

**Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale**

<b>Bilagsnr.:</b>	<b>729</b>
Land:	Tyrkiet
Kilde:	The Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland
Titel:	COI Query Response. Turkey – Information on Political Corruption
Udgivet:	31. marts 2025
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	21. juli 2025

# RESEARCHED AND COMPILED BY THE REFUGEE DOCUMENTATION CENTRE OF IRELAND ON THE 31 MARCH 2025

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## DISCLAIMER

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. All COI Query Responses are compiled in line with the Common EU Guidelines (2008) and the EUAA Methodology (2023). This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. Please refer to all documents cited.

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## COI QUERY RESPONSE

### TURKEY - INFORMATION ON POLITICAL CORRUPTION

The *Arab Center Washington DC* in March 2025 notes that: “Turkey’s political landscape has undergone a dramatic shift with the recent arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s most formidable rival. The pressure on Imamoglu has been building for some time, but events accelerated last week. On March 18, 2025, Istanbul University annulled Imamoglu’s undergraduate diploma, citing, according to the Associated Press, “alleged irregularities in his 1990 transfer from a university in Northern Cyprus.” Under Turkish law, presidential candidates are required to hold a university degree, making the annulment a direct barrier to his eligibility to run against Erdoğan in 2028. Just hours later, in the early morning of March 19, a sweeping police operation detained Imamoglu and several close associates on charges of corruption and financing terrorism. This triggered massive protests across major cities that were met with a forceful crackdown. On March 23, Imamoglu and top aides were formally arrested on corruption charges.”<sup>1</sup>

The *USA Today Online* in March 2025 mentioned that: “Thousands of people, including the person dressed in the inflatable Pikachu costume, hit the streets in Antalya on Wednesday to express frustration over the March 19 arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, who was detained on political corruption and terrorism charges, Reuters reported. Imamoglu, 54, is considered to be President Tayyip Erdogan’s biggest political rival in the 2028 presidential election, according to reporting by Reuters. Close to 15 million people voted for Imamoglu in a presidential primary, municipal officials told Al Jazeera English on Monday.”<sup>2</sup>

The same document states that: “Nearly 1,900 people have been detained since the nationwide demonstrations began eight days ago, Reuters reported. Just under 500 people have been released,

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<sup>1</sup> Arab Center Washington DC (29 March 2025) The Arrest of Ekrem Imamoglu: A Critical Turning Point in Turkey’s Politics

<sup>2</sup> USA Today Online (27 March 2025) Watch as protester dressed in inflatable Pikachu costume flees from Turkish police

and more than 660 others were still being processed, while 150 police officers were injured, the country's Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya told Reuters.”<sup>3</sup>

The *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)* in March 2025 points out that: “We are very concerned by the detention of at least 92 people by the Turkish authorities over the past week, including Ekrem İmamoğlu, Istanbul's democratically-elected mayor, who is facing corruption charges and has been removed from office. These detentions triggered country-wide demonstrations that were met with unlawful blanket bans on protests in three cities. Over 1,000 people have been detained during the protests, among them at least nine media workers.”<sup>4</sup>

The *Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP)* in March 2025 reported that: “Turkish police have arrested 1,133 people since mass protests erupted last Wednesday following the detention of Ekrem İmamoğlu, an opposition leader and main rival to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The government accused İmamoğlu of corruption, but opponents say the charges were merely an excuse to remove him from the political scene.” [...]”<sup>5</sup>

In March 2025 *Human Rights Watch* states that: “The formal order by an Istanbul court to detain Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu is the latest example of the justice system weaponized to remove a leading opposition politician from the political scene, Human Rights Watch said today. Mayor İmamoğlu's detention, nominally based on a corruption investigation by the Istanbul Prosecutor's Office, came on the morning of March 23, 2025, the day his Republican People's Party (CHP) nominated him as their presidential candidate. The detention demonstrates how the presidency of the incumbent, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, exercises excessive influence over Türkiye's prosecutors and courts.”<sup>6</sup>

The document further notes that: “The court ordered the detention of İmamoğlu and the mayor of Istanbul's Beylikdüzü district, a member of the same party, along with 43 others, pending the completion of the investigation into corruption, and released 41 others under judicial controls. The court also ordered the detention of three others, among them the mayor of Istanbul's Şişli district, in a separate investigation into terrorism links but rejected, for now, the prosecutor's request to jail İmamoğlu in connection with that investigation. None of those detained have been charged with any offense. The Prosecutor's Office claimed to be investigating İmamoğlu with a view to bringing charges of “establishing and leading a criminal organization,” “bribe taking,” “illegal recording of personal data,” and “public tender bid rigging.” The alleged evidence against him includes vague statements by witnesses with protected identities.”<sup>7</sup>

*The Conversation* in March 2025 points out that: “Turkey is in turmoil after Istanbul's mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu, a leading opposition figure and potential challenger to Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, was arrested on March 19 on charges of corruption. More than 1,000 people who protested against the arrest have also been detained as hundreds of thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in anger at what they say is a major blow against democracy. İmamoğlu, who

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<sup>3</sup> ibid

<sup>4</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (25 March 2025) Türkiye: Concern at widespread detentions

<sup>5</sup> Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) (24 March 2025) Turkish Authorities Arrest Over 1,100 in Crackdown on Protests

<sup>6</sup> Human Rights Watch (24 March 2025) Türkiye: Court Jails Istanbul Mayor

<sup>7</sup> ibid

denies all charges against him, has since been endorsed as the candidate for the 2028 presidential elections for the Republican People's Party (CHP)."<sup>8</sup>

A report issued by *Human Rights Watch* in January 2025 states that: "Political divisions and power struggles within Türkiye's top courts and increasing reports of corruption within the state and judiciary have further undermined human rights and the rule of law."<sup>9</sup>

The *Turkish Minutes* in October 2024 reported that: "The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) by Transparency International also paints a bleak picture. Turkey's CPI score dropped from 45 in 2015 to 36 in 2023, reflecting widespread corruption, cronyism and the misuse of public funds by the ruling elites." [...]<sup>10</sup>

The *US Department of State Country Reports On Human Rights Practices* in April 2024 mentioned that: "While opposition politicians frequently accused the ruling party of corruption, there were only isolated journalistic or official investigations of government corruption. Journalists and civil society organizations revealed they feared retribution for reporting on corruption. Authorities continued to pursue criminal and civil charges against journalists reporting on corruption allegations. Courts and RTUK regularly blocked access to press reports regarding corruption."<sup>11</sup>

A report issued by *Freedom House* in February 2024 states that: "Corruption remains a major problem, including at the highest levels of government. Enforcement of anticorruption laws is inconsistent, and anticorruption agencies are ineffective, creating a culture of impunity."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The Conversation (24 March 2025) The peculiar Turkish corruption issue behind Istanbul mayor's arrest – and how it became a tool of political oppression

<sup>9</sup> Human Rights Watch (16 January 2025) World Report 2025: Türkiye

<sup>10</sup> Turkish Minutes (October 2024) [OPINION] A crisis foretold: societal decay and democratic erosion in Turkey, p.12

<sup>11</sup> US Department of State (22 April 2024) 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Turkey (Türkiye)).

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