
<b>Barriers to Resources</b>	Requirement to notify the government before using foreign funding, even if the funds are received from the headquarters of their organization.
<b>Barriers to Expression</b>	Despite constitutional protections for speech, many legal provisions are sustained despite their apparent conflict with the Constitution. The internet regulation No. 5651 may increase censorship and pave the way for removing content without a court order.
<b>Barriers to Assembly</b>	Vague grounds to justify restrictions, excessive force on protesters, and advance notification requirement.

## Legal Overview

This section provides a brief overview of Türkiye's legal framework for the promotion and protection of civic freedoms. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

## RATIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

<b>Key International Agreements</b>	<b>Ratification*</b>
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	2003
Optional Protocol to ICCPR (ICCPR-OP1)	2006
International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)	2003
Optional Protocol to ICESCR (Op-ICESCR)	No

Key International Agreements	Ratification*
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)	2002
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	1985
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women	2002
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	1995
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW)	2004
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)	2009

Key Regional Agreements	Ratification*
Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)**	No
European Convention on Human Rights	1954
The Convention for The Protection of Individuals with Regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data	2016

\* Category includes ratification, accession, or succession to the treaty

\*\* On March 20, 2021, a Presidential Decision was published to announce Türkiye's withdrawal from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, which is widely known as Istanbul Convention. Türkiye subsequently reported the decision to the Council of Europe. On July 1, the decision came into effect and Türkiye officially withdrew from the Istanbul Convention.

## CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Constitution was adopted in 1982, immediately following a military coup. Although the Constitution is sometimes criticized for its lack of democratic principles, it still guarantees basic rights and freedoms. Relevant articles include:

**Article 22:** Everyone has the right to freedom of communication.

**Article 25:** Everyone has the right to freedom of thought and opinion.

**Article 26:** Everyone has the right to express and disseminate his thoughts and opinions by speech, in writing or in pictures or through other media, individually and collectively.

**Article 33:** Everyone has the right to form associations, or become a member of an association, or withdraw from membership without prior permission.

No one shall be compelled to become or remain a member of an association.

Freedom of association may only be restricted by law on the grounds of protecting national security and public order, or prevention of crime, or protecting public morals, public health.

The formalities, conditions, and procedures governing the exercise of freedom of association shall be prescribed by law.

Associations may be dissolved or suspended from activity by the decision of a judge in cases prescribed by law. In cases where delay endangers national security or public order and in cases where it is necessary to prevent the perpetration or the continuation of a crime or to effect apprehension, an authority designated by law may be vested with power to suspend the association from activity. The decision of this authority shall be submitted for the approval of the judge in charge within twenty-four hours. Unless the judge declares a decision within forty-eight hours, this administrative decision shall be annulled automatically.

Provisions of the first paragraph shall not prevent imposition of restrictions on the rights of armed forces and security forces officials and civil servants to the extent that the duties of civil servants so require.

The provisions of this article are also applicable to foundations.

**Article 34:** Everyone has the right to hold unarmed and peaceful meetings and demonstration marches without prior permission.

**Article 35:** Everyone has the right to property and inheritance.

**Article 56:** Everyone has the right to live in a healthy and balanced environment

**Article 90:** International agreements duly put into effect have the force of law. No appeal to the Constitutional Court shall be made with regard to these agreements, on the grounds that they are unconstitutional. In the case of a conflict between international agreements, duly put into effect, concerning fundamental rights and freedoms and the laws due to differences in provisions on the same matter, the provisions of international agreements shall prevail

## **NATIONAL LAWS, POLICIES, AND REGULATIONS**

National laws affecting the civil society sector include the following:

- Law 5253: Associations Law on Associations
- Law 5737: Law on Foundations
- Law 4721: Civil Code
  - Associations: Articles 56-100
  - Foundations: Article 101-117
- Law 8965: Penal Code
- Law 5326: Law on Misdemeanor
- Law 2860: Law on Collection of Aid
- Law 2911: Law on Meetings and Demonstrations
- Law 4982: Law on Right to Information

- Law 4962: Law on the Amendment to Certain Laws and Tax Exemption for Law on Foundations
- Law 6102: Commercial Law
- Law 193: Income Tax Law
- Law 5520: Corporate Tax Law
- Law 213: Tax Procedure Law
- Law 1319: Property Tax law
- Law 488: Stamp Tax Law
- Law 3065: VAT Law
- Law 1606: Law on the Exemption of Certain Associations and Institutions from Certain Taxes, All Fees and Dues
- Law 5072: Law on the Relations of Public Institutions with Associations and Foundations
- Law 4641: Law on the Establishment and Functioning of the Economic and Social Council
- Law 3335: Law on Establishment of International Organizations
- Law 5018: Public Financial Administration and Control
- Law 3713: Prevention of Terrorism Law
- Law 6698: Law on Protection of Personal Data
- Law 7262: Law on Preventing Financing of Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction

## **PENDING REGULATORY INITIATIVES**

### **Post-Internet Law Annulment Draft Law**

In a positive development, the Constitutional Court in January 2024 annulled Article 9 of Law No. 5651 (Internet Law), ruling that its content-blocking powers violated constitutional safeguards. However, the ruling party subsequently introduced a draft law, which aims to restore power of the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK) to its pre-annulment status. Along with disregarding the reasoning and grounds of the Constitutional Court's annulment decision, the draft law would grant the BTK the authority to directly block access to websites and applications on grounds of "national security" and public order, which raises concerns about censorship. As of December 2025, the proposed amendment has passed from the Justice Committee, but it has not yet been placed on the agenda of General Assembly.

### **"Agents of Influence" Developments**

The government plans to pass a law to regulate the crime of "Agents of Influence" by expanding the scope of the crime of "Espionage" in the Penal Code. It was originally proposed as an article within the omnibus bill that was submitted to the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) on October 18, 2024, and was passed by the TBMM's Justice Commission. However, it alarmed CSOs, human rights groups, journalists, bar associations, and the political opposition because it reminded them of the "Disinformation Law" adopted in 2022, which was used to intimidate political opposition, civil society and especially

journalists. Following public and political opposition, in November 2024, Article 339/A, which proposed a prison sentence of three to seven years for anyone found guilty of committing a “crime against state security or political interests,” was withdrawn. The law, however, is still expected to be resubmitted to parliament, and Article 339/A will be reviewed and examined with opposition parties.

## **Legislation on Volunteering**

The government is preparing legislation related to volunteering through various ministries, which has concerned CSOs due to excessive regulation and oversight. CSOs are closely monitoring the process.

## **Anti-LGBTI+ Draft Law**

According to a leaked draft law in February 2025, as a part of the 10th Judicial Package—which is based on the 4th Judicial Reform Strategy Document prepared by the Ministry of Justice and aims to amend the Criminal Code and Civil Code—any person who publicly encourages, praises, or promotes attitudes and behaviors contrary to “innate biological sex” and “public morality” will be sentenced to imprisonment for one to three years. If the draft is adopted, CSOs and human rights defenders advocating for LGBTI+ rights or gender equality could face legal proceedings.

Following the leak, numerous CSOs called for the draft not to be submitted to the parliament. Despite this, another draft law was submitted to the Parliament by HÜDA PAR in April 2025. This draft law, which is titled the “Bill on Amendments to the Turkish Penal Code and Certain Other Laws” and broadens the scope of criminalization, has not yet been placed on the agenda of the parliamentary committee. However, in October 2025, the draft resurfaced through another press leak within the scope of 11th Judicial Package and this time with even harsher provisions targeting LGBTI+ people and organizations. The leak sparked broad criticism from LGBTI+ and women’s groups, bar associations, human rights organizations, unions, journalists’ associations, opposition parties and international organizations.

A [joint declaration](#) published by 189 organizations declared that the proposal criminalizes LGBTI+ existence, legitimizes discrimination and deepens the ground for violation of fundamental rights including freedom of speech and association. On November 27, when the package was formally submitted to Parliament, these provisions were removed from the draft.

## **FATF-related Amendments to the Law on Foundations**

The Directorate General of Foundations is working on amending the Law on Foundations to comply with the AML/CFT recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). The proposed amendments, however, do not fully comply with FATF standards and threaten over-regulation. Therefore, CSOs are seeking to be consulted before any amendment to the Law is submitted to the Parliament.

## **Law Proposal to Broaden MASAK’s Oversight and Intervention Power**

A draft bill has been proposed that would grant the Financial Crimes Investigation Board (MASAK) real time monitoring and immediate freezing powers over bank accounts to enable rapid intervention in suspected cyber fraud and other financial crimes. The initiative aims to broaden oversight of unusual or high-risk transactions by updating rules on suspicious transaction reporting and information-sharing obligations. These measures were formally included in the 11th Judicial Package submitted to Parliament on November 27, 2025, although the specific provisions granting these powers have not yet been adopted. If the draft law is enacted, it might may allow for excessive interference with the property rights of all individuals and legal entities, including civil society, and pave the way for practices that could result in violations of their rights.

*Please help keep us informed; if you are aware of pending initiatives, write to ICNL at [ngomonitor@icnl.org](mailto:ngomonitor@icnl.org).*

## Legal Analysis

This section provides an in-depth assessment of Türkiye's legal environment for civic freedoms, including the barriers to the exercise of the freedoms of association (formation, operations, resources), expression, and peaceful assembly. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

### ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS

There are two legal forms of CSOs in Türkiye: associations and foundations. The right to establish these organizations is guaranteed under Article 33 of the Constitution, which affirms the freedom of association. Both forms must operate on a not-for-profit basis.

Article 56 of the Civil Code defines an association as “a society formed by unity of at least seven real persons or legal entities for realization of a common object other than sharing of profit by collecting information and performing studies for such purpose.”

Article 101 of the Civil Code defines foundations as “charity groups in the status of a legal entity formed by real persons or legal entities dedicating their private property and rights for public use.”

### PUBLIC BENEFIT STATUS

The criteria for obtaining “public benefit” status for associations and “tax exemption” status for foundations remain vague and poorly defined, and the decision-making process is often seen as highly political. Moreover, the privileges associated with these statuses are limited. Tax incentives for individual and corporate donors apply only to donations and contributions made to foundations with tax exemption status and associations with public benefit status. Associations with public benefit status are exempt from obligations under the Stamp Duty Law, Fees Law, Real Estate Tax Law, Inheritance and Gift Tax Law, and Municipal Revenues Law. Similarly, foundations with tax exempt status benefit from tax advantages provided under the Stamp Duty Law, Fees Law, Real Estate Tax Law, and Inheritance and Gift Tax Law, as well as the Foundations Law.

Following a major change in 2018, Presidential authority over these statuses increased. Article 19 of Presidential Decree Law No. 703 of July 2, 2018 (which amended Article 27 of the Associations Law) and Article 57 of Decree Law No. 698 of July 2, 2018, granted the President the power to confer public benefit status on associations and foundations. Previously, this authority rested with the Council of Ministers, which made decisions based on the opinion of the Ministry of Finance and a proposal from the Ministry of Interior. Under the earlier system, the process was bureaucratic, opaque, and influenced by political considerations. No independent, transparent, or easily accessible body existed to oversee the process. Furthermore, the eligibility criteria were neither clearly-outlined nor uniformly applied, and the conditions for obtaining public benefit and tax-exempt statuses differed. The presidential decrees did not improve the transparency or fairness of the process.

Although Turkish law provides for public benefit status, only a small fraction of CSOs have been granted this designation. As of December 2025, only 365 of Türkiye's 101,840 active associations (0.35 percent) held public benefit status. Among foundations, just 343 of 6,294 (5.4 percent) were tax-exempt—a ratio that has remained largely unchanged in recent years.

Further restrictive changes were introduced at the end of 2024 through amendments to the General Communiqué (Series no: 1) on the Provision of Tax Exemption to Foundations. Under the new rules, transfers from a foundation to its economic enterprises are no longer considered expenses related to the foundation's purpose, even if these enterprises operate in line with the foundation's mission. This rule makes it more difficult for foundations to meet the legal requirement of spending at least two-thirds of their annual income within the same fiscal year to maintain tax-exempt status. Furthermore, what was previously a one-time condition for obtaining tax exemption—meeting a specific threshold of income-generating assets and annual income—has now become an ongoing requirement to maintain this status. These changes have made it more difficult for foundations to both qualify for and maintain tax-exempt status.

On November 5, 2025, the Revenue Administration published a new Guide on the Taxation of Associations and Foundations, which outlined the obligations and procedures applicable to these legal entities within the Turkish tax system. The guide provides explanatory information on their general tax status, applicable exemptions, the taxation of their economic enterprises, and the procedures for granting or revoking public-benefit or tax-exempt status by presidential decree.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Although Türkiye's National Development Plan and Annual Presidential Program emphasize the importance of participation in decision-making processes, there is no overarching policy or strategy that defines, encourages, or institutionalizes cooperation and participation mechanisms. The Regulation on the Procedures and Principles of Drafting Legislation contains provisions regarding CSO participation in decision-making processes, but these provisions fail to make consultation mandatory.

## **BARRIERS TO FORMATION**

Article 33 of Türkiye's Constitution guarantees the freedom of association. It states that everyone is free to establish associations without prior permission, that individuals may freely join or leave associations, and that no one can be forced to become or remain a member of an association.

Both individuals and legal persons with legal capacity have the right to establish associations and foundations. However, specific legal restrictions apply to certain groups, including members of the Turkish Armed Forces, the police, and civil servants, as outlined in relevant special laws.

The registration process for CSOs is regulated by the Law on Associations and the Law on Foundations.

For associations, the process is relatively straightforward. At least seven individuals—citizens or foreigners with residence permits—must submit the required documents to the provincial office of the Directorate General for Relations with Civil Society. No registration fee is required. Associations are considered legally established as soon as they initiate the registration process and may begin activities immediately. The Directorate General has up to 60 days to review the application. If any documents are missing or the application violates existing rules and regulations, the association is given 30 days to resolve the issues. Under Article 62 of the Law on Associations, newly founded associations must hold their first generally assembly within six months and are expected to have at least 16 members and establish their mandatory governance structures (executive board, internal auditing committee, and general assembly) within this period.

The registration process for foundations is more complicated. Establishing a foundation requires the allocation of assets—immovable and movable property, including cash, securities and bonds, or any rights with economic value—to the foundation's specified purpose. The Council of Foundations, the highest decision-making body within the General Directorate of Foundations, sets the minimum asset requirement annually. As of 2025, this threshold stands at TRY 2,000,000 TL (USD 42,500 as of December 2025). Foundations must submit a charter, verified by a court, which outlines the foundation's title, purpose, assets, governance structure, and administrative procedures. Legal personality is granted once the court approves the charter and the foundation is registered by the General Directorate of Foundations. The registration timeline varies depending on the court's workload.

The Law on Associations contains vague limitations that invite administrative discretion and restrict CSO activities, particularly at the time of registration. For example, Article 56 of the Turkish Civil Code prohibits the formation of associations "for an object contrary to the laws and morality." Similarly, Article 101 limits the establishment of foundations whose objectives are "contrary to the characteristics of the Republic defined by the Constitution, Constitutional rules, laws, ethics, national integrity and national interest, or with the aim of supporting a distinctive race or community."

Additional hurdles exist at the local level. For example, according to implementing regulations for the Law on Associations, associations seeking office space within residential buildings must secure the permission of all residents of the building—a burdensome and often unfeasible requirement. Failure to secure office

space may be a barrier to the process of registration for associations. Moreover, associations are prohibited from sharing offices with other legal entities or individuals. This restriction lacks a statutory basis and stems from an opinion issued by the Ministry of Interior's law department.

The formation of federations and confederations is also tightly regulated. The Law on Associations requires at least five associations to establish a federation and at least three federations to form a confederation. Furthermore, all member organizations must have the "same purpose," an unnecessarily restrictive condition that limits coalition building across different but related fields.

Foreign CSOs face serious bureaucratic hurdles when seeking to establish branch offices in Türkiye. Foreign organizations must first obtain permission from the Ministry of Interior, based on the opinion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The legislation does not impose a specific timeframe for the Ministry to respond to applications. According to guidelines published by the Directorate General for Relations with Civil Society, the length of the review process varies depending on factors such as the organization's field of activity, the region where activities will be carried out, the country of origin, and their international recognition, among other things. Furthermore, under Article 22 of the Regulation on Associations, the establishment of branches or representative offices by foreign foundations in Türkiye is subject to reciprocity and is restricted to situations deemed beneficial for international cooperation. As of December 2025, only 113 foreign CSOs were authorized to operate in Türkiye.

## **BARRIERS TO OPERATIONS**

### **Permissible Purposes**

Legislation does not explicitly limit the permissible purposes of associations and foundations. However, the Civil Code prohibits organizations from adopting aims "contradictory with law or morality." While associations and foundations are not prohibited from directly engaging in political activities, rights-based CSOs reportedly face more government interference in practice than other organizations.

