**Hundreds of Thousands on the Streets of Istanbul. Marta Kos Urges Ankara to Respect Freedom of Expression**  
**Party Still Nominated Him as Presidential Candidate**  
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**A. P. J., B. V.**

Despite a ban on gatherings, a rally is taking place in Istanbul protesting the detention of popular mayor Ekrem Imamoglu. Reports say several hundred thousand people have gathered. European Commissioner Marta Kos is urging Turkish authorities to respect freedom of expression and independent journalism.

The main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), which organized the event under the slogan "Freedom for Imamoglu", called people to the streets on Saturday. Ferries were even rented to transport protesters.

The crowd gathered in the Maltepe district on the Asian side of Istanbul, where participants waved Turkish flags and carried signs in support of Imamoglu. Some read: “If the judiciary is silent, the people will speak.”

One protester said: “Everything in the country is getting worse—from the economy, the judiciary to the rule of law. That’s why we’re here. We demand our rights.” Protesters chanted, among other slogans, “Taksim is everywhere, resistance is everywhere,” referring to the large 2013 protests at Taksim Square. Among the demonstrators were Imamoglu’s wife, mother, and two sons.

According to the German press agency DPA, Imamoglu's speech was played at the protest, and a message was read in which he stated: “I am not afraid at all, because our people are united. We will not bow to tyranny. From my endless cell I cry out: the people are great.”

**Özel Announces Weekly Protests**

According to Özgür Özel, head of the CHP—the party to which Imamoglu belongs—2.2 million protesters gathered. French agency AFP reported that the number could not be independently verified.

Özel said the protests will continue until early presidential elections are announced or until Imamoglu is released from prison. In an interview with France’s *Le Monde*, he added that future rallies would be held every Saturday in a different Turkish city, and every Wednesday evening in Istanbul. Özel also predicted that the number of arrests will decrease.

Protests in Istanbul and other Turkish cities have been ongoing since March 19, when Imamoglu was arrested on charges of belonging to a criminal organization, supporting a terrorist group, and corruption. On Friday, protests also took place in Izmir and Ankara.

According to Turkey’s interior ministry, over 2,000 people have been detained since the protests began, including several journalists, with 260 ordered into custody. As of Friday, over 500 students had been detained in Istanbul alone.

**Swedish Journalist Also Detained**

On Friday, Swedish journalist Joakim Medin was also taken into custody upon his arrival in Turkey on Thursday. Turkish media report he is accused of insulting President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and being a member of an armed terrorist organization. Andreas Gustavsson, editor-in-chief of the Swedish newspaper *Dagens ETC*, for which Medin works, wrote on X that the allegations are completely false.

In recent days, Turkish authorities have also arrested several Turkish journalists and expelled a BBC correspondent.

President Erdogan has described the protests as a “violent movement” incited by the opposition, and many cities have banned them.

**Party Nominates Him as Presidential Candidate**

53-year-old Imamoglu is considered Erdogan’s main political rival. Despite the court order for his detention, CHP officially nominated him as their presidential candidate for the 2028 elections.

Turkish authorities deny any influence over the judiciary and stress that the judicial branch is independent.

**Kos Urges Ankara to Respect Freedom of Expression**

European Commissioner for Enlargement Marta Kos has called on Turkish authorities via social media platform X to protect independent journalism and respect freedom of expression.

She stated that recent detentions, expulsions, penalties, and broadcasting bans are contrary to Turkey’s commitments and democratic traditions. She added that a free press is essential for democracy and the rule of law.

Kos also reminded that Turkey, as a member of the Council of Europe and a candidate for EU membership, is committed to the fundamental right to assembly.