



anka review

STRENGTH THROUGH INDEPENDENCE

WEEKLY

NEWSLETTER

GET IN TOUCH



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DOMESTIC POLITICS



GOVERNMENT MAKES LAST-MINUTE CHANGE TO MULTI-BAR LAW TO BREAK LAWYERS' POWER

The ruling AKP and MHP ratified a bill late on July 11 to change the structure of bar associations into a multi-bar system despite the protests of bar associations. Crucially, the government [added](#) an article that will allow lawyers in the public sector to also vote in bar elections so as to tip the balance against opposition-minded bar associations.

The law was passed by a vote of 251-163 in the 600-seat parliament, as only 417 MPs cast votes.

While lawyers were planning a strategy to maintain their unity in a multi-bar system against governments' efforts, the ruling party decided to add an article to the bill at the last minute that allows lawyers who work in the public sector to also vote in bar elections. "That is due to the fear that the number of pro-government lawyers might not reach 2,000 lawyers to establish bars," a protesting lawyer told ANKA.

It is not compulsory for public lawyers to register in the bar, but they will now have the right to vote in its elections.

The heads of bars and lawyers have ended their weeklong protests against the bill and will now appeal it to the Constitutional Court.

"On the very day when this legislation is published in the Official Gazette, we will appeal to the Constitutional Court," CHP Chair Kemal Kilicdaroglu [said](#) on July 9 before the bill's ratification.

"The multi-bar system is treason against the unitary structure of the Turkish Republic. This system is a dagger stabbed right into the heart of the unitary structure," said Kilicdaroglu.

Along with the CHP, all of Turkey's opposition parties oppose the multi-bar system.



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The AKP and MHP passed the bill so as to dilute the power of mostly dissident bar associations, particularly in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. However, the adopted

law does not regulate the status of the estates owned by the existing bars and the income methods of the bars, leaving questions for the future.

PRESIDENCY EXPANDS PROGRAM FOR JULY 15 COMMEMORATIONS

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan **will be** in Ankara for the fourth anniversary of the July 15 coup attempt, the Communications Directorate of the Presidency has said amid government plans to organize many more commemorations around the country – and even abroad.

state institutions regarding the ceremonies and established a system to act on the feedback from the events.

The government aims to organize programs all over Turkey, as well as overseas.

Erdogan will first participate in a wreath-laying ceremony at the July 15 Monument before attending a ceremony at parliament. After that, he will host families of those killed in the coup attempt at the Presidency. Finally, at 9 p.m., he will deliver a speech to the nation.

In Istanbul, there will be a series of programs, including digital shows around the areas of Kuleli, Sariyer, and the first Bosphorus bridge – now called the July 15 Martyrs Bridge – where some of the biggest incidents in the coup attempt occurred.

Ahead of the date, the Communications Directorate shared a strategy paper with

Musician Fahir Atakoglu has composed a symphony for the commemoration.

PROBE DROPPED INTO ANTI-COUP VETERAN WHO QUESTIONED DONATION CAMPAIGN

Officials speedily **dropped** an investigation this week against a veteran of the resistance to the 2016 coup attempt who asked about the fate of a solidarity campaign that raised 338 million Turkish Liras.

Ufuk Yegin, who participated in the anti-coup effort, attended a demonstration on June 16 in front of the AKP headquarters and the Family, Labor and Social Services Ministry to demand answers about what happened to funds raised for



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veterans and the families of those who died in the attempted putsch. But after Yegin answered questions from opposition broadcaster Fox TV at the demonstration, Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul ordered an investigation into him on July 2.

Surprisingly, the investigation was dropped due to public reaction in just a week, according to CHP Deputy Murat Emir. The ministry decided that “there is no need for disciplinary punishment against Yegin,” Emir added.

ISTANBUL MUNICIPAL APPOINTMENT RAISES DEBATE ON MERITOCRACY

Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu touched off controversy this week among both pro-government media and the opposition daily Cumhuriyet by appointing Can Akin Caglar, a former general director of state lender Ziraat who had previously been accused of offering non-performing loans, as the municipality's new secretary-general.

CHP Deputy Aykut Erdogan had accused Caglar of delivering non-performing loans to Ora Mall, a shopping center in Istanbul, while he was Ziraat's president in 2012. Erdogan had also previously requested Caglar's resignation from his post at the Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BDDK).

