

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 29, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write with deep concern regarding the Turkish Constitutional Court's June 2021 decision to accept an indictment against the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), in an attempt to dissolve the country's third largest political party. Putting the HDP on trial for politically-motivated charges marks the culmination of President Erdogan's efforts to disenfranchise Turkey's Kurdish population, undercut political pluralism in the country, and tighten his grip on power through anti-democratic means. We commend the State Department's March 2021 statement highlighting the threats the dissolution of the HDP would pose to democracy and enfranchisement in Turkey. We urge you to forcefully condemn President Erdogan's escalating efforts to disband the country's largest pro-Kurdish political party and to work with our EU partners to prevent further democratic backsliding in Turkey.

Over the past several years, President Erdogan has undertaken a systematic campaign to restrict the rights of the HDP. Since 2015, the Turkish government has detained more than 5,000 HDP lawmakers, executives, and party members, virtually all on baseless charges and eliciting international condemnation. In the high-profile case of Selahattin Demirtaş, the former HDP leader who has been in prison since November 2016, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled, in 2018 and 2020, that Turkey had violated his rights under the European Convention on Human Rights and ordered his immediate release. Despite the legally-binding nature of these rulings, Demirtaş remains in prison, prompting the Council of Europe on September 17, 2021 to call on Turkey to release him immediately.

In another brazen effort to cement his power through anti-democratic means, President Erdogan has removed from office, and in many instances detained, dozens of democratically-elected HDP mayors. According to the U.S. Department of State's 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights, by August 2019, the Turkish government had replaced most of the HDP mayors elected in the March 2019 local elections with centrally appointed "trustees." Such moves overturn the will of millions of voters and undermine Turkey's multiparty system.

Having failed to defeat Turkey's largest pro-Kurdish party at the ballot box, President Erdogan is now attempting to dissolve the HDP and bar hundreds of its members from holding office through the judicial system. This represents a clear effort to kneecap the political opposition ahead of Turkey's next general elections scheduled for 2023 and, if successful, would extinguish the fairness and credibility of such elections and do lasting damage to the country's political pluralism. We urge you to uphold our national values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in our relations with Turkey and, in concert with our EU partners, ensure that President

Erdogan understands that any attempt to disband the HDP or detain or bar from office its members will result in serious negative consequences for Turkey.

We thank you for your leadership and look forward to working with you on this urgent issue.

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



James Lankford
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Angus S. King Jr.
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator