

Split in Turkish opposition CHP becomes official: Özgür Özel announces new party

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The elected chairman of the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP), Özgür Özel, announced that he and the party's parliamentary deputies would found a new party in his final group meeting speech in parliament on Tuesday.

At least 80 of the CHP's 135 deputies and the elected provincial chairs of 74 of the country's 81 provinces attended the meeting. The founding petition of the new party is expected to be submitted to the Interior Ministry in the coming days. This will formalize the de facto split within the main opposition party since May 21, when a court, exceeding the limits of its jurisdiction, removed the CHP's elected leadership through a ruling of "absolute nullity" and reinstated the former leadership of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has targeted dozens of mayors and municipal administrations—including Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor and CHP presidential candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu—through a politically motivated judicial operation, is seeking by means of this preventive coup to forestall a likely defeat in the next elections. The fact that Özel's new party and İmamoğlu still lead in the polls expresses the opposition of broad layers of the population to this police-state repression.

However, the repression directed against the CHP, the party of Atatürk, founder of the Turkish Republic, and the split within it are the expression of a far broader crisis of rule in Türkiye and internationally. What is driving the process, beyond Erdoğan's efforts to preserve his own power, is the ruling class's drive to consolidate its rule amid mounting international and class tensions.

As a United States and NATO ally, Türkiye is being drawn into the vortex of both the escalating war against Russia in Ukraine and the criminal US-Israeli war

against Iran. At the same time, the working class, hit by a deepening cost-of-living crisis and an austerity offensive, is mounting ever-greater resistance. The response of the ruling class as a whole is to escalate militarism and construct a police state. This involves a sweeping attack on basic democratic rights—the right to vote and to stand for election, freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of association—whose ultimate target is the working class.

In his speech, Özel declared that the new party would be the main opposition in parliament and would come to power in the next elections. Having accepted the court's lawless ruling despite the overwhelming support of CHP members and voters for the elected leadership, Özel claimed that although they were leaving the CHP the party's historic legacy, legitimacy and authority lay with them.

Özel had challenged Kılıçdaroğlu by calling for the chairman to be determined through a ballot in which some two million members would take part, saying that he would step down if he won less than 90 percent of the vote. Stating that he and his supporters would not abandon the jailed mayors, above all İmamoğlu, Özel called for unity under the roof of a "Türkiye Alliance" extending "from social democrats to conservative and nationalist democrats."

The process that led to the split began after the defeat suffered by Erdoğan's Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) at the hands of the CHP in the March 2024 local elections. Following these elections, in which the CHP came first for the first time in 47 years, the government set out to intimidate and neutralise the CHP through a judicial offensive.

İmamoğlu, who was leading Erdoğan in the polls, was jailed in a politically motivated investigation; since then, more than 20 CHP mayors and hundreds of

municipal officials have been imprisoned. In September 2025, a trustee was appointed to the CHP's Istanbul provincial organisation. Although under the constitution authority over party congresses rests with the Supreme Election Board, on May 21, 2026, the Ankara Regional Court of Justice issued an "absolute nullity" ruling on the CHP's previous congresses. This lawless ruling was enforced through the seizure of the CHP headquarters in Ankara by police.

Özel responded to this operation, which trampled on the constitution and the law, with ineffectual legal appeals and an internal party struggle. The Özel leadership collected the signatures of 1,040 delegates, far more than the number required for an extraordinary congress; according to Özel, some 500 of these delegates had voted for K?l?çdarolu in 2023. K?l?çdarolu nonetheless insisted on not convening a congress, citing the court's injunction.

Not content with this, the K?l?çdarolu leadership removed the elected provincial chairs and the officials of the women's and youth branches who supported Özel and moved to purge his faction by initiating expulsion proceedings against deputies and members of the party assembly.

The official split in the CHP has resonated widely in the international press. Reuters described the split as a development that deepens the difficulties confronting Erdoğan's rivals. It noted that the new distribution of parties in parliament could affect the calling of the early elections that Erdoğan requires in order to stand again as a presidential candidate. Although the constitution states, "A person may be elected President of the Republic twice at most," Erdoğan is currently serving his third term and is preparing to stand for a fourth time in 2028.

The *Financial Times* described Özel's new party initiative as a "bold move" capable of reshaping Turkish politics. It wrote that the new party could unite a fragmented opposition and mobilise disaffected voters, and that it was ahead of the AKP in recent polls. *Deutsche Welle* assessed the announcement as a "historic break" in the CHP.

The significance of the split in the CHP cannot be denied, but in terms of their fundamental orientation there is no difference of principle between Erdoğan, K?l?çdarolu and Özel. Each of them is a political representative of a ruling class deeply committed to

imperialism and to the US-NATO military-strategic alliance.

In the 2023 presidential elections, K?l?çdarolu stood against Erdoğan on a right-wing programme that was more pro-NATO and anti-immigrant. At that time, both the Kurdish nationalist movement and the Stalinist, Pabloite and pseudo-left political tendencies lined up behind K?l?çdarolu despite this reactionary campaign. Now K?l?çdarolu is Erdoğan's preferred chairman of the CHP, to which he has been returned by a judicial coup.

Özel's new party will not represent a break with this pro-imperialist and anti-working class tradition, but a continuation of it. Whatever his criticisms of Trump and his "worker-friendly" rhetoric, Özel recently sought to provide international finance capital and NATO with precisely this assurance in articles written for *Newsweek* in the United States and the *Financial Times* in Britain, in which he issued them a friendly warning: if they do not support him and do not halt Erdoğan's dictatorial measures, a social explosion in Türkiye will shake the ruling classes of those countries as well.

The response of the working class to this crisis, which produces war, austerity and dictatorship, must be to break consciously from both pro-imperialist factions of the Turkish ruling class, and from the pseudo-left groups behind them, and to build its own party to advance its own revolutionary solution, aimed at taking power and implementing socialist measures. That party is the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal, the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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