Imamoglu has come under fire for appointing pro-AKP civil servants, including Bahaddin Yetkin, who became the general manager of Istanbul IT and Smart City Technologies Inc. (ISBAK) in August 2019.

Pro-government Hurriyet and dissident Cumhuriyet both published similar headlines regarding Caglar's appointment. While Hurriyet [highlighted](#) the arguments within the CHP over Imamoglu's move, Cumhuriyet [focused](#) on the unease in the party.

According to Cumhuriyet, CHP supporters have accused Imamoglu of appointing AKP figures and demanded that he find opposition-minded people with the same capabilities.

But despite Cumhuriyet's close relations with the CHP, the newspaper's report did not quote any party official.

During the appointment ceremony, Caglar said he had explained the reasons for non-performing loans to Erdogan, adding that they “had been friends since.”



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Erdogdu **broke** his silence on the matter after three days, noting that Caglar had been absolved of any wrongdoing.

CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu, meanwhile, **backed** Imamoglu, saying: "It is not

right to get involved in the decisions of administrators. The ones who criticize Imamoglu should look at what he has done. He has done things that they couldn't achieve in the last 20 years."

EXPLOSION AT FIREWORKS FACTORY FORCES GOVERNMENT TO TAKE MEASURES AGAINST PRO-GOVERNMENT BUSINESSMAN

Six days after an explosion at a fireworks factory killed seven people in Sakarya, a truck carrying leftover fireworks from the same factory exploded on July 9, killing three soldiers and obliging the government to cancel the factory's license.

"The governorate will first suspend and then cancel the working permits of the factory," Interior Minister Suleyman Soyulu **said** on July 10.

After the first explosion, Sakarya's governor had said officials had conducted inspections at the factory every three months and would continue to do so, indicating the factory had taken enough measures to ensure the security of workers.

It was understood that the owner of the factory, Yasar Coskun, is a representative of the Islamic-oriented business association MUSIAD in Sakarya and has close relations with the government.

Coskun was **arrested** while his father was released on probation. In total, five people have been arrested, including the general manager of the factory.

In the meantime, CHP mayors have said they will no longer use fireworks at events in their municipalities.



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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTORATE'S MAP OF IRAQ RAISES IRE

The Communication Directorate of the Presidency tweeted a map this week showing the locations of Turkish soldiers in 38 areas of Northern Iraq before deleting the post on July 6 due to reactions over the way it portrayed Iraq's borders.

The directorate shared the map as a source of pride following the launch of the Claw-Tiger and Claw-Eagle operations against the PKK, but the map showed the northern part of Iraq in yellow and the rest in green.

Aytun Ciray, an Iyi Party deputy, criticized the directorate for sharing a map that displayed Iraq divided in two. "If you

share such maps, you will legitimize other official sources who share maps of a divided Turkey," said Ciray, adding that the map violated Turkey's policy of not advocating Iraq's territorial unity.

A source in the Defense Ministry who is not permitted to speak to the press expressed concerns about sharing the map publicly and said the Tweet was deleted soon after the ministry warned the directorate.

According to the map, Turkish soldiers have entered 40 kilometers into the Kurdistan region.

EU'S BORRELL TURNS BACK ON OPPOSITION, NGOs

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, muted the bloc's criticism of Turkey on democracy, the rule of law and human rights during a visit

to Ankara on July 6-7 while also overlooking Turkey's opposition and civil society.

During the visit, he chose not to talk



about democracy, focusing instead on efforts to de-escalate tensions between France and Turkey in the Mediterranean, as well as the EU-Turkish migration agreement.

A source from the delegation confirmed that Borrell did not meet with the opposition or NGOs but refused to give details about his decision not to.

"We noticed that the EU did not request any appointment, unlike previous visits from the EU's foreign policy chiefs," a CHP source told ANKA.

Lawyers who have been protesting against a bill that will reduce their independence were also denied a meeting with Borrell, ANKA has learnt.

Instead, Borrell preferred to meet with Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and Defense Minister Hulusi Akar during his two-day trip. During the visit, Cavusoglu said Turkey would retaliate if the EU imposed further sanctions on Turkey after Ankara expanded its oil and gas exploration activities in the Mediterranean.



