



The UIA Institute for the Rule of Law

STATEMENT

Paris, 23 June 2025

UIA-IROL calls for the immediate release of lawyer Mehmet Pehlivan and expresses serious concern over judicial harassment in Türkiye

The Institute for the Rule of Law of the *Union Internationale des Avocats* (UIA-IROL) expresses its deep concern regarding the arrest and pre-trial detention of lawyer **Mehmet Pehlivan**, who was taken into custody on 19 June 2025, following a summons issued as part of a high-profile criminal investigation into alleged corruption involving the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality.

Mr. Pehlivan, a member of the Istanbul Bar and legal counsel to Mayor **Ekrem İmamoğlu**, was referred to the Criminal Peace Court and ordered into pre-trial detention on charges of “membership in a criminal organization.” These charges are based on statements made by suspects who reportedly benefited from the so-called “effective remorse” mechanism.

According to the information available to us, the alleged acts attributed to Mr. Pehlivan concern his representation of various individuals under police custody, his coordination of legal strategy among colleagues, and communications with detained suspects. All of these are activities **which appear to fall squarely within the legitimate and protected scope of legal defense work.**

The decision to detain Mr. Pehlivan on the basis of his professional activity represents a serious infringement on the rights of the defense, the independence of the legal profession, and the fundamental guarantees of the Rule of Law. The accusations advanced by the prosecution — that Mr. Pehlivan allegedly coordinated legal defense strategies in order to protect an “organization” — are **deeply troubling** and reflect a **dangerous tendency to criminalize the legitimate exercise of the legal profession.**

In a related development, UIA-IROL notes with concern the **sudden reallocation of two judges** from the panel of the 5th Istanbul Administrative Court who had recently issued an interim decision favorable to Mr. İmamoğlu in a separate dispute concerning his university diploma. These developments raise **serious questions about the independence of the judiciary in politically sensitive cases.**

UIA-IROL urgently calls upon the Turkish authorities to:

1. **Immediately release lawyer Mehmet Pehlivan** and drop all charges that stem from his professional conduct;

2. **Cease the criminalisation of legal defense activities** and uphold the independence of the legal profession in accordance with international standards, including the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.

UIA-IROL further **urges the international community**, and in particular:

- the **European Union institutions**,
- the **Council of Europe**,
- and all bar associations, professional bodies, and human rights institutions in Europe and beyond,

to **speak out forcefully** against the criminalisation of lawyers and to **insist on the respect for the Rule of Law and due process in Türkiye**. Silence in the face of such violations risks normalising the erosion of fundamental freedoms under the guise of criminal justice.

UIA-IROL will continue to monitor this case closely and remains in contact with national and international partners to ensure that the rights of lawyers and the Rule of Law are respected in Türkiye.

More about UIA-IROL

The Institute for the Rule of Law of the Union Internationale des Avocats (UIA-IROL) promotes the Rule of Law and supports and defends, in particular, (1) lawyers, judges and human rights defenders who are harassed, threatened and/or persecuted in the exercise of their professions, (2) the independence of the legal and judicial professions, and (3) the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, especially in defense of human rights.

For more information go to: www.uanet.org - uiacentre@uanet.org
Contact person: Julie ROSA, Communication & Digital Strategy Manager - jrosa@uanet.org