

**18 March 2025**

**A brief up-to-date review of human rights in Turkey:**

**1. GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION:**

Under a State of Emergency (OHAL) regime that has been rendered permanent through numerous regulations, **ambiguity, lawlessness, and arbitrariness** have become key components of the regime’s own sustainability. The regime’s ability to create ambiguity as a governance technique enables the concentration of all power in a single hand, exempts it from oversight mechanisms, and allows for the limitless expansion of repression and control over society.

i. Especially since July 2015, the already widespread and systematic human rights violations in daily life have intensified to such an extent that the exercise of rights has become the exception, while their violation has become the norm, as witnessed by the vast majority of the population or directly experienced by many segments of society.

To better illustrate the current situation, below are examples **from recent months in daily life** reflecting violations of freedom of expression and press, the right to assembly and demonstration, freedom of association, and the right to vote and be elected:

* The prosecution, arbitrary detention, arbitrary arrests followed by trials and sentencing—including imprisonment—of numerous individuals, including but not limited to human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, unionists, and politicians, on charges such as “making propaganda for a terrorist organization,” “membership in an armed organization,” “disseminating misleading information,” “insulting the President,” and “denigrating the Turkish nation, the Republic of Turkey, or state institutions and bodies”;
* The appointment of trustees, the banning of numerous activities, including union activities and those related to women and LGBTI+, and the obstruction of demonstrations through criminalization of the right to protest.
* The dissolution of GÖÇİZDER by court order, the closure of the Tarlabaşı Community Center following a decision by the District Governor’s Office, and targeted pressure on certain institutions, as can be seen in the example of the Istanbul Bar Association.
* The appointment of trustees to ten municipalities governed by the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM) and two municipalities run by the main opposition party, the Republican People’s Party (CHP), on the grounds of investigations and charges brought under the Anti-Terror Law—an accelerated process following the March 31, 2024, local elections, particularly after October 2024.
* Following the March 31 local elections, and at an accelerated pace in recent months, the launch of investigations and the filing of lawsuits on various grounds—including terrorism allegations related to the “city consensus” and corruption allegations concerning “public tenders”—both at an institutional level and against numerous individuals, including CHP’s prospective candidate for presidential elections;

These examples, along with similar cases against those who criticize or oppose the government, highlight the growing trend of criminalization—discursively, administratively, and judicially—toward individuals who do not adopt or align with the ruling party’s views and perspectives. This rise in repressive practices is significant in demonstrating the extent the regime has reached.

ii. It is observed that irregardless of any kind of identity, unlawful and arbitrary practices that are not based on any rule have recently been tried to be transformed into an ordinary practice, especially in a manner independent of “time.” For example:

* Although the Peoples’ Democratic Congress (HDK), established in 2011, has not been banned or dissolved on grounds for having any relationship with illegal activities, 4753 individuals who at point interacted with the Congress have been indicted for their activism, journalism, and civil society activities and accused of being members of the PKK/KCK, even though these events took place **14 YEARS AGO**. In 2024, an investigation was launched against them. Within the scope of this investigation, 52 individuals were arbitrarily detained on February 18, 2025, without any legal grounds. They were brought before a judge on February 21, who ruled for the arrest of 30 of them and placed 13 people under house arrest while releasing 7 on bail or under judicial control.

The public has been informed that the Chief Public Prosecutor of Ankara, in its Decision of Non-Jurisdiction sent to the Public Prosecutor of Istanbul on April 1, 2024, stated that "*It has been determined that HDK is an armed terrorist organization*." The fact that such a statement can be made about a platform which has been operating legally for 14 years and continues to do so underscores the level of arbitrariness and lawlessness in relation to the rule of law.

* Ayşe Barım, an agent for actors and artists, was arbitrarily detained on January 24, 2025, without any legal basis as part of the investigation into the Gezi Park protests. She was then arrested on January 27, 2025, on the charge of "Aiding and Abetting Attempts to Overthrow the Government or Prevent the Government from Performing Its Duties."After Ayşe Barım was granted release on February 17, 2025, she was re-arrested on the same day following an objection filed by the Public Prosecutor of Istanbul. Furthermore, the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors launched an investigation into the judge who ruled for her release, dismissing him from his current post and appointing him to another court. This serves as a specific example for the current state regarding “the principle of independence and impartiality of the judiciary.”As is known, the Ministry of Internal Affairs had announced that “*approximately 3.611.208 people attended 5532 protests/activities held within the scope of the Gezi Park Events in 80 provinces between May 28 and September 6, 2013.*”

Along with other examples, these two cases, which directly affect many people, serve as an indication that the goal is to instill the fear and idea in millions of people—those who have exercised or wish to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, assembly and demonstration, and association, both now and in the future—that they could be subjected to all kinds of pressure AT ANY MOMENT, without any legal basis, even after many years, regardless of time.

1. In such an atmosphere, the unprecedented and rapid overcrowding of prisons in Turkey represents, in a way, a brief summary of the recent developments in our country.