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ECONOMY

EXPERIENCE, UNIVERSITY DEGREE NO LONGER A PREREQUISITE TO BE CENTRAL BANK DEPUTY GOVERNOR

Turkey's president has [revoked](#) the requirements that Central Bank deputy governors have at least 10 years of experience in the sector and be a university graduate, according to a decree published in the Official Gazette on July 11.

In addition, the Central Bank was authorized to instantly access the information of banks.

"The demands of the banks should be met in real time. In order to sustain those requests, the [Central] Bank can access the information systems of institutions," said the decree signed by Erdogan.

The decree also revoked the rule that banks have to set aside 20 percent of their annual profits as a reserve fund.

Last month, the opposition [criticized](#) the government for a succession of appointments to the management boards of state-run banks, saying the positions were not being filled according to merit.

A former wrestling champion, Hamza Yerlikaya, was appointed to the management board of Vakifbank, while Ebubekir Sahin, head of the media watchdog RTUK, was appointed as a board member to Halkbank, as was former Istanbul Mayor Mevlut Uysal. Similarly, lawyer Veysi Kaynak was appointed to the board of Ziraat Bank.



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AKP DEPUTY CHAIR REVEALS CENSORS, SAYS PARTY DEFENDS RIGHTS OF ALL

Mahir Unal, the deputy chair of the AKP, grudgingly revealed on July 7 that a character in a Turkish soap opera on Netflix had been **censored** while arguing that the AKP was respectful to the rights of all.

"Netflix asked a Turkish company to shoot a film series. The scenario of the serial was written. The film was about the story of a homosexual, Osman," said

Unal, revealing that the main character in the show, "Love 101," had been changed to a straight man instead of a LGBT man.

Unal also insisted that the AKP does not aim to block social media platforms while arguing that the party was tolerant toward the LGBT community.





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GOVERNMENT REACTION TO HAGIA SOPHIA RULING DRIPS WITH SYMBOLISM

Turkey's Council of State overturned a 1934 decision on July 10 to turn Istanbul's Hagia Sophia into a museum, eliciting a government reaction that has been rich in symbolism as it prepares to open the edifice to Muslim prayer.

First, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan delivered a speech to the nation on July 10 at 20:53, a reference to the upcoming 600th anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul and the Hagia Sophia. Then, Erdogan said the structure would open for Friday prayers on July 24, the anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne, the agreement that cemented Turkey's sovereignty.

Erdogan also accused Turkey's decision-makers in 1934 of "betraying" the country, although he avoided mentioning the country's leader at the time, founding father Mustafa Kemal Ataturk,

by name.

By Erdogan's decree, the Presidency of Religious Affairs will now administer Hagia Sophia, instead of the Culture and Tourism Ministry.

Interestingly, however, lawyers for the presidency actually [asked](#) the Council of State to dismiss the application to reconvert Hagia Sophia into a mosque, according to documents shared after the hearing. The presidency now theoretically has the right to appeal the decision within 30 days.

While the decision sparked criticisms from Orthodox Christians, it also ignited new discussions within Turkey.

Journalist Yildirim Ogur [noted](#) that Turkey was under authoritarian rule in 1934 when the decision to convert it into

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a museum was taken. "Tragically, while changing the status of Hagia Sophia after 86 years, the decision-making mechanism still uses the technology of 1934."

Orhan Pamuk, Turkey's Nobel Prize-winning author, denounced the decision, saying, "To convert it back to a mosque is to say the rest of the world, 'We are not secular anymore.'"

OPPOSITION WARY OF CRITICIZING

The leaders of the right-wing opposition parties İYİ, DEVA, Future and Felicity applauded the decision on their Twitter accounts, but the CHP and HDP did not lend support to the change.

Still, CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu earlier [said](#) his party would not oppose the move, since the AKP is eager to accuse the CHP of banning worship before adding, "I am against discussing this as an issue of sovereignty."

The HDP criticized the decision, declaring Hagia Sophia to be the common heritage of humanity and demanding the government revoke the change.

But Muharrem İnce, the CHP's presidential candidate in 2018 and an opponent

of Kilicdaroglu within the CHP, said he would attend the first Friday prayer at Hagia Sophia, stressing that the issue concerned Turkish sovereignty.

