Police raid the major pro-opposition Halk TV channel in Turkey

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Autor	Burak Ünveren
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Turkish police raided the Istanbul headquarters of an important pro-opposition television station on Wednesdazy, the day that jailed Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu was set to start his defense against corruption charges.

On Wednesday morning, the live broadcast was halted, Halk TV's headquarters in the city of Istanbul were searched, and a new administrator was appointed by the government to run the media outlet. An arrest warrant was issued for the station's CEO, Cafer Mahiroglu, who currently lives in London. According to prosecutors, 11 people were arrested.

Turkey has faced criticism for years over restrictions on press freedom. Halk TV is one of the country's best-known opposition television stations and regularly broadcasts critical reports about Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP). After the raid, journalists were initially prevented from entering the building. Pre-recorded programs were broadcast instead of live reports.

The timing is particularly sensitive: Halk TV was raided on the very day that jailed Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoglu was scheduled to begin his defense against corruption charges in court. The channel has been an important source of information for those following the trial.

Imamoglu, who won the mayoral election in Istanbul in 2019 and remained in office until his arrest on March 19, 2025, is one of Erdogan's most significant rivals, considered a beacon of hope for the opposition. He is still expected to run for president in 2028.

He is accused of establishing and running a criminal organization, as well as of various related financial crimes. Prosecutors are seeking a prison term of 2,352 years related to 142 charges. Imamoglu denies the allegations, arguing that the case is politically motivated.

11 people were arrested in conjunction with the raid on Halk TV headquarters Image: ANKA

Raid linked to investigation into Cafer Mahiroglu

Istanbul prosecutors said that the raid on Halk TV was linked to an investigation into its CEO Mahiroglu, who is accused of bribery, bid rigging and money laundering.

They said that arrest warrants had been issued for 17 people, on top of the 11 arrests. Assets belonging to companies allegedly linked to Mahiroglu were also seized and a trustee appointed to run the firms.

The opposition responded with sharp criticism of the police raid. Ozgur Ozel, the leader of the social democratic New Party (Yeni Parti) said it was a dark day for Turkey.

"The public's right to information is being seized for political reasons," Mahiroglu said.

"Showing solidarity with Halk TV means supporting the struggle for democracy in Turkey," Ozel said.

He added that "only dictators" would launch "a dawn raid on a television channel, appointing a trustee […]" and criticized the fact that this had occurred on the day that Imamoglu was due to begin his defense.

Many people in Turkey protested in support of Ekrem Imamoglu when he was jailed in 2025, like here in Izmir on May 19, 2025Image: Berkcan Zengin/Middle East Images/picture alliance

Journalists' union slams raid

The Journalists' Union of Turkey (TGS) also condemned the raid on the platform X, describing it as arbitrary and arguing that the press was free and should not be censored.

Editor-in-chief Suat Toktas tried in vain to persuade the new state-appointed administrator to continue live broadcasts. In a video released by the TV channel, he said that what was happening was "illegal."

Halk TV began broadcasting on January 10, 2005 and its live broadcasts gained widespread attention particularly during the 2013 Gezi Park protests. Cafer Mahiroglu took over the station in 2020.

This article was translated from German.

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