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Resolution of the European Committee of the Regions on the Arrest of Turkish Mayors and the Assault on Local Democracy in Türkiye

(C/2025/3167)

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR),

Whereas:

A. The Mayor of Istanbul Ekrem İmamoğlu was arrested on 19 March 2025 together with over a hundred Turkish local officials and citizens, and charges against him have been confirmed by the Istanbul prosecutor, leading to his suspension from office on 23 March 2025;

B. As Mayor of Istanbul and President of the Union of Municipalities of Türkiye, Ekrem İmamoğlu's leadership is widely associated with aspiration for a future Türkiye based on pluralism, justice, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;

C. The simultaneous cancellation of Mr İmamoğlu's university diploma, with a diploma being a requirement for candidates for the presidency, and his arrest on corruption and terrorism charges constitute clear indications of the politicisation of his case;

D. The arrest of Mr İmamoğlu adds to the ongoing trend of arrests and dismissals of opposition mayors, including the replacement of 14 elected mayors by state appointed trustees since the local elections in March 2023;

E. This practice of dismissing opposition mayors has been condemned as incompatible with local democracy by successive CoR opinions, the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe;

F. Türkiye has systematically misused counter-terrorism laws to target elected officials, opposition politicians and human rights defenders, as noted by the UN Special Rapporteur and the Venice Commission;

G. As a candidate for EU membership, Türkiye is expected to adhere to the highest standards of democracy and the rule of law. Local democracy and effective multilevel governance, irrespective of political affiliation, is a fundamental component of these standards.

1. Strongly condemns the arrests and detentions of local opposition leaders, including Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu. They constitute a severe breach of democratic rules and blatant disregard of the will of the electorate. The systematic targeting of opposition politicians threatens the foundations of democratic societies.

2. Urges the Turkish authorities to immediately release the Mayor of Istanbul and other politicians of the opposition detained for political reasons and calls on the authorities to cease all politically motivated prosecutions and undue pressure on local authorities. Ensuring fairness and impartiality of the judiciary is essential to maintaining public trust in democratic institutions.

3. Stands in solidarity with all local leaders facing undue pressure and persecution. Acknowledges their crucial role in representing the democratic will of their electorate and emphasises the need to protect their independence. Extends its support to the people of Istanbul and all those in Türkiye who are committed to the future of local democracy, as evidenced by the very high turnout in local elections.

4. Stands with the citizens in Türkiye, who are demonstrating for democracy and underlines the importance of the fundamental freedom of assembly and expression. Urges public authorities to stop any form of repression of demonstrators and journalists.

5. Highlights the detrimental impact of these arrests and other attempts by the central government to curtail the power and resources of opposition municipalities on the quality, transparency and responsibilities of local governance. Weakening municipal institutions adversely affects the daily lives of millions of citizens in Türkiye.

6. Welcomes the call by the European Parliament in its resolution on the recent dismissal and arrests of mayors in Türkiye (2025/2546(RSP)) ([1]) to the High Representative/Vice President of the European Commission calling for restrictive measures to be taken against Turkish officials assuming the role of trustee and those appointing them; calls on the High Representative/Vice President of the European Commission to consider imposing restrictive measures under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime.

7. Supports the demands of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in its declaration of 27 March 2025 on *Dismissals of mayors in Türkiye*.

8. Urges the European Commission and the Council to reconsider any further steps related to Türkiye's accession process, given the Turkish government's current disregard of essential criteria for EU membership. Emphasises that continued backsliding on fundamental rights should lead to a review of Türkiye's participation in EU financial and institutional programs.

9. A delegation of the European Committee of the Regions will travel to Türkiye and visit the imprisoned Mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu, thereby expressing in a concrete way the Committee's solidarity and support for all imprisoned Turkish local officials.

10. Reaffirms its commitment to promoting and protecting local democracy in Türkiye, a strategic partner of the EU and an EU candidate country; undertakes to continue collaborating with democratically elected local leaders in Türkiye via its working group on relations with Türkiye, to ensure that democratic principles are respected and upheld at the local level.

11. Instructs its president to forward this Urgent Resolution to the European Commission, the European Parliament, the High Representative/Vice President of the European Commission, the Hungarian, Polish and Danish Presidencies of the Council of the EU and the Turkish authorities, and to ensure that the resolution is translated into Turkish.

Brussels, 3 April 2025.

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions
Kata TÜTTŐ

([1]) https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/en/procedure-file?reference=2025/2546(RSP).