Like İnce, one of DEVA's founders, Deniz Karakullukcu, [differed](#) from his party's leader.

Karakullukcu lashed out at the government for taking advantage of spiritual feelings in an effort to win votes. "I will not take part in legitimizing this shame," he said, adding that the government converted the Hagia Sophia back into a mosque to deflect attention from Turkey's real problems.

COURT GIVES SUPERIORITY TO OTTOMAN LAW

The Council of State's 19-page decision also touched off new discussions about the superiority of Ottoman law, instead of republican Turkish law, as the court ruled that Hagia Sophia belonged to the Foundation of Fatih Sultan Mehmet Han (Mehmet the Conqueror) based on his will.

Everything belonged to the sultan in Ottoman times, and since the court based its decision on this principle, it has kick-started discussions about the



heritage of Ataturk.

"According to the ruling of the court, the foundations law during the Ottoman Empire is inviolable," said Professor Ali Ulusoy.

Ulusoy added that the ruling should be based on the Turkish Republic's foundations law, instead of Ottoman foundations law.

"According to the recent ruling of the Council of State, Ataturk's testament about the transfer of his shares to the CHP can't be challenged," added Ulusoy.

For more than a decade, Erdogan has been demanding the transfer of the CHP's 28 percent shares in the lender Is Bank, which was the will of Ataturk, to the Treasury. Though the CHP receives no financial benefit from the shares, as Ataturk's will stipulated that the dividends go to the Turkish Language Association and Turkish History Association, Erdogan has pressured civil servants to find a way to transfer the shares.

The Ankara branch of the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) also rebuked the

government for the decision and expressed its determination to fight against what it calls the illegal construction of the presidential palace in Ataturk's Forest Farm (AOC) in violation of Ataturk's will.

GOVERNMENT TRIES TO EASE REACTIONS

The government has begun planning the details for worship, especially as the Christian frescoes must be covered during Muslim prayers. According to Hurriyet, they will be blacked out during worship but shown at other times.

Government officials also tried to ease reactions. "Hagia Sophia's doors will remain open to visitors from all over the world," said Fahrettin Altun, the communications director of the Presidency.

The Foreign Ministry did not reply to questions as to whether UNESCO was notified about the change to Hagia Sophia's status.

Finance Minister Berat Albayrak, however, echoed the words of Islamist poet Necip Fazıl Kısakurek ahead of the decision. "Youth, wait for it. Hagia Sophia will be opened [to pray] either today or tomorrow."



WHY NOW?

In contrast to his stance now, Erdogan [upbraided](#) his supporters in March 2019 for demanding Hagia Sophia be turned back into a mosque. "First fill the Blue Mosque next to it, then we will look into it."

A few days after that rally, Erdogan was more hesitant about converting Hagia Sophia during a live broadcast, [warning](#) his supporters that Turkish mosques abroad could be targeted: "There is a political dimension to this issue. While you don't fill the Blue Mosque next to it, you are calling to fill Hagia Sophia. We built the Grand Camlica Mosque, which is four or five [times as big as] Hagia Sophia. Let's not be hoodwinked. These are all traps. We know very well what to do and when to do it. We don't take steps because these bastards said so."

The timing of the decision stems from Turkey's growing economic crisis and the drop in AKP support since the formation of the breakaway DEVA and Future parties, according to journalist Banu Guven.

"As the AKP's votes fell, the government decided to fly on the wings of the angels in Hagia Sophia," [wrote](#) Guven, stressing

that Erdogan had sent a message to conservative voters, especially supporters of the Felicity Party, to win the next elections. But he also sent a message to secularists, since he conquered the building, which symbolically signifies the secular Turkish Republic, just as he ordered the construction of mosques in Taksim and Camlica, she said.

Meanwhile, Medyascope Editor-in-Chief Rusen Cakir [said](#) Erdogan had fulfilled an endless desire of right-wing governments but added "He played his last card."

"He converted it now, not because he is powerful, but because he is at his weakest and aims to gain power," said Cakir, stressing that this decision would not help the ruling parties consolidate their power since the opposition didn't strenuously object to the decision.

Cakir noted that Erdogan might consolidate his voters only if the international reaction is vociferous.

Since he played his last card, there is nothing left apart from perhaps resurrecting the caliphate, Cakir said, while noting that the MHP would not welcome such a step.



