

## After the court ruling, who is running Türkiye's Republican People's Party?



The Republican People's Party, or CHP — Türkiye's oldest political party and the largest opposition party — witnessed an unprecedented event in its history after ruled a Turkish court to invalidate its 2023 general congress, which had brought Ozgur Ozel to the party leadership after 13 years under Kemal Kilicdaroglu.

The ruling did not merely open a personal dispute between two men; it also shook the party's internal structure: an elected leadership that says it derives its legitimacy from the congress and the party base, and a former leadership that the court decision has temporarily thrust back into the spotlight. From there emerged the broader question: Who holds the legitimate authority to run the party?

How can a party function when it has two heads? Who controls the headquarters, the seal, and the signature? What happens to the parliamentary bloc, the branches, and the municipalities? And how can this crisis be resolved without harming the future of the Turkish opposition? In the following questions, we answer the main aspects of this story.

How did the CHP reach a leadership crisis?

The crisis began at the party's 38th general congress in November 2023, when Ozgur Ozel won the leadership of the Republican People's Party in the second round, ending Kilicdaroglu's 13-year tenure. That came after Kilicdaroglu lost the

presidential election and amid rising demands within the party for a leadership renewal.

After that, the party scored a major victory in the municipal elections in March 2024, winning 37.8 percent of the vote compared with 35.5 percent for the ruling Justice and Development Party.

But the 2023 congress remained the subject of appeals and accusations of vote-buying and swaying delegates through promises of jobs and funding, before those accusations turned into a court case.



Kemal Kilicdaroglu was temporarily returned to the forefront of the Republican People's Party by court order

In May 2026, the court found that the flaws in the 2023 congress affected everything that followed from it, so it annulled its results and temporarily returned Kilicdaroglu to the forefront under a ruling that remains under appeal and within an ongoing legal process.

The crisis thus moved from the question, "Who won the party leadership?" to a more complex one: Who owns the party when the legitimacy of the congress collides with a court ruling?

How is the Republican People's Party leadership elected?

The Republican People's Party's bylaws clearly define its institutional

mechanism. The general congress, known as the kurultay, is the party's highest body and is responsible for electing the chairperson and the main leadership bodies, including the party council and the disciplinary board.

Delegates elected through the party's local structures take part in the congress, alongside party figures who hold organizational or representative positions.

The chairperson leads the party and represents it politically and organizationally, while the party council helps shape general policy and oversee organizational work. The parliamentary bloc, meanwhile, consists of the party's lawmakers in the Turkish Parliament and operates under its own internal rules within the legislature.

That is why a distinction must be made between the party's central leadership and its parliamentary bloc. The former may be affected by a court ruling related to the congress, while the latter retains its own internal mechanisms for choosing who represents it in Parliament.

In addition, the party includes local branches and major municipalities that form an important organizational and electoral base, but they do not negate the role of the general congress as the primary source of party legitimacy.

What does it mean for a court to annul a party congress?

The ruling issued by the court was based on the idea that the November 2023 congress was marred by violations affecting the legitimacy of its results. On that basis, it annulled the congress and the party leadership that emerged from it, which led to the previous leadership being temporarily brought back to the forefront.

But the ruling does not necessarily mean that every decision taken by Ozel's leadership since 2023 has automatically become void in day-to-day practice, as that depends on the scope of the ruling, the mechanisms of implementation, and the outcome of appeals.

Annulment of the congress opens the door to challenging the legitimacy of the bodies and decisions that arose after it, but it does not settle all the legal and political consequences at once.

The decision remains part of an ongoing judicial process that is open to appeal, leaving the future of the leadership unresolved until a higher judicial authority rules or an internal solution is found, such as a new congress.

Implementation of the ruling also remains complicated, because the question is not simply about annulling a congress, but about who gets to run a major political institution with a headquarters, a parliamentary bloc, branches, municipalities, accounts, and documents.

## What happens when a party has two heads?

The existence of two leaderships in one party has created a complicated scene. After the ruling was issued, Ozel and his supporters refused to leave party headquarters, prompting police to storm the headquarters in Ankara and forcibly remove the ousted leadership or its supporters, in a move that made control of the headquarters part of the struggle over legitimacy.

As a result, the issue of the headquarters, the seal, and official documents became a practical element of the crisis, not merely a political symbol.



Control of Republican People's Party headquarters has become part of the struggle over legitimacy

By contrast, Ozel has retained political weight within the party, especially after CHP lawmakers re-elected him as head of the parliamentary group despite the court ruling, revealing the possibility that parliamentary legitimacy within the party may diverge from the judicial legitimacy produced by the ruling.

There is thus one leadership restored by court order that may hold an official position in running the party, and another previously elected leadership that still enjoys political support within the parliamentary bloc and among a broad segment of the party base.

This duality could lead to conflicts in statements and financial and administrative decisions, and complicate relations between the center and the branches and

municipalities, especially if some local structures deal with one leadership while others recognize the rival one.

Can the party emerge from the crisis through a new congress?

There are several possible paths out of the crisis.

First: appealing the ruling before a higher judicial authority. If the appeal is accepted and the ruling is overturned, the results of the 2023 congress and Ozel's leadership could regain full legitimacy.

Second: calling a new extraordinary congress to reproduce legitimacy, whether by re-electing Ozel, confirming Kilicdaroglu, or choosing a third, consensus candidate for the leadership.

Third: forming a transitional administration or a consensus committee that includes representatives of both wings to temporarily manage party affairs until a new congress is held, a step that could ease the intensity of the clash, but would require internal political agreement and clear legal recognition.

Fourth: continuation of the status quo, meaning the party remains caught between one leadership backed by the court ruling and another backed by political support within the party, threatening to deepen the duality and weaken the party organizationally.

What does the crisis mean for the future of the Turkish opposition?

The Republican People's Party is the backbone of the Turkish opposition and runs major municipalities such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir.

The continuation of the leadership crisis therefore affects the opposition's readiness for the next parliamentary and presidential elections, and makes coordination between municipalities and the parliamentary bloc more difficult if legitimacy remains disputed.

The internal split may also affect the party's ability to compete with the ruling party in the coming period.

On the other hand, the crisis raises a broader debate about the relationship between parties and the judiciary in Türkiye. Opposition forces have described the ruling as interference in party freedom, while others see it as a legal process tied to internal corruption.

In all cases, the situation reveals the fragility of the organizational structure when congress results collide with the legitimacy of a judicial ruling, and underscores the need for clearer internal mechanisms to ensure the integrity of party elections and resolve disputes without institutional paralysis.



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