### **Internal Affairs**

Associations are required to maintain four official 'books' and comply with strict reporting and notification requirements, with sanctions for non-compliance. They must also submit standardized forms when receiving or utilizing foreign funding or opening new branches or offices. (See "Barriers to Resources" for more details.)

As a positive development, the Directorate General of Foundations has enabled Activity Certificates to be obtained online through the Foundation Information Management System (VBYS 2.0) as of November 25, 2025. With this update, foundations no longer need to apply to Regional Directorates in person, as the entire process, including application, automatic generation, and download of the certificate, can be completed digitally. The Directorate General of Foundations also published a user manual to support effective use of the system.

There has been a sharp decline in association membership. The number of members fell from 11,239,693 in 2017 to 8,509,169 in December 2025. This decrease may be partially attributed to the member notification requirement introduced in 2018, which obliges associations to submit personal data on their members. Authorities have cited reasons such as resignations, deaths, and the correction of double-recordings in membership records for the decline. Moreover, the regulations requiring the disclosure of personal data upon joining associations discourage potential new members.

### **Counter-terrorism Measures**

The Law on Preventing Financing of Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction No. 7262 entered into force on December 31, 2020. The law, justified by the need to conform Turkish law with international standards in the fight against terrorist financing and money laundering, allows the Minister of Interior to suspend association board or staff members if they are being prosecuted for crimes related to terrorist financing, money laundering, or drug trafficking crimes. The Minister of Interior also can immediately

apply to civil courts to ask for a temporary suspension of the association's activities. The Constitutional Court annulled several key provisions of Law No. 7262 on April 3, 2024, including rules granting the Minister of Interior broad powers to suspend association organs, appoint trustees, and halt activities. As a result, some of these powers are no longer in force. However, this law has still triggered widespread concern, and CSOs working in human rights or receiving foreign funds have reported repetitive, vague, and burdensome inspections.

Despite adopting Law No. 7262 to avoid sanctions by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), Türkiye was gray-listed in 2021. It was then removed from the list in June 2024 following reforms.

On May 28, 2025, Türkiye's Council of State annulled several provisions of a 2021 amendment to the Regulation on Associations that introduced procedures to assess and mitigate the risk of associations' assets being linked to money laundering or terrorist financing. The ruling followed a lawsuit by the Freedom of Expression Association (*İfade Özgürlüğü Derneği* - İFÖD) challenging Article 16 of the amendment. The annulled provisions empowered the Ministry of Interior's Directorate General of Relations with Civil Society to establish risk-assessment procedures, classify associations into risk groups, and assign audit frequencies and officials accordingly. The Court held that these procedures lacked a clear legal basis in the Law on Associations and violated the principles of legal certainty and foreseeability. It also annulled Article 3, which required associations to participate trainings and workshops based on risk levels. However, the Court upheld the general principle that audits may be based on risk analysis. Legislative efforts to adopt a new law on this matter are ongoing.

## **Human Rights Violations**

According to a December 2025 [fact sheet](#) by the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (HRFT) and Human Rights Association (HRA), between January 1 and November 30, 2025 at least 131 CSO members or executives were detained. Of these, 60 were arrested, and 42 were released under judicial control. At least 404 faced prosecution in 92 previously filed cases. While 49 people were acquitted, 84 were sentenced to prison for varying durations.

The UPR Advocacy Report 2025 by the Murat Çekiç Human Rights Association, Kaos GL, and May 17 Association documented systematic violations of LGBTI+ rights in Türkiye, including bans on pride marches and administrative targeting of LGBTI+ associations through audits and investigations.

The Istanbul Anatolia Chief Public Prosecutor's Office ruled that there was "no grounds for prosecution" following an investigation into insulting and threatening social media posts targeting human rights lawyer and Co-Chair of the Human Rights Association Eren Keskin.

The Constitutional Court announced its reasoning in the decision in a trial known as the "Gezi Park Case" in November 2025, stating that the "right to a fair trial" of urban planner Tayfun Kahraman had been violated. The Court ruled that there was no concrete link between the actions attributed to the defendant and the evidence used to justify the conviction, and therefore the conviction was not sufficiently substantiated. This, therefore, violated Kahraman's right to a fair trial guaranteed by Article 36 of the Constitution. However, the Istanbul 13th Heavy Penal Court rejected Kahraman's request for a retrial in line with the Constitutional Court's decision.

## **Legal Harassment of Marginalized Groups**

Marginalized communities and the organizations that support them continue to face legal harassment. A notable example is the Association for Supporting Tarlabasi Community (Tarlabası Toplumunu Destekleme Merkezi Derneği or TTM), which works to empower the people living in Tarlabasi facing exclusion, poverty, and inequality, while raising awareness of their rights.

In 2022, two lawsuits were filed against TTM. One sought the termination of the association on the grounds that achieving its objectives was "impossible," while the other sought annulment on the basis that the association was acting against law and morality. These cases have dragged on through dozens of hearings over the past three years and remain unresolved as of December 2025. Criminal proceedings

were also initiated against two members of the association's executive board. On October 8, 2024, TTM's office was sealed on the grounds that it was operating without a license.

## **Restrictions on CSO Operations**

In [an open letter](#) dated May 16, 2025, Human Rights Watch and 57 other groups urged EU leaders to prioritize the protection of civil society and democratic freedoms in their engagement with Türkiye. The letter expressed concern over the Turkish government's escalating repression of political opposition, independent media outlets, and CSOs through the misuse of criminal laws, arbitrary administrative obstacles, and growing limitations on freedom of association. The letter emphasizes that the wide-ranging crackdown has had a pervasive chilling effect on human rights and civil society and further eroded the right to political participation.

The EU Commission Türkiye Report also highlighted that CSOs operate in a difficult and increasingly restrictive environment due to sustained judicial and administrative pressures from the authorities. CSOs dealing with women's rights, LGBTI+ issues, environmental protection and human rights especially continued to face growing pressure.

Notable examples of government harassment of CSOs in 2024 and 2025 include:

- The Ministries of Finance and Interior froze the assets of Göçizder (Migration Monitoring Association) and some of the former chairpersons of the association, with their closure case still ongoing. In December 2024, the court ruled to dissolve the association.
- İstanbul Bar Association President İbrahim Kaboğlu and 10 board members were indicted for terrorism-related offenses in 2025 over a public statement, leading to their court-ordered dismissal (currently under appeal). The second hearing in the case against the İstanbul Bar Association President and Board members was held on September 9-10, 2025, with the next hearing adjourned to January 5, 2026. Twelve international organizations submitted a joint amicus curiae brief to be included in the case file.
- Targeting CSOs with excessive audits and administrative penalties.
- Genç LGBTİ Derneği, an LGBTI+ youth association in İzmir being ordered to be dissolved by the İzmir 3rd Civil Court of First Instance on grounds of alleged "obscenity" related to its social media content. The decision followed inspections of the association's online posts from 2024 that authorities categorized as obscene and contrary to public morality and constitutional provisions on family and child protection. The Prosecutor office also claimed the group engaged in activities outside its charter, though an earlier criminal investigation resulted in a non-prosecution decision. The association argued that the images in question were not obscene and that using them as grounds for closure represented a disproportionate infringement on freedom of expression. However, the court concluded the association's activities were incompatible with law and morality and ruled for its closure.
- In February 18, 2025, 52 individuals, including journalists and CSO members, were detained in a raid targeting the People's Democratic Congress (HDK), a civil-political alliance. As of December 2025, none remain in pre-trial detention, and the judicial proceedings were ongoing.

## **BARRIERS TO RESOURCES**

### **Foreign Funding**

There are no legal restrictions on CSOs' ability to access foreign funding, although notification requirements apply. Foundations must notify public authorities within one month of receiving foreign funds, while associations must notify the government before using or sending the funds.

Following a July 9, 2020, amendment to the Regulation on Associations, foreign foundations and associations must now also notify authorities upon receiving any donations—whether cash or in-kind—from abroad, including from their own headquarters. Previously, funds originating from headquarters were exempt from this requirement.

CSOs receiving foreign funding have frequently been the target of smear campaigns by media outlets and politicians. In 2024, the government proposed the “agents of influence” bill, which would criminalize activities deemed to be in line with foreign states’ or organizations’ interests that are perceived as detrimental to Turkey’s security or political interests. The bill’s vague language could have exposed CSOs receiving foreign funding to criminal investigations. The bill was shelved at the end of the year.

