

Imprisoned CHP presidential candidate ?mamo?lu indicted on charges of “espionage” in Turkey

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27 October 2025

President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an’s use of the judiciary to attack democratic rights and build an authoritarian regime reached a new level with the “political espionage investigation” launched Friday. Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (?BB) Mayor and Republican People’s Party (CHP) presidential candidate Ekrem ?mamo?lu and his campaign director Necati Özkan, who have both been in prison since March on charges of “corruption,” have now been subjected to a new indictment. The immediate impact of the action is that it would keep the two men in prison even if the corruption charges were overturned.

Opposition journalist Merdan Yanarda? was also arrested, and a trustee was appointed to the TELE1 television channel, where he served as chief editor. TELE1 was one of the few opposition channels broadcasting nationwide, and Yanarda? and the channel had long faced government pressure.

The political nature of this operation was revealed in a statement by the Istanbul Chief Prosecutor’s Office declaring Yanarda? “guilty” and appointing a trustee to the channel on these grounds. The statement, made while Yanarda? was still detained on “espionage” charges, reads:

Merdan Yanarda?, the chief editor of the TV channel TELE1, who was detained on suspicion of espionage, has committed crimes through his words and actions many times; he is the real operator of the channel; official records show his son Alp Yanarda? as the company owner. Yanarda? used the TV channel TELE1 in these crimes. On these grounds, the Istanbul Criminal Court of Peace has today decided to appoint ... [a] trustee to the ABC Radio Television and Digital Broadcasting Corporation, the owner of the channel.

The investigation is based on digital materials obtained from Hüseyin Gün—who was arrested on July 4, 2025, and who is alleged to have engaged in espionage activities on behalf of countries such as Britain, the US, and Israel—as well as on Gün’s conversations. It is alleged that Gün “transferred information he had gathered on matters related to Middle Eastern countries, African countries, and our country [Turkey] to individuals

belonging to a foreign country identified as conducting intelligence activities.”

?mamo?lu and his advisor Özkan are accused of being accomplices to a crime by “collaborating [with Gün] in the 2019 local election campaign” and sharing voter information with him. Routine election campaign activities such as voter profiling, reporting, and social media analysis are being portrayed as criminal acts.

Despite these allegations of “espionage,” Ankara has not requested an official statement from NATO allies London or Washington. In 2019, ?mamo?lu won the Istanbul elections, then unlawfully repeated at the request of Erdo?an’s Justice and Development Party (AKP), by a margin of 800,000 votes.

Journalist Yanarda? is accused of being in contact with Gün, “organizing the press aspect of the election process and engaging in activities to manipulate the 2019 local elections in collaboration with foreign intelligence services, thereby committing espionage.”

Cumhuriyet columnist Bar?? Terko?lu wrote that the allegations against Yanarda? were baseless, pointing out that Gün’s testimony revealed his direct ties with the state’s defense industry, writing: “Gün referred to Ali? [Latif Aral] as his ‘family friend’ and said, ‘we founded a company together.’ Ali? is the owner of Sars?lmaz Savunma, a well-known company in the defense industry. He works with the government on projects such as ATAK, HÜRKU?, HÜRJET, and KAAN.”

The espionage operation is an attempt to discredit ?mamo?lu and his overwhelming election victory over the AKP, paving the way for the appointment of a trustee to the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (?BB). On March 19, as mass protests erupted across the country against ?mamo?lu’s detention, he was not arrested on the “terrorism” charges brought against him, preventing the appointment of a trustee to the municipality.

During his interrogation, ?mamo?lu denied the allegations, stating, “In my view, espionage is equivalent to treason,” adding, “Burning Rome is more realistic [than these allegations].”

?mamo?lu also argued that the accusations were baseless, saying, “It is absolutely illogical that [Hüseyin Gün] could have directed and influenced my entire campaign within 15 days. Because I had been running a seven-month election campaign at that time. It is not in line with the normal course of life to reduce my entire campaign period to just 15 days, as if it had been thrown

in the trash.”

In his statement, journalist Yanarda? said that he had been “fighting against imperialism and Zionism” since his youth, adding, “I am a left-wing and patriotic journalist. It is unthinkable that I would engage in any activity against my country or our people.”