As of January 2, 2024, the number of detainees and convicts was 292.282. Just 14 months later, on March 3, 2025, this number rose to 398.694, reflecting a significant increase both in absolute numbers and in proportion.

1. Recent legal regulations show that ambiguity, lawlessness, and arbitrariness, which have become the main components of the regime's sustainability, are being actively transformed into explicit norms. Furthermore, as reported in the press in February 2025, the draft bill prepared by the Ministry of Justice on amendments to the Turkish Penal Code and other laws goes beyond the non-recognition of LGBTİ+ identities and poses a risk of threatening their very existence.

v. The issues related to the dramatic rise in widespread and systematic human rights violations, including torture, and the significant decline in the rule of law and democracy in Turkey, are reported not only by national human rights organizations but also by numerous international human rights organizations, including UN and EU treaty bodies of which Turkey is a member. [[1]](#footnote-1)

On the other hand, the significant decline in democracy is also reflected in major global indexes that assess political regimes. For example, Turkey's liberal democracy index, based on the dataset in the 2025 Democracy Report[[2]](#footnote-2) published by Gothenburg University's V-Dem Institute on March 12, 2025, shows that Turkey is experiencing one of its worst periods in recent history.

vi. Beyond the intensification of widespread and systematic human rights violations in daily life, we are currently going through a process in which there has been a shift from "state practices that systematically violate rights" to "the complete abandonment of the idea of a rights-based regime."

All these developments in the human rights sphere highlight that Turkey is at a critical juncture. In such a critical moment, the importance of civil efforts becomes even more vital.

In such an environment, in order to overcome this severe crisis that has led to the closing of civil space, it has become more crucial than ever to implement an approach that emphasizes the "foundational role" of human rights in every sphere of life, not only in our country but also worldwide.

The realization, development, and strengthening of an approach that emphasizes the "foundational role" of human rights can be achieved by ending the ongoing violations, preventing their recurrence, and striving to ensure redress for past violations, which is already a pressing need today.

**2. EVALUATION OF THE PROCESS MADE PUBLIC AFTER 1ST OCTOBER 2024**

Apart from the human rights situation in Turkey, another crucial reality is the process made public after 1st October 2024.

i. As a result of the process made public through the statements of MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli on 1st October 2024, Abdullah Öcalan’s call on 27th February 2025 for “all groups to lay down their arms and for the PKK to disband,” and the subsequent developments, this process is of vital importance in terms of ending the conflict and violence.

The end of the conflict and violence is, above all, invaluable because it will clearly contribute to preventing the loss of lives and the alleviation of the deep anxieties and fears experienced by the families of those involved in the conflict. For this reason, it is of utmost importance that everyone involved in this process adopts a language and attitude that acknowledges and respects the sensitivities and pain of those directly affected by the social trauma caused by more than 40 years of conflict and violence.

Furthermore, the cessation of hostilities will broaden the scope of dialogue and enhance its effectiveness, thereby facilitating the non-violent resolution of the Kurdish issue.

In this regard, every effort aimed at ending the conflict and violence including the laying down of arms, is of great significance.

ii. It should be noted that, as of today, we do not have sufficient information to make a comprehensive evaluation of the process made public since October 1st.

iii. Nevertheless, it is evident that the significance of the process made public since October 1st will increase as long as genuine efforts are made to resolve the Kurdish issue through non-violent methods based on dialogue and negotiation.

The democratic and peaceful resolution of the Kurdish issue can essentially be achieved through a “democratization program” grounded in the understanding that democracy is a value in itself, independent of any instrumental approach.

iv. The aforementioned program should, above all, aim to ensure that everyone, without discrimination, can enjoy their basic rights and freedoms, thereby paving the way for peaceful coexistence. This is because rights constitute the principles and norms by which everyone, indiscriminately, can live in a manner befitting human dignity. They are holistic and inalienable, meaning that their exercise and safeguarding do not require anyone's approval, which is the foundation for the idea that democracy is a value in itself. For this reason, ensuring the broadest possible enjoyment of basic rights and freedoms cannot and should not be the subject of negotiations or agreements, let alone bargaining.

v. Certainly, in the current circumstances where widespread and systematic human rights violations are becoming increasingly aggravated, and the system is rapidly moving toward the complete abandonment of the notion of a rights-based regime, it is of utmost importance to strengthen our ongoing efforts to create a peaceful and democratic environment for coexistence and to encourage all social groups towards this goal.

1. - UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Türkiye (28 November 2024)

- The Concluding Observations of the UN Committee Against Torture on the Fifth Periodic Report of Turkiye (14 August 2024)

- Memorandum on freedom of expression and of the media, human rights defenders and civil society in Türkiye presented by the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights (5 March 2024)

- Resolution on allegations of systemic torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in places of detention in Europe, adopted by Parlamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) (24 January 2024)

- PACE Resolution on honouring of obligations and commitments by Türkiye (12 October 2022)

- PACE Resolution on the functioning of democratic institutions in Turkey (22 April 2021)

- Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, Report on Visit to Turkey (19 February 2020) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.v-dem.net/documents/60/V-dem-dr__2025_lowres.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)