## **Domestic Funding**

CSOs face serious barriers to domestic fundraising. The highly restrictive and overly bureaucratic Law on Collection of Aid (No 1983, 23/6/1983) requires CSOs to obtain prior government approval for each fundraising activity it undertakes. To obtain approval, a CSO must submit an application including detailed information on the amounts to be raised, its intended use, the timeframe, and location. The local state authority decides whether to grant or deny permission. Associations and foundations must obtain such approval to collect donations in open public spaces and via the internet. In May 2022, the accounts of Nesin Foundation were blocked for breaching the Law of Aid Collection by conducting a fundraising campaign without a permit.

While voluntary donations and the publication of bank account details on websites are exempt, most other online donation tools—including SMS campaigns and direct online fundraising—require permits. This creates a repressive environment for CSOs seeking to collect donations or generate income online.

Some CSOs can receive exemptions from the Law on Collection of Aid, but as of September 2025, only 51 CSOs held this status—many of which were founded by law and are administered by the state.

A general lack of coordination and strategy among ministries complicates CSOs’ access to public funding. Türkiye lacks a permanent public funding mechanism to support CSOs’ institutional infrastructure and activities, and no standardized legal framework, approach, or code of conduct exists to govern public funding for CSOs. There is also a lack of data on the total amount of annual public funding available, as each ministry determines its own budget, funding methods, and criteria.

CSOs are only permitted to engage in economic activities if they are conducted through separate corporate subsidiaries, which must be registered with the trade registry and are subject to corporate taxation. This imposes additional burdens on CSOs seeking to generate income for social benefit.

## **BARRIERS TO EXPRESSION**

The Constitution of Türkiye provides for freedom of thought and expression. Article 25 guarantees that “Everyone has the freedom of thought and opinion” and protects individuals from being compelled to disclose or be punished for their thoughts. Article 26 recognizes freedom of expression but allows for restrictions on grounds including national security, public order, public safety, and the protection of state secrets, among others.

However, since 2013, freedom of expression in Türkiye has faced mounting restrictions, including arbitrary and restrictive legislative interpretations and pressure, dismissals, and prosecutions of journalists, writers, and social media users. Notably, the number of people prosecuted and convicted for “insulting the president” has risen sharply. According to a Ministry of Justice report, in 2024, the Chief Public Prosecutor Office had 25,033 files on allegations of “insulting the president” and “degrading the symbols of state sovereignty.”

Türkiye’s Constitutional Court ruled that disciplinary penalties imposed on members of the Academics for Peace—who were dismissed after signing a 2016 petition calling for peace in the Kurdish-Turkish conflict—violated their freedom of speech and expression. This ruling, the second such decision by the

Court, ordered the government to pay non-pecuniary damages to the academics.

Despite this, the space for freedom of speech and advocacy continues to deteriorate. Human rights defenders, journalists, academics, and LGBTI+ rights advocates are targets of threats, stigmatization, judicial harassment, prolonged arbitrary detention, and travel bans. This ongoing pressure has resulted in widespread self-censorship by activists and discouraged others from participating in CSOs and advocacy initiatives focused on human rights.

According to 2024 statistics from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), Türkiye accounted for the highest percentage of pending applications among 47 Council of Europe states—representing 35.8 percent of all cases (21,600 cases). In 2024, Türkiye was the subject of 73 ECHR judgments, with at least one violation of the European Convention on Human Rights found in 67 cases. The most frequently violated rights were the right to liberty and security (Article 5) and freedom of expression (Article 10).

## **International and Domestic Monitoring Reports**

Several international and domestic organizations have documented restrictions on free expression in Türkiye:

- Amnesty International's "[The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2025](#)" flagged several concerns in Türkiye, including growing executive interference in the judiciary, baseless prosecutions of journalists and human rights defenders, unlawful restrictions on freedom of assembly and association, arbitrary detentions, and a culture of impunity for state officials implicated in abuses. It also noted increased pressure on CSOs, including legislative efforts to label some organizations as "agents of influence."
- Human Rights Watch's 2025 World Report described persistent human rights violations in Türkiye in 2024, citing government control over media, internet censorship, and continued targeting of human rights defenders and opposition voices. The report also highlighted further erosion of women's and LGBTI+ rights following Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention and intensifying concerns over the treatment of refugees and migrants and security operations against Kurdish groups.
- According to the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (HRFT) and Human Rights Association (HRA), at least 29 journalists and media professionals were in prison in Türkiye as of December 10, 2025. Between January 1 and November 30, 2025, 101 journalists were detained, 52 were arrested, and one was prevented from entering the country. In addition, 329 people were detained and 48 arrested due to social media posts. The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) imposed penalties, including fines and program suspensions, on at least 20 media platforms, including 11 TV outlets, six digital broadcast platform, two radio broadcasts and one YouTube channel.
- Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranked Türkiye 159th out of 180 countries in its [2025 World Press Freedom Index](#), down from 99th in 2002. In a statement, RSF highlighted the role of economic pressure and political control, including discriminatory allocation of state advertising, financial penalties targeting critical media, and insufficient support for independent digital media, in the backsliding.
- A Media and Law Studies Association report covering September 2024–August 2025 found that over half of free speech cases in Turkey involved terrorism charges, with pre-trial detention rates sharply increasing. Defendants, primarily activists, journalists, and students, were prosecuted for constitutionally protected activities, including peaceful protests, social media posts, and reporting. Charges also included unlawful assembly, insults, and dissemination of "misleading information." Despite a 57% acquittal rate, courts imposed lengthy prison sentences, fines, and judicial supervision, underscoring a systematic crackdown on freedom of expression and the increasing criminalization of professional and critical speech.

## Legal Framework and Legislative Challenges

Freedom of expression in Türkiye is undermined by vaguely worded provisions in legislation, which are frequently used to prosecute dissent. Problematic articles in the Turkish Penal Code include:

- Article 301: denigrating the Turkish nation and the state
- Article 299: insulting the President
- Article 216: inciting people to hatred and hostility
- Article 220/6: committing crimes on behalf of an organization without being a member of the organization

Articles 6 and 7/2 of the Anti-Terror Law, on making propaganda for a terrorist organization, are also highly restrictive. Furthermore, Law No. 7418, known as the “Censorship Law,” has expanded restrictions on journalists through amendments to the Press Law.

## Restrictions on Speech in 2025

Freedom of expression continued to be restricted in 2025:

- In February 2025, after delivering speeches critical of social and political conditions, Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD) President Orhan Turan and High Advisory Council President Ömer Aras faced an ex officio criminal investigation for “attempting to influence a fair trial” and “spreading false information.” A criminal case was filed, and both face potential prison terms of up to five and a half years. The trial of TÜSİAD executives Orhan Turan and Ömer Aras continued on September 23, 2025, with a court-ordered forensic review of Aras’s speech. The next hearing is scheduled for January 20, 2026, with both defendants seeking acquittal.
- Following widespread protests in March 2025, authorities sought to block more than 700 social media accounts, including those of journalists, political figures, students, and CSOs. X (formerly Twitter) publicly objected to these mass censorship orders, while Meta reported receiving significant fines for non-compliance. Meanwhile, internet throttling was imposed in Istanbul for 42 hours, disrupting access to social media and messaging platforms. The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) also penalized TV broadcasters for airing protest footage. In total, 14 journalists were detained, 8 were remanded in custody, and one was deported.
- In May 2025, as part of the government’s “Year of the Family” campaign, the Ministry of Family and Social Services issued a circular prohibiting the use of rights-based concepts like gender, gender identity, LGBTI+, and SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics) in public-CSO collaborations. CSOs working on women’s and LGBTI+ rights strongly opposed the circular, citing violations of international human rights obligations and risks of exclusion from state consultation mechanisms.
- In June 2025, the website and X account of Kaos GL, a prominent LGBTI+ rights organization, were blocked. On June 27, the website was formally shut down following a court ruling. On August 19, the organization’s Instagram account was also restricted, a decision Kaos GL announced it would legally challenge.
- On June 21, 2025, journalist Fatih Altaylı was taken into custody over remarks he made about the President on his YouTube channel. He was arrested later that day on charges of threatening the President. On October 3, 2025, Fatih Altaylı appeared before the court for the first time, and his detention was extended. On November 26, 2025, he appeared for a second hearing, where the court sentenced him to four years and two months of continued detention for threatening the

president.

- On June 30, 2025, *Leman*, a Turkish satirical and humor magazine, faced a legal investigation for “publicly insulting religious values” over a cartoon allegedly depicting Prophet Muhammad and Moses. The cartoonist, editorial staff, and two general managers were arrested. The indictment seeks prison sentences ranging from six months to four years for six individuals. A capture order was also issued for the magazine’s owner, who resides abroad, with all charged with “inciting hatred and enmity among the public.” Four of the five individuals detained over *Leman* magazine’s June 2025 cartoon were released under judicial control on September 4, 2025, while the cartoonist, Doğan Pehlivan, remained in custody. The indictment for “incitement to hatred” was accepted, with the first hearing on November 14, 2025. At that hearing, the court ordered Doğan Pehlivan’s release after five months and lifted judicial controls on the other defendants. Pehlivan will remain in custody due to a separate “insulting the president” case. The next hearing is scheduled for May 5, 2026.
- According to Bianet’s July–September 2025 report, 150 journalists faced prosecution, with either detained, five placed under pre-trial detention, and nine released from custody.
- In August 2025, Enes Hocaoğulları, a youth delegate to the Council of Europe and LGBTI+ rights defender, was arrested after a speech at the Council denouncing police violence and the arrest of opposition mayors. He was released after 35 days in pre-trial detention, though his trial is ongoing.
- In October 2025, Merdan Yanardağ, General Editorial Director of TELE1 television channel, was arrested in connection with an “espionage” investigation targeting Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu and his campaign director Necati Özkan. On the day Yanardağ was arrested, the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF) appointed a trustee to ABC Radio Television and Digital Broadcasting Inc., the company that owns TELE1. Many employees resigned because the appointment of a government-affiliated figure to manage the company threatened the channel's editorial independence. Prior to his arrest, in September, Yanardağ, along with TELE 1 Managing Director İhsan Demir and program moderator Musa Özüğurlu, were detained as part of an investigation in which they were accused of “publicly insulting the president.” After giving their statements, the three journalists were released under judicial control measures of “travel ban and reporting to the police station.”

## **BARRIERS TO ASSEMBLY**

The legal framework governing the right to peaceful assembly in Türkiye includes:

- The Constitution of Türkiye;
- Law No. 2911 on Meetings and Demonstrations, adopted on October 6, 1983;
- The Regulation on the Implementation of Law on Meetings and Demonstrations, adopted on August 8, 1985;
- Law No. 2559 on the Duties and Discretion of the Police;
- Law No. 3713 on the Prevention of Terrorism Acts; and
- Law No. 5326 on Misdemeanors.

Article 34 of the Constitution guarantees citizens the right to organize assemblies and demonstrations without prior authorization. However, Law No. 2911 on Meetings and Demonstrations imposes significant restrictions. Assemblies and demonstrations may be limited on broad and vaguely defined grounds such

as “preservation of national security,” “public order,” “prevention of crime,” and protection of “public morality” and “public health.” Although these limitations appear compatible with Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights, in practice they are often applied in a restrictive and arbitrary fashion, undermining the exercise of the right to peaceful assembly.

Article 10 of the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations introduces further restrictions, requiring all members of the organizing committee to submit a signed declaration to the district governor’s office during work hours at least 48 hours prior to the assembly. Failure to comply renders the assembly illegal, giving authorities the right to disperse it, including through police intervention.

The Law Amending the Law on Powers and Duties of the Police, Other Laws and Decrees, which Parliament passed in March 2015 and is widely referred to as the “Internal Security Reform Package,” further expanded police powers. This reform allows police to detain individuals during demonstrations without prior approval from the prosecutor’s office.

In a decision issued on September 28, 2017, the Constitutional Court struck down provisions of the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations requiring assemblies and demonstrations to end before sunset and a ban on demonstrations on public roads that might disrupt daily life. In response, Law No. 7145, adopted on July 25, 2018, amended the relevant provision, allowing assemblies to continue up to one hour after sunset. This change has been seen as a positive step towards aligning national law with the Court’s decision.

### **International and Domestic Monitoring Reports**

Several international and domestic organizations have documented restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly in Türkiye:

According to the Human Rights Association (HRA) Documentation Unit, between January 1 and November 30, 2024, law enforcement intervened in at least 207 peaceful meetings and demonstrations, detaining 2,805 people, including 81 children, many of whom reported torture or other forms of ill treatment in custody. Local governorships imposed blanket bans on demonstrations 83 times across 25 cities and one district, with the duration of bans ranging from one to 15 days.

According to a December 2025 fact sheet by the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (HRFT) and Human Rights Association (HRA), between January 1 and November 30, 2025 law enforcement intervened in at least 245 peaceful meetings and demonstrations, detaining 3,511 people, many of whom reported torture or other forms of ill treatment in custody, and at least 131 people were injured. 292 of whom were arrested, and judicial control measures were applied to at least 876 people, 75 of whom were under house arrest. Local governorships imposed blanket bans on demonstrations 29 times across 13 cities and 8 district, with the duration of bans ranging from one to 15 days.

The authorities continue to impose widespread restrictions on assemblies, often citing security concerns or public order.

- Following the detention and arrest of several mayors on terrorism-related charges, widespread protests erupted across Türkiye beginning on March 19, 2025. The focus of the protests expanded to include demands for justice, fundamental rights, and broader political change. Although largely peaceful, the demonstrations—led by students and young people—were met with sweeping bans, arbitrary detentions, and excessive force by law enforcement. The Istanbul Governor’s Office imposed an initial four-day ban on all assemblies, later extended to eight days, citing public order concerns. Ankara, İzmir, and Manisa followed with similar bans. According to the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey Documentation Center, from March 19 to 28, police intervened in at least 15 protests across five cities, using physical violence and chemical agents to disperse peaceful assemblies. By March 27, the Minister of Interior reported that 1,879 individuals had been detained, including 260 who were placed in pre-trial detention and 468 who were subjected to judicial control measures such as travel bans and house arrest. A report issued by [Amnesty International in June 2025](#) found that during the March protests, police unlawfully detained at least 1,879 people,

arrested over 300, and used excessive force causing serious injuries. The organization verified evidence of beatings, threats, and degrading treatment, warning that some abuses may amount to torture, and called for independent investigations. Despite these reports, no formal investigations were initiated. On October 31, 2025, the Istanbul 61st Criminal Court of First Instance acquitted 109 of the 110 people on trial for participating in protests. On November 28, 2025, 87 other individuals also prosecuted for participating in allegedly unauthorized demonstrations following Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu’s detention on 19 March 2025, were acquitted, along with eight journalists and four lawyers also acquitted on related charges.

- On May 1, 2025, despite a 2023 Constitutional Court ruling declaring bans on May Day celebrations in Taksim Square unconstitutional, the Istanbul Governorate once again prohibited access to the square citing security concerns. In the days before May 1, more than 100 people, including political party, trade union, and civil society representatives, were detained at home as a “preventive measure.” The city center was placed under heavy police lockdown on May 1, with traffic and public transportation suspended and all routes to Taksim barricaded. According to data compiled by the Progressive Lawyers’ Association (ÇHD), 419 individuals, including 10 children and 11 lawyers, were detained for protesting the ban on access to Taksim Square. Numerous reports documented torture and ill-treatment by police during detention.
- On May 31, 2025, local authorities closed Taksim and Şişhane metro stations and the Taksim-Kabataş funicular from 15:00 onwards, restricting access on the anniversary of the 2013 Gezi Park protests, which began as opposition to urban development and evolved into nationwide demonstrations against authoritarianism and police violence.
- The 2025 Istanbul Pride marches were again met with bans, heavy police presence, and human rights violations. At least 95 people were arbitrarily detained, some of whom were subjected to ill-treatment and discriminatory insults. For the first time, three participants were arrested solely for taking part in a Pride march. The trial of 53 participants is ongoing, with the next hearing scheduled for December 24, 2025.
- On November 25, 2025, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, demonstrations were held across several cities in Türkiye. In Istanbul, large crowds planned to gather in Taksim Tünel Square for the main rally, however, the Istanbul Governor’s Office closed the Taksim metro station, suspended the funicular line, and blocked access points to İstiklal Avenue with police barricades. Despite these restrictions, protesters marched along İstiklal Avenue, and police detained 13 protestors, all of whom were released later the same day.