?brahim Pa?al?, a pro-government writer for Yeni ?afak, was appointed to manage the TELE1 channel. The channel, which has started broadcasting from tape, had its YouTube archive deleted Saturday, and its account was subsequently closed.

CHP leader Özgür Özel said in a statement following the arrest, “Since the accusations of theft and corruption against our friends didn’t work, now... they’ve turned to the last resort of espionage accusations.”

Özel added that if anyone is to be prosecuted for sharing data with a person linked to foreign intelligence, “first, the former head of the National Intelligence Organization (M?T), Hakan Fidan [current Minister of Foreign Affairs], who had MIT data stolen, should be prosecuted... And above all, Recep Tayyip Erdo?an should be prosecuted.”

A statement from the Peoples’ Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party), which mediated the negotiations between the Erdo?an government and imprisoned Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan, said, “It is clear that another judicial operation has been launched, demonstrating how distorted the scales of justice are in this country. The role of the law should be to ensure justice. Unfortunately, however, judicial mechanisms in Turkey have long been used as a tool to shape politics.”

In mid-October, comments by Pervin Buldan, a member of the “?mrali Delegation” of the DEM Party who met with Öcalan and is a member of parliament, regarding the press’s critical approach to the negotiations, were seen as a call to the government for censorship and led to harsh criticism. Buldan stated, “[Öcalan] clearly expressed that many channels and commentators still maintain their hostile discourse from the past and that these circles are not concerned with a solution and peace, but rather with rhetoric and hostility.”

Buldan continued: “The fact that some commentators, journalists, and channels use comments and statements against the process is not a problem we can solve. Because when we look at it, today the media is in the hands of the government, and the judiciary is in the hands of the AKP. We are talking about a government that has all the power and dominates every area of life. Therefore, it is again the government’s responsibility to improve and eliminate all these issues. But I would also like to point out that no progress has been made in this regard.”

The arrest of ?mamo?lu and Yanarda? on suspicious “espionage” allegations and the appointment of a trustee to the TELE1 channel are a clear attack on fundamental democratic rights such as the right to a fair trial, the presumption of innocence, and freedom of the press and expression.

Understanding the class nature of this attack is essential to understanding how to combat it. The acceleration of authoritarian regime building in Turkey stems from the crisis of the global capitalist system and is part of the process of authoritarian and far-right tendencies gaining strength worldwide.

The Erdo?an government’s gradual elimination of democratic rights is closely linked to the intensifying class war against the working class. With growing social inequality, mounting popular opposition, and developing global war conditions, the ruling classes everywhere are concluding that they cannot protect their interests, even to a limited extent, through democratic forms of government.

This trend has accelerated with the inauguration of fascist President Donald Trump in the US and his attempt to establish a presidential dictatorship in line with the interests of the financial oligarchy.

?mamo?lu’s arrest in March came a few days after Erdo?an’s phone call with Trump. This latest operation came after Erdo?an was hosted by Trump at the White House in late September. While Erdo?an gave his full support to Trump’s Gaza agreement, he ensured that Washington would not object to any steps he might take at home. This new colonial agreement was supported by the CHP and DEM Party.

Regardless of their tactical differences, all parties of the capitalist order are facilitating a turn to authoritarianism and war, allied with imperialist powers and opposed to the working class. Under increasing pressure from the government, the CHP is trying to find a compromise with Erdo?an and insistently emphasizes its own pro-NATO character.

The DEM Party, meanwhile, is perpetuating the illusion that the Erdo?an government can resolve the Kurdish issue and pursue democracy and peace. Both parties are attempting to channel the growing anger and opposition among the working class and youth into capitalist politics and an electoral dead end.

Social opposition to the construction of authoritarian regimes and anti-democratic attacks by governments is also global in nature. An estimated 7 million people participated in the “No Kings” protests against Trump in the US on October 18. In Turkey, millions of people are estimated to have participated in weeks of mass protests following the arrest of ?mamo?lu.

The critical issue is arming the developing mass movement with a revolutionary perspective. The only way to secure democratic and social rights is through the transfer of power to the working class. This requires mobilizing workers to fight for an international socialist program, independent of all capitalist parties whether in power or in “opposition”. This is the perspective for which the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal (the Socialist Equality Party – Fourth International) is fighting.



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