

In this week's *Türkiye in Focus*:

- CHP is grappling with a lawsuit demanding the annulment of the congress in which Özgür Özel was elected as chairman. Tensions between the former and current leadership are escalating by the day.
- The depiction of Prophet Muhammad in a cartoon sparked widespread outrage and reactivated the deep fault lines of polarisation within Turkish society.
- Developments in the Terror-Free Türkiye initiative are increasingly reflected in the discourse of key political actors..

CHP Faces Internal Tensions Amid Ongoing Court Case

The lawsuit filed against the Republican People's Party (CHP) centres on allegations of procedural irregularities and suspected fraud in the party congress where Özgür Özel was elected chairman. The case directly challenges the legitimacy of the new leadership. On Monday, the court postponed the verdict to September 8. This delay has prolonged the political uncertainty within the main opposition party, leaving room for speculation and internal tension.

The court faces three potential outcomes:

- Either uphold the legitimacy of the current leadership; or
- Annul the congress on grounds of "absolute nullity" and reinstate the previous administration led by Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu; or
- Appoint a trustee (kayyum) to oversee the party and organise a new congress.

Predicting the court's decision is difficult, but legal experts and political observers have focused particularly on the possibility of absolute nullity, as that term appeared in official court records from May. This raised the stakes significantly and shifted attention to the potential return of Kılıçdaroğlu.

If the court decides to annul the congress, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu would technically regain the party leadership. This scenario is highly divisive, as Kılıçdaroğlu appears to harbour a grudge against the leadership that removed him in such an unceremonious manner. Pro-CHP media and many influential party figures have harshly criticised Kılıçdaroğlu in recent months.

In this context, senior CHP politicians and several mayors who met with Kılıçdaroğlu attempted to persuade him not to reclaim the leadership and instead work in harmony with the party's current direction, but this did not appear to influence Kılıçdaroğlu's decision, as he reportedly believes the party has been poorly managed under Özgür Özel's leadership.



(Mustafa Çiftçi - Anadolu Agency)

On the other hand, Kılıçdaroğlu has subtly echoed concerns about the legitimacy of the congress and suggested that the party has become overly focused on the legal troubles of Istanbul's former mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu, who is currently imprisoned. In his view, the emphasis on İmamoğlu's case has paralysed political activity within the CHP. He frames the issue as a legal dispute between İmamoğlu and the judiciary, aiming to distance the party from any conflict with the judicial branch and shield it from İmamoğlu's legal issues.

Although the appointment of a trustee is not seen as the most likely outcome, experts do not entirely rule it out. Should such a step be taken, the interim management would be tasked with organising new internal elections. Regardless of the final verdict, the lawsuit has exposed deep divisions within CHP. Even if the current leadership remains in place, the visible alignment of some MPs and members with Kılıçdaroğlu continues to highlight the internal fractures and unrest within the party.

Depiction of Prophet Muhammad Draws Widespread Criticism

Last week, a significant controversy erupted in Türkiye following the publication of a caricature in the well-known satirical magazine *Leman*, which appeared to depict the prophets Muhammad and Moses. The illustration drew immediate backlash due to widespread Islamic sensitivities, particularly regarding the prohibition against visual representations of the Prophet Muhammad, a well-established principle in Islamic tradition. For many believers, such depictions are not only prohibited but also regarded as deeply disrespectful and offensive to their faith.

Conservative circles in Türkiye have long criticised *Leman* for its content, which is often perceived as libellous and hostile toward religious communities. In response to the backlash, the magazine issued a statement claiming that the figures depicted were not prophets but rather ordinary Muslim and Jewish individuals. While some commentators accepted this explanation, a significant portion of the public saw it as a retroactive justification constructed after the controversy erupted. Four individuals affiliated with the magazine, including the cartoonist, were arrested on charges of "insulting religious values" and "inciting hatred and hostility."

The political reaction was notably divided. The government and right-wing opposition parties strongly condemned the caricature, emphasising the need to respect religious boundaries and maintain social harmony. Within the main

opposition party, responses varied. Istanbul's imprisoned former mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu, adopted a tone empathetic to conservative religious reactions, while CHP Chairman Özgür Özel defended the magazine, endorsing the claim that the caricature did not depict the Prophet Muhammad.

The publication sparked widespread protests, with thousands gathering outside *Leman*'s offices, while social media became a battleground for polarised opinions. This reflected the Kulturkampf in Türkiye, which periodically brings the deep cultural divisions in Turkish society to the forefront.



(Dilara İrem Sancar - Anadolu Agency)

Cautious Steps Toward a Terror-Free Türkiye



(TUR Presidency/ Murat Cetinmuhurdar - Anadolu Agency)

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan recently stated that significant progress has been made in advancing the "Terror-Free Türkiye" initiative, a national strategy aimed at achieving internal unity and fostering peaceful dialogue beyond the country's borders. He also emphasised that attempts by certain factions within terrorist organisations to sabotage this process would not be tolerated. Erdoğan noted that ongoing regional instability further underscores the necessity and justification of the government's determined efforts to secure lasting peace at home.

While not an unprecedented step, President Erdoğan is expected to meet with a delegation from the pro-Kurdish DEM Party next week. Many observers interpret this move as a continuation of dialogue and a sign of political will to sustain engagement. On the other hand, although no official confirmation has been given, some unverified reports claim that footage showing PKK members laying down arms may soon be released. If confirmed, this would mark a tangible step in a process that remains cautious and tentative. Positive statements from both government officials and Kurdish-oriented political figures, including members of the DEM Party, have contributed to the sense that the process is moving forward.

Adding to the sense of momentum, Türkiye's intelligence chief, İbrahim Kalın, held meetings in northern Iraq last week. While it is too early to draw definitive conclusions, this development has been viewed by many analysts as a signal that new developments could soon occur. Although caution is still warranted, the convergence of political engagement, regional activity, and measured rhetoric suggests that Türkiye may be approaching a new stage in its long-term effort to overcome terrorism and establish greater social harmony through political and institutional mechanisms.

Highlights

- The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement in response to remarks made by 14 ministers from Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's Likud party regarding the annexation of the West Bank. The Ministry strongly rejected these statements.
- Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan met with Ismail Darwish, head of Hamas's leadership council. Fidan emphasised that Türkiye's foremost priority is to end the massacre in Gaza and ensure the immediate delivery of humanitarian aid.
- President Erdoğan is planned to attend the 17th Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) summit in Khankendi, Azerbaijan, on Friday. Under the theme "New ECO Vision for a Sustainable and Climate Resilient Future," the summit will focus on regional cooperation, climate change, trade, transportation, and institutional reform.

Recent Publications by TRT World Research Centre

- [The July 9 Tariff Deadline: Will the Global South Speak as One?](#) by Şeymanur Yönt
- [From Accolade to Instrument: How Politics Hijacked the Nobel Peace Prize](#) by İnsan Faruk Kılavuz
- [Iran at the Crossroads: War, Maximum Pressure, and the Fight for Regime Survival](#) by Mehmet Kılıç



Send us leads and feedback at:
turkiyeinfocus@gmail.com