Vedat Demir, a communications academic, argued that Erdogan's decision was simply a move to consolidate his base, rather than gain new voters.

"The regime does not need votes any longer. The decision is to consolidate AKP supporters and reaffirm the faith. The regime is preparing for a bigger and final war," wrote Demir.

WHAT DO THE POLLS SAY?

According to a survey conducted by the pollster Metropoll in June, 43.8 percent of the Turkish population said the government revived the discussions

about Hagia Sophia to change the agenda in order to curtail discussions on the economic crisis. Some 29.5 percent of respondents thought that the true reason for the government's decision was to turn the museum back into a mosque, while 11.7 percent said the government wanted to use the matter as an electoral tool. Another 15 percent said they had no idea.

The survey, meanwhile, showed that young people are not very interested in the discussions about converting the Hagia Sophia into a mosque, evaluating it instead as a means to mask Turkey's economic crisis.

WOMEN IN ERDOGAN FAMILY PROVIDE GUARANTEES FOR ISTANBUL CONVENTION

The AKP is not preparing to repudiate the Istanbul Convention, which aims to prevent violence against women and enshrines rights for members of the LGBT community, women's rights defenders have told ANKA on condition of anonymity - in part because members of the president's family oppose Turkey's potential withdrawal.

"We are in touch with the women in Erdogan's family" who oppose Turkey's withdrawal from the agreement, which is

officially known as the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, said a women's rights advocate.

High-level AKP officials have recently suggested that Turkey should leave the convention because of its clauses on the rights of women in a family and "marginal" issues like LGBT and trans rights.

The Women and Democracy Association



(KADEM), of which President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's daughter Sumeyye Erdogan Bayraktar is the deputy chair, is known as a defender of the convention. Erdogan's wife, Emine Erdogan, is also known to support the convention, even though she is not usually vocal on women's rights.

"The first lady's statements on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on Nov. 25 were pretty clear," said one source, asserting that the AKP had no plans to withdraw from the agreement.

"It's not just the physical but the psychological and economic aspects of violence against women that must be addressed. We have things to do in all areas extending from judicial regulations to the interpretation of cultural norms," Emine Erdogan said last Nov. 25.

Ozlem Zengin, the deputy president of the AKP group; Sare Aydin, KADEM's former chair and a current AKP deputy; and Saliha Gumrukcuoglu, the association's current head, are all known to defend the convention.

AKP Deputy Chair Numan Kurtulmus recently broached the idea of Turkey's withdrawal from the convention, saying it

was a "mistake" to sign it in 2011. "Just as Turkey followed the procedure to sign it, it will similarly follow the appropriate procedure to withdraw from it," he said.

President Erdogan also ordered a review of the withdrawal procedure in line with "public demands" during an AKP's Central Executive Board meeting on July 3.

However, withdrawing from the convention is not an easy procedure, according to the Turkish Constitution.

Canan Gullu, the president of the Women's Associations of Turkey, [thinks](#) the president put the ball in the public's court because he does not actually want to withdraw from the agreement. She also underlined that the president does not have the right to issue a decree to withdraw from the agreement since the convention is a fundamental right that cannot be overturned by fiat.

An expert working on the legislation process in parliament also noted the difficulty of withdrawing from the convention through a presidential decree.

While it still had a parliamentary system, Turkey had the right to withdraw from



international conventions by reversing the steps it took to sign such agreements. But all those steps have been changed with the adoption of the presidential system. In the past, the cabinet proposed the adoption of the convention as a bill from the government, but ministers no longer have the right to submit a draft law under the new system. Instead, only deputies have the right to propose a draft law. Furthermore, because the convention is now enshrined in the Turkish Constitution's section on fundamental rights and freedoms, parliament cannot withdraw from the agreement through a simple vote.

"Since the presidential system came into force in 2018, the withdrawal from the Convention requires a constitutional change," said the expert on parliamentary legislation.

A constitutional change is possible, but that would require a qualified parliamentary majority of 400; the ruling coalition, however, has only 340 seats. Alternatively, the government could put the matter to a public referendum.

Even so, Article 90 of the constitution states that, in the event of a conflict between Turkey's domestic laws and international agreements on fundamental rights and freedoms, the provisions of global conventions shall prevail.

