# Turkish opposition leader criticises Keir Starmer over failure to condemn İmamoğlu's arrest



The leader of Turkey’s largest opposition party, the Republican People’s Party (CHP), Özgür Özel, has publicly expressed his profound disappointment with UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer for his glaring failure to stand against the crackdown on democracy represented by the recent arrest of Istanbul's mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu. Speaking to The Guardian, Özel highlighted Starmer’s inability to outright condemn İmamoğlu’s detention as a significant oversight that not only undermines democratic values but also prioritises political expediency over human rights.

İmamoğlu's arrest last month on dubious corruption charges, widely viewed as politically motivated by opposition leaders, has ignited the largest anti-government protests in Turkey in over a decade, drawing hundreds of thousands of citizens into the streets in defiance. Özel described the legal maneuvers against the mayor as part of a “political trial,” emphasising that President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan manipulates the legal system as a tool to crush dissent.

“He has his lawyers imprison those who disturb him and his team politically,” Özel asserted during the interview. Governing Istanbul—a city of approximately 16 million residents—as a formidable rival to Erdoğan, İmamoğlu’s political significance only amplifies the CHP's claims of ulterior motives behind the charges. With his designation as the CHP's presidential candidate following his arrest, political tensions are escalating sharply ahead of the anticipated elections in 2028, although some insiders suggest that early elections may emerge, foreshadowing a turbulent political climate.

In light of these developments, the CHP has launched rallies aimed at mobilising public support against Erdoğan's oppressive regime, coupled with an economic boycott of companies perceived to back the president. Özel noted that despite the possibility of İmamoğlu remaining incarcerated, plans for his presidential campaign are already underway, framing the next election as a critical juncture that will determine whether Türkiye embraces democracy or succumbs to autocracy once and for all.

The political maelstrom is exacerbated by Erdoğan's own legal actions against Özel, who has been accused of insulting the president by calling the current regime a “junta that is afraid of elections.” Özel, who has dismissed these charges as intimidation tactics, conveyed his escalating concern that Erdoğan may opt for more extreme measures against him should he persist in challenging the regime.

Internationally, European leaders, including French President Emmanuel Macron and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, have denounced İmamoğlu’s detention, which Özel argues necessitates a robust response calling for greater pressure on Ankara to halt its democratic backsliding. He raised alarms about allowing Turkey’s situation to be driven solely by security dialogues, especially considering its status as a major NATO ally under an autocratic government.

Despite these urgent developments, the UK government, under Starmer’s leadership, has remained largely passive, with Stephen Doughty, Minister for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories, offering minimal input and reiterating the UK’s generic calls for Turkey to respect international commitments and the rule of law.

Özel’s comments reverberate with a sense of urgency, emphasising that both Erdoğan's authoritarianism and Starmer's negligence are detrimental, underscoring, “The loser of this process, not just in my eyes but in the eyes of democratic forces worldwide, is Erdoğan in Turkey and Starmer at the international level.” As the CHP rallies to oppose the current administration, the political atmosphere in Turkey remains precarious, teetering under the weight of these unsettling developments.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arrest_of_Ekrem_%C4%B0mamo%C4%9Flu> - This Wikipedia article provides detailed information on the detention and arrest of Ekrem İmamoğlu, highlighting the charges and political implications surrounding his case. It corroborates the opposition's view that the arrest was politically motivated and sparked significant protests in Turkey.
* <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-arrest-of-ekrem-imamoglu-a-critical-turning-point-in-turkeys-politics/> - This article from the Arab Center DC discusses the broader political context of İmamoğlu's arrest, emphasizing its impact on Turkey's political landscape and the implications for the upcoming elections. It supports claims of increased authoritarianism under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.
* <https://www.turkishminute.com/2025/04/10/istanbul-courts-order-release-of-107-jailed-for-joining-protests-over-mayors-arrest4/> - This Turkish Minute article reports on the release of protesters arrested during demonstrations against İmamoğlu's arrest, illustrating the scale of public unrest and international concern over his detention.
* <https://www.google.com/search?q=özgür+özel+interview+the+guardian> - This search query is intended to find interviews or statements by Özgür Özel in The Guardian, where he expressed disappointment with international leaders' responses to İmamoğlu's situation.
* <https://www.euronews.com/2025/03/25/eu-denounces-ekrem-imamoglu-arrest-as-turkey-protests-continue> - Although not directly available, searching for news articles on Euronews would typically provide coverage of European leaders' condemnation of İmamoğlu's detention, supporting assertions about international reactions.