

In this week's *Türkiye in Focus*:

- The absolute nullity decision has left the main opposition party facing a profound and deepening crisis.
- Potential future scenarios for the CHP have already become a central topic of political discussion.
- This decision marks a momentous turning point in Turkish politics.

CHP Faces One of the Gravest Political Crises in Its History



(Fatih Kurt - Anadolu Agency)

Following the annulment of the 38th CHP Ordinary Convention—where Özgür Özel had been elected—Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu has reassumed the leadership of the main opposition party. Unsurprisingly, the Özgür Özel faction strongly objects to this decision. In fact, the situation escalated to the point that the Özel administration only agreed to vacate their posts after police intervened at the party headquarters. Consequently, the Kılıçdaroğlu faction has now seized control of the headquarters both de facto and de jure. Kılıçdaroğlu appears to be consolidating his intra-party dominance with patient and confident strides, having recently announced his new 19-member Central Executive Board.

Nevertheless, Özel still wields considerable influence within the party. Crucially, the vast majority of CHP MPs have continued to support him so far. Relying on this legislative backing, Özgür Özel was elected as the party's parliamentary group chairman, subsequently turning the parliamentary group meeting into a defiant show of strength against Kılıçdaroğlu.

Özel's supporters are now demanding that an extraordinary convention be convened as a matter of urgency. Conversely, the Kılıçdaroğlu camp maintains that a definitive ruling from a higher court is required before any such convention can take place. Meanwhile, Kılıçdaroğlu repeatedly emphasises the necessity of an internal purge within the CHP to combat corruption allegations that have severely tarnished the party's public image. At present, reaching a compromise between these two warring camps seems highly improbable.

It is also possible to identify another key actor exacerbating this crisis. Ekrem İmamoğlu, currently remanded in custody as part of an ongoing corruption investigation, has been sending fierce messages from prison to signal his staunch support for the Özel faction. Most political analysts note that İmamoğlu's presidential ambitions, alongside the political cadres backing these ambitions, exert a profound influence over Özel, a dynamic that is further deepening the divisions within the party. On the other hand, commentators also note that this atmosphere of internal crisis is severely damaging the party's relationship with the electorate.

Prospects for the Main Opposition

At present, a dual leadership dominates the CHP. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu is observed to be taking calm yet confident steps, attempting to construct a fresh political narrative. On the other hand, Özgür Özel's strategy appears focused on maintaining his influence over members of parliament and remaining within the party until the very last moment. Nevertheless, rumours of a new party have begun to surface, and Özel has subtly implied that such a move is being kept in reserve as a last resort.

Under these circumstances, it is possible to outline three potential scenarios for the CHP's future. The first, and currently the most anticipated, outcome is that this conflict will culminate in the Özel-İmamoğlu faction breaking away from the main body, leading to the birth of a new political party. Some commentators argue that this presents a unique opportunity for the defectors, allowing them to finally shed the CHP's historical negative baggage. However, the political ascent of the Özel-İmamoğlu line relied heavily on the CHP's existing political power rather than an original, independent political project. Indeed, the speech delivered by Özgür Özel to the CHP parliamentary group this week, which strongly nodded toward the party's ideological core and traditions, indicates that there is no firm resolve yet to introduce a breath of fresh air into Turkish political life. On the contrary, it suggests that a regression to the very ideological burdens the CHP has been trying to offload remains entirely possible. Furthermore, historical precedents demonstrate that breakaway factions splitting from a main political spine rarely achieve long-term electoral success.



(CHP - Anadolu Agency)

The second possibility is for the Özel faction to bide its time until the next ordinary convention, allowing the party's future leadership to be decided through a new democratic election. Nevertheless, both complex legal hurdles and Kılıçdaroğlu's unyielding stance so far suggest that this scenario will not be easily realised.

The third and final scenario involves a reconciliation being brokered between Özel and Kılıçdaroğlu. While this outcome appears highly improbable under current conditions, it remains a possibility that must be kept in mind, given the immense value of the CHP brand to both factions and the sheer depth of the ongoing crisis.

For the Kılıçdaroğlu camp, the ultimate test lies not only in restoring intra-party unity but also in crafting a compelling new political narrative capable of lifting the electorate out of this pervasive atmosphere of despair—a formidable challenge that looms large on their horizon across Türkiye.

The Political Significance of the Absolute Nullity Decision Against the CHP



(Mustafa Murat Kaynak - Anadolu Agency)

The absolute nullity decision issued against the CHP has profound political implications that go far beyond legal debates. Until now, the CHP has maintained its distinct identity as the founding party of the republic in Turkish politics. This status has historically granted it a unique degree of symbolic legitimacy and institutional prestige. Such standing allowed the party to occupy a privileged position within the political system, even during long periods outside government. As a result, both the public and CHP elites widely see the party as the primary custodian of the state's official ideology.

During the first decade of the AK Party government, the main opposition party consistently failed to win elections. Still, it maintained an image of being deeply intertwined with the judicial and security bureaucracies. In those years, despite

being the governing party, the AK Party was constrained by the bureaucratic establishment, while the CHP benefited from an alignment with the established order. However, following the events of 2016, this perception began to fracture significantly. The absolute nullity decision now represents a critical turning point for the CHP in this regard. The significance of the ruling lies not merely in its legal implications but in its symbolic effect. For a party long perceived as enjoying a special relationship with segments of the state establishment, judicial intervention into its own internal legitimacy challenges a core element of its historical identity.

Moreover, the CHP has successfully maintained its status as the main opposition party since 2002, effectively consolidating the wider opposition against the AK Party. This influence increased after Türkiye's transition to the presidential system—a shift that was clearly reflected in the party's voting percentages. However, the current crisis casts serious doubt on the CHP's future. If the crisis persists, it could create opportunities for new actors within the opposition. For instance, new political movements might emerge, new leadership centres may form, or existing alliances could be reconfigured. As a result, the opposition may enter a period of greater fragmentation and competition than it has experienced in recent years.

Highlights

- Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met with Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, Chairman of Sudan's Sovereignty Council, in Ankara on Tuesday, with MIT Director İbrahim Kalın also in attendance.
- Türkiye's foreign trade deficit shrank to \$42.7bn in the first five months of the year, a positive sign for the country's economy, driven by a sharp decline in May imports, according to Trade Minister Ömer Bolat.
- Meanwhile, in his testimony, the jailed CHP Mayor of Antalya, Muhittin Böcek, claimed that, on Özgür Özel's instructions, he gave €950,000 to Ferdi Zeyrek, the Manisa mayoral candidate and a figure close to Özel.

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