## Additional Resources

This section contains links to external reports and news reports relevant to civic freedoms. The Historical Notes section contains links to past developments which ICNL has reported on. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

## GLOBAL INDEX RANKINGS

Ranking Body	Rank	Ranking Scale (best - worst possible)
<a href="#">UN Human Development Index</a>	51 (2025)	1 - 193
<a href="#">World Justice Project Rule of Law Index</a>	118 (2025)	1 - 143

Ranking Body	Rank	Ranking Scale (best - worst possible)
<a href="#">Transparency International</a>	107 (2024)	1 - 180
<a href="#">Fund for Peace Fragile States Index</a>	41 (2024)	179 - 1
<a href="#">Freedom House: Freedom in the World</a>	Status: Not Free Political Rights: 17 Civil Liberties: 16 (2025)	Free/Partly Free/Not Free 40 - 0 60 - 0
<a href="#">Freedom House: Freedom on the Net</a>	31 (2025)	100 - 0

## REPORTS

UN Universal Periodic Review Reports	<a href="#">Türkiye UPR page</a>
UN Human Rights Reports	<a href="#">Türkiye</a>
European Commission Report	<a href="#">Türkiye 2025</a>
U.S. State Department	<a href="#">2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Turkey (Türkiye)</a>
Fragile States Index Reports	<a href="#">Fund for Peace Fragile States Index 2024</a>
IMF Country Reports	<a href="#">Türkiye and the IMF</a>
Human Rights Watch	<a href="#">World Report 2025</a>
Amnesty International	<a href="#">The State of the World's Human Rights 2025</a>
TUSEV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Individual Giving and Philanthropy in Türkiye (2024)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Tax Legislation Related to Foundations and Associations in Türkiye and Public Benefit Status: Current Situation and Recommendation (2024)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development 2024 Türkiye Report</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Tax Regulations Concerning Civil Society (2024)</a></li> </ul>
Expert Council on NGO Law (Council of Europe)	<a href="#">The Expert Council on NGO Law: "Opinion on The Impact of The State of Emergency on Freedom of Association in Turkey" (2017)</a>
ICNL Online Library	<a href="#">Türkiye</a>

## NEWS

### [The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights visits Türkiye](#) (December 2025)

The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Michael O'Flaherty, visited Türkiye from December 1-5, 2025 and urged Turkish authorities to fully implement human rights standards on freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, noting that although these rights are guaranteed in

law, their practical application—especially regarding restrictions on protests, broad criminal provisions affecting speech, and pressures on civil society—falls short of European human rights norms. He called on Türkiye to align counter-terrorism and other legislation with international standards and to reinforce protections for civic space.

### [\*\*Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office announce Istanbul Municipality indictment\*\*](#) (November 2025)

On November 1, 2025, 237 days after Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu and his colleagues were arrested, the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office announced that the Istanbul Municipality (İBB) indictment was completed. İmamoğlu is charged with "organizing a criminal syndicate for the purpose of obtaining financial profit" and faces a prison sentence ranging from 828 to 2,352 years. 3,741-page indictment names 402 suspects: 105 in custody, 170 under judicial control, seven wanted on arrest warrants, and five listed as complainants. In total, 407 individuals are charged with 142 separate acts.

### [\*\*Turkey sets up parliamentary commission to oversee PKK disarmament\*\*](#) (August 2025)

Turkey's parliament has set up a commission to oversee the disarmament of the PKK, following the group's decision to end its armed insurgency. The commission will manage the disarmament process and prepare the legal framework to support lasting peace.

### [\*\*Kurdish PKK militants burn weapons in Iraq to launch disarmament\*\*](#) (July 2025)

Thirty PKK militants publicly burned their weapons in northern Iraq on July 11, marking the launch of a long-awaited disarmament process following imprisoned leader Abdullah Öcalan's call for the group to disband. The symbolic ceremony is seen as a potential turning point in ending the decades-long insurgency that has killed more than 40,000 people. Ankara welcomed the move as a step toward strengthening security and regional stability, while Kurdish leaders urged Turkey's government and parliament to address demands for greater rights as part of the peace process.

### [\*\*European Court of Human Rights finds Selahattin Demirtaş's 2019 detention arbitrary\*\*](#) (July 2025)

On July 8, 2025, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Selahattin Demirtaş's 2019 detention was arbitrary, politically motivated, and violated multiple rights under the European Convention on Human Rights, including Articles 5 and 18. The Court highlighted failures of judicial oversight and the prolonged, unjustified pretrial detention of the politician, since November 2016.

### [\*\*Turkey's main pro-Kurdish party prepares to again meet with Öcalan for peace efforts\*\*](#) (June 2025)

Turkey's pro-Kurdish People's Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party) is preparing for a visit to İmralı Island to meet with Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), as part of ongoing efforts for peace between Ankara and the Kurdish militants. DEM Party spokesperson Ayşegül Doğan announced that the visit would include members of the party's leadership but did not specify the date. Öcalan, who has been imprisoned since 1999, has long been a central figure in the conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK, which has fought for Kurdish rights since the 1980s.

### [\*\*Turkish police scuffle with May Day protesters in Istanbul\*\*](#) (May 2025)

Turkish police charged May Day protesters in Istanbul, detaining hundreds of people and dragging some away in buses after they tried to defy a ban on public gatherings and march towards Taksim Square. Unions and NGOs had called for protests and marches across Istanbul, which has seen a wave of mass demonstrations in recent weeks over the detention of its mayor and President Tayyip Erdoğan's main political rival, Ekrem İmamoğlu.

### [\*\*Large crowds rally in Istanbul over jailing of Erdoğan's main rival\*\*](#) (March 2025)

Hundreds of thousands of Turks protested in Istanbul against the jailing of Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, President Tayyip Erdoğan's main rival, sustaining the largest demonstrations Turkey has seen in more than a decade. A letter from İmamoğlu was read out at the rally to cheers from the crowd. The main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), other opposition parties, rights groups and some Western powers have all said the case against İmamoğlu is a politicised effort to eliminate a potential electoral

threat to Erdogan.

### [\*\*IBAHRI's concern for Istanbul lawyers' body\*\*](#) (January 2025)

The International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI) has expressed "deep concern" about a recent criminal investigation and lawsuit against the Istanbul Bar Association, its President İbrahim Kaboğlu, and the executive board. It has co-signed a statement calling on Turkish authorities to immediately cease legal proceedings against the Istanbul Bar Association. The statement from several legal and human-rights organisations also calls on Türkiye to respect its obligations under international law to ensure the independence of the profession and the right to freedom of expression.

### [\*\*Istanbul bans November 25 women's rights demonstrations\*\*](#) (November 2024)

Authorities in İstanbul have imposed restrictions on public transportation in Taksim ahead of planned November 25 demonstrations marking the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The İstanbul Governor's Office banned all events in the Beyoğlu district, citing security concerns.

### [\*\*Enlargement reports 2024: Commission outlines progress and priorities for candidate countries\*\*](#) (October 2024)

The Commission has adopted the 2024 enlargement reports, which offer a detailed assessment of the state of play and the progress made by countries seeking to join the European Union. The reports also provide guidance on key reform priorities for each country.

### [\*\*Instagram reopened in Turkey following 8-day ban\*\*](#) (August 2024)

Access to Instagram was reopened in Turkey on August 10 following an eight-day ban that had begun on August 2. On the morning of August 2, Turkish authorities blocked access to the platform, citing failure to remove unlawful posts as justification for the ban. Although not explicitly stated, censoring of posts related to the recent assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran was strongly implied as the impetus for the ban.

### [\*\*Turkey blocks Instagram amid 'censorship' row\*\*](#) (August 2024)

Turkey has blocked access to Instagram, the national communications authority said, after a top government official slammed the social media platform for "censoring" Hamas-related content. The communications authority BTK announced the block on Friday, without giving an explanation for the decision or stating the duration of the ban. The move follows comments by the Turkish presidency's communications director, Fahrettin Altun, criticizing the Meta-owned platform for what he called its decision to block condolence posts on the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh.

### [\*\*Turkey approves 'massacre law' to remove millions of stray dogs\*\*](#) (July 2024)

Turkish legislators have approved a law aimed at removing millions of stray dogs from the country's streets that animal lovers fear will lead to many of the dogs being killed or ending up in neglected, overcrowded shelters. Some critics also say the law will be used to target the opposition, which made huge gains in the latest local elections. The legislation includes penalties for mayors who fail to carry out its provisions and the main opposition party has promised not to implement it.

### [\*\*Unlawful ban on May Day celebrations in Istanbul must be lifted\*\*](#) (May 2024)

The Turkish authorities must urgently lift a ban on a planned May Day solidarity demonstration in İstanbul's Taksim Square and allow people to gather in accordance with a recent ruling by Türkiye's Constitutional Court, Amnesty International said. Trade unions, opposition parties and other civil society organizations have pledged to gather in Taksim Square despite a ban announced by the governor on April 23 and by the Minister of Interior on April 29.

### [\*\*Kurdish politicians convicted in unjust mass trial\*\*](#) (May 2024)

A Turkish court's conviction of 24 Kurdish politicians on bogus charges of crimes against the state follows a manifestly political and unjust trial, Human Rights Watch and the Turkey Human Rights Litigation Support Project said. The court sentenced the 24 politicians to prison terms ranging from 9 to 42 years, while acquitting 12 other politicians who had been on trial with them.

### [\*\*RSF decries draft amendment on "agents of influence" that threatens independent\*\*](#)

## [journalism](#) (May 2024)

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) urges the Turkish government to abandon proposed amendment on “agents of influence” under which journalists working for internationally funded media could potentially be jailed. Such legislation would endanger independent journalism.

## [Turkey’s ‘Foreign Influence Agent Law’ alarms media and civil society](#) (March 2024)

The planned “foreign influence agent law” of the Turkish government would be a major blow to rights and freedoms and take a toll on press and civil society. “Those who work on behalf of another state and create public opinion against Turkey will be put under the spotlight. Influence spying will be included in the Turkish Penal Code as a crime,” Yeni Safak wrote. This news alarmed rights groups and the opposition, since everyone critical of the government can fall under this definition.

## [Turkish parliament strips jailed opposition lawmaker of status](#) (January 2024)

Turkey’s parliament stripped a jailed opposition lawmaker of his status following a judicial ruling, further complicating an unprecedented clash between two of the country’s top courts. Can Atalay, 47, was elected to parliament representing the Workers’ Party of Turkey (TIP) – an ally of the large pro-Kurdish DEM party – while serving an 18-year prison sentence. Atalay was sentenced in April 2022 after being convicted of trying to overthrow the government by allegedly organizing the nationwide Gezi Park protests in 2013 with Turkish philanthropist Osman Kavala, also now jailed, and six others. The chair of Atalay’s party, Erkan Bas, branded the Court of Cassation move as “unconstitutional” and said parliament had also violated the constitution by stripping the jailed lawmaker of his status.

## [Türkiye elections marked by unlevel playing field yet still competitive](#) (May 2023)

Characterized by a high turnout, Türkiye’s general elections were well-managed and offered voters a choice between genuine political alternatives, but the current president and the ruling parties enjoyed an unjustified advantage. Continued restrictions on fundamental freedoms of assembly, association and expression hindered the participation of some opposition politicians and parties, as well as civil society and independent media, international observers said in a statement.

## [Thousands dead, millions displaced: earthquake fallout in Turkey and Syria](#) (February 2023)

Turkey’s death toll has climbed above 41,000, the country’s disaster authority has said. In Syria, already devastated by years of war, authorities have said more than 5,800 people died. According to Hans Kluge, the World Health Organization’s Europe director, relief workers were facing “the worst natural disaster in the region for a century”, adding that 26 million people need assistance across both countries.”

## [‘Disinformation’ tactics silence journalism](#) (October 2022)

According to the BIA Media Monitoring Report of the July-August 2022 period, 126 media representatives faced trials. In the previous three months, at least five media representatives, including three women and one LGBTI+, were detained. The most important agenda of the three months was the “Disinformation Law.”

## [Turkey detains medical group head on ‘terrorist propaganda’ charge](#) (October 2022)

Turkish police detained the head of the Turkish Medical Association (TTB), Sebnem Korur Fincanci, for allegedly “spreading terrorist group propaganda.” The state-owned Anadolu news agency said an investigation was launched over statements Fincanci made to Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militant group-linked media last week on alleged chemical weapons use by the Turkish armed forces. The TTB described her arrest as a “political lynching” and said it was the final stage of pressure exerted by authorities on the medical group and its leaders. It demanded that she be released immediately after her statement is taken.

## **ARCHIVED NEWS**

[Turkey: Court upholds exit from treaty on violence against women](#) (July 2022)

[Turkey’s top appeals court upholds jail term for prominent opposition figure](#) (May 2022)

[Top appeals court upholds jail term for prominent opposition figure](#) (May 2022)

[Philanthropist sentenced to life in Turkey in 'travesty' trial over Gezi Park protests](#) (April 2022)

[Council of Europe Congress highlights "generally degrading situation" of local democracy in Turkey](#) (March 2022)

[Osman Kavala case: Council of Europe launches proceedings against Turkey](#) (February 2022)

[Erdogan tightens grip on media with circular on family values](#) (January 2022)

[Boğaziçi University students protesting: 14 detained](#) (October 2021)

[Turkish government increases pressure on social media](#) (September 2021)

[Istanbul police attack peace rally, detain several](#) (September 2021)

[Turkey to further ease coronavirus restrictions from July](#) (June 2021)

[Committee of Ministers of CoE gives warning to Turkey](#) (June 2021)

[Büyükkada trial: Constitutional Court rules that rights advocate Eser's arrest was unlawful](#) (June 2021)

[Exiled Turkish journalist attacked in Germany](#) (July 2021)

[İstanbul Pride March: Several people detained](#) (June 2021)

[Erdoğan reveals stricter COVID-19 measures during Ramadan](#) (April 2021)

[Diyarbakır police detain dozens of women in early morning raid](#) (April 2021)

[Hrant Dink murder: people sentenced to life in prison](#) (March 2021)

[Boğaziçi protests: police detain 12 students for carrying rainbow flags](#) (March 2021)

[Turkey sentences journalist to 27 years in jail](#) (December 2020)

[Constitutional Court forwards Kavala's application to General Assembly](#) (December 2020)

[Torture in Turkish prisons under scrutiny again following inmate's death](#) (October 2020)

[New Turkish indictment prolongs 'torture' for philanthropist Kavala](#) (October 2020)

[PACE Rapporteurs Call for Release of Kavala](#) (June 2020)

[Six HDP co-mayors removed from duty](#) (May 2020)

[Turkey Amends Criminal Procedure And Execution Provisions](#) (May 2020)

[Coronavirus stokes tensions between Erdogan and mayor](#) (April 2020)

[Turkish activist re-arrested hours after his Gezi Park acquittal](#) (April 2020)

[Turkish Law on Social Media Delayed by Pandemic](#) (April 2020)

[Yiğit Aksakoğlu to be Released on Probation, Arrest of Osman Kavala to Continue](#) (June 2019)

[Civil Society Organizations from Germany: 'Kavala and Aksakoğlu Should be Released'](#) (June 2019)

[CHP members say ruling party fears losing billions in grants to charities tied to government](#) (May 2019)

[Turkish police use tear gas to break up Women's Day march](#) (March 2019)

[Minister Kasapoğlu launched 2019 Year of Volunteering](#) (March 2019)

[Turkish police use tear gas to break up Women's Day march](#) (March 2019)

[Minister Kasapoğlu launched 2019 Year of Volunteering](#) (March 2019)

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[Ministry of Interior to collect information of association members](#) (October 2018)

[Turkey issues first decree for new executive presidential system](#) (July 2018)

[The Start of a New Era in Turkey: Presidential System of Government](#) (July 2018)

[Understanding The "Turkish Model" Of Presidential System](#) (July 2018)

[Turkey ends state of emergency after two years](#) (July 2018)

[Turkey election: Erdogan win ushers in new presidential era](#) (July 2018)

[Turkey ends state of emergency, but eyes tough terror bill](#) (July 2018)

[Turkey's Erdogan says state of emergency may be lifted after June 24 elections](#) (June 2018)

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[Q & A: Turkey's Elections](#) (June 2018)

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[Turkish government to extend state emergency for seventh time](#) (April 2018)

[Ban on access to website violates freedom of expression: Constitutional Court](#) (December 2017)

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[Court arrests Turkish activist Osman Kavala over failed coup attempt](#) (November 2017)

[Turkish LGBTI activists condemn 'illegal' ban on events in Ankara](#) (November 2017)

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['Massive anxiety' as Turkey cracks down on international NGOs](#) (October 2017)

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[Turkish PM cools down demands to reinstate death penalty](#) (August 2016)

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[Europe and US urge Turkey to respect rule of law after failed coup](#) (July 2016)

[Turkey issues arrest warrants for 42 journalists after failed coup](#) (July 2016)

[In latest escalation, 102 media outlets closed by decree](#) (July 2016)

[Turkey's Erdogan shuts schools, charities in first state of emergency decree](#) (July 2016)

[Turkey dismisses military, shuts media outlets in crackdown](#) (July 2016)

[President Erdogan texts 68 million people in fresh call for protests](#) (July 2016)

[Turkey coup attempt: State of emergency announced](#) (July 2016)

[Turkey to temporarily suspend European Convention on Human Rights after coup attempt](#) (July 2016)

[Turkey: Istanbul gay pride march banned over 'security' concern](#) (June 2016)

[Turkey jails Cumhuriyet journalists Can Dundar and Erdem Gul](#) (May 2016)

[Turkish LGBT group releases annual monitoring report on hate crimes](#) (May 2016)

[Erdoğan's latest target is CSOs](#) (April 2016) *(Turkish)*

[How Turkey uses terrorism to justify its crackdown on the press](#) (March 2016)

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[Ruling AKP creating its own NGOs](#) (March 2016)

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[Turkey Dominates Global Twitter Censorship](#) (October 2015)

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[Security Bill Undermines Rights](#) (October 2014)

[Turkish Parliament to Consider New Protest Laws](#) (October 2014)

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[Action Plan of Right to Peaceful Freedom of Assembly](#) (June 2014)

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[Police fire tear gas at Republic Day protesters](#) (October 2012)

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[Confirmed pre-trial detention of defender Osman Isci and 27 trade union members: Joint press release](#) (July 2012)

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[Activists prosecuted for criticising the judges](#) (February 2011)

[Human Rights Watch slams journalists' arrests in Turkey](#) (March 2010)

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[Turkey: Summary of Amnesty International's Concerns in Turkey, July to December 2009](#) (March 2010)

## **HISTORICAL NOTES**

Until 2004, when a new Associations Law was enacted, the autonomy of civil society in Türkiye remained heavily restricted. The new law was widely welcomed by both civil society actors and the European Union as a positive step toward expanding civic space. Further progress came in 2008 with the adoption of the Law on Foundations.

The operating environment for civil society began to deteriorate following the Gezi Park protests in 2013, which were triggered by the government's urban development plans but evolved into broader anti-government demonstrations. Civil society has since faced mounting pressure linked to ongoing conflicts in the Kurdish region, instability related to the Syrian conflict, and a failed coup attempt in 2016, which paved the way for government measures curbing the freedoms of association, assembly, and expression.

Türkiye officially transitioned to a presidential system of government on July 9, 2018, when Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was inaugurated for a new term. The new system has been widely criticized for concentrating excessive power in the president. Nevertheless, on October 10, 2018, a regulation on the organization and duties of the Directorate General of Relations with Civil Society came into force, introducing targets to improve the civil society environment.

In late 2022, the Specialized Committee on Civil Society Organizations in the Development Period was established to contribute to the preparation of the 12th National Development Plan (2024-2028). The committee's main objective was to increase CSO participation in public policy planning, development, monitoring, and supervision, though the diversity of CSOs represented in the committee remained limited.

Also in 2022, Parliament adopted the Law on Sport Clubs and Sport Federations (No. 7405), which allows sports clubs and federations to convert their legal status from associations to corporations. Since then, approximately 20,000 sports clubs and federations have made this transition, further reducing the overall number of registered associations in Türkiye.

According to Birgün Newspaper, by the end of 2024, prosecutors had opened 4,379 investigation files under the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations, accusing 11,041 people of a total of 14,016 offenses. In 2023, 4,097 such files were opened, targeting 12,571 individuals with 17,120 alleged offenses. This trend is also reflected in Constitutional Court rulings on violations of the right to assembly, which rose from 602 in 2022 to 1,403 in 2023.

In line with the 12th National Development Program, the 2025 Annual Presidential Program highlighted the increasing number and diversity of CSOs; recognized the importance of ensuring their effective participation in decision-making processes; and stressed the need to strengthen cooperation between CSOs, public institutions, and the private sector.

Although the Directorate General of Relations with Civil Society published the Draft Civil Society Strategy Document and Action Plan (2023-2027) for public consultation on its website at the end of 2022, by the end of February 2025, the document had still not entered into force. Moreover, CSOs that provided feedback had not been informed about how their feedback was evaluated. At the end of 2024, the Directorate also published draft amendments to the Law on Associations and Law on Aid Collections, inviting input from CSOs and relevant experts. The Directorate General of Foundations has been working on draft amendments to the Law on Foundations to comply recommendations from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to counter money laundering and the financing of terrorism. However, no legislative proposals had been submitted to the Parliament as of mid-2025.

## **Key Events**

### **European Commission Report Highlights Challenges to Civic Space**

According to the 2024 Türkiye Report by the European Commission, Türkiye has seen continued democratic backsliding, particularly in the areas of rule of law, fundamental rights, and judicial independence. Structural deficiencies in the presidential system remain unaddressed, with a centralized concentration of power undermining checks and balances. The report highlighted significant challenges for CSOs, including increased administrative and judicial pressure, restrictive regulations, and shrinking civic space. Freedom of assembly and association is hindered through bans, intimidation, and bureaucratic hurdles. Human rights defenders, activists, and independent CSOs face targeted pressure, limiting their ability to operate freely. Media outlets critical of the government continue to face harassment, fines, and judicial proceedings. The European Commission also notes insufficient efforts to improve human rights protections and address systemic concerns about democratic accountability and pluralism. Civil society remains resilient but faces a hostile operating environment, exacerbating restrictions on civic engagement and advocacy.

### **Judicial Operations Targeting Opposition Officials in Istanbul and Elsewhere**

Since March 19, 2025, a series of large-scale judicial operations targeted the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, culminating in the arrest of Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu and dozens of municipal officials and affiliates. The multi-phase investigation was based on serious allegations including forming and leading a criminal organization, bribery, bid rigging, aggravated fraud, unlawful acquisition of personal data, and aiding a terrorist organization, also linked with the above mentioned 'urban consensus' investigation. The first wave began on March 19 with the detention of 106 individuals. İmamoğlu was arrested four days later on March 23, along with 30 others, in a move that drew strong national attention. Subsequent waves of the operation expanded the scope significantly. The second wave, on April 26, led to the detention of 52 individuals, including senior municipal officials and executives. Eighteen people were arrested, 26 were released under judicial control, and four were placed under house arrest. The third wave on May 20 focused on the municipality's media and public relations departments, detaining 22 people, several of whom cooperated with authorities under the "effective remorse" provision. Some people who were initially arrested in this phase were later released to house arrest. The fourth wave, on May 23, targeted high-ranking bureaucrats and executives of municipal subsidiaries. Forty-nine people were detained in this round, though judicial outcomes had not been finalized at the time of reporting. As part of the broader investigation, two district mayors—Şişli Mayor Resul Emrah Şahan and Beylikdüzü Mayor Mehmet Murat Çalık—were also arrested on charges of aiding an armed terrorist organization. Şişli Deputy Mayor Ebru Özdemir was likewise arrested under the same charges.

Following these arrests, the Ministry of Interior suspended all three from their duties. The Şişli District Governor, was appointed as a trustee in place of Şahan. İmamoğlu and Çalık were also formally suspended from office. The investigation, widely referred to as the "city consensus" probe, centers on

allegations that İmamođlu and his administration forged an electoral alliance during the Istanbul municipal elections with the People’s Democratic Congress, a coalition accused of links to terrorist organizations. This alleged political coordination forms the basis of the terrorism-related charges. In this context, IMM Deputy Secretary General Mahir Polat and Reform Institute Director Mehmet Ali alıřkan were also arrested; Polat was later placed under house arrest due to health issues.

Overall, the operations have led to the detention of at least 229 people, with at least 49 formally arrested, several placed under judicial supervision or house arrest, and multiple high-profile suspensions and trustee appointments. The scale and political sensitivity of the investigation have triggered widespread controversy regarding judicial impartiality, political interference, and the broader implications for democracy in Trkiye. Since March 19, 2025, the political climate in Trkiye has become increasingly tense. The detentions have sparked widespread national and international concern over the state of democracy and rule of law. Protests have erupted in major cities, with opposition parties and civil society condemning the detentions as politically motivated. The government, however, claims that these measures were part of a legal investigation. This development has also deepened societal polarization and intensified debates over judicial independence and democratic backsliding in Trkiye. Police have responded to the protests with disproportionate force in many cities. Human rights organizations have also raised alarm about the government violations, including the mistreatment of detainees and restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly. Within the scope of the investigation, arrests targeting numerous politicians and municipal officials from Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and other CHP-run district municipalities continue as of the end of May.

On November 1, 2025, 237 days after Mayor Ekrem İmamođlu and his colleagues were arrested, the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office announced that the Istanbul Municipality (İBB) indictment was completed. İmamođlu is charged with “organizing a criminal syndicate for the purpose of obtaining financial profit” and faces a prison sentence ranging from 828 to 2,352 years. 3,741-page indictment names 402 suspects: 105 in custody, 170 under judicial control, seven wanted on arrest warrants, and five listed as complainants. In total, 407 individuals are charged with 142 separate acts.

## INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR NOT-FOR-PROFIT LAW

<https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/turkiye>