

Turkish court keeps Kurdish politician Demirtas in jail despite ECHR

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A Turkish court has ruled that the former leader of Turkey's pro-Kurdish opposition remain in prison, his lawyers said on Twitter on Friday, after top EU officials last week called for the politician's swift release.

Selahattin Demirtas, former co-chairman of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) and one of Turkey's best-known politicians, was detained two years ago on terrorism-related charges, which he denies.

He was jailed in September for more than four years over comments in a speech he gave in 2013. He has effectively served out that prison term, but faces more terrorism-related charges that could see him sentenced to up to 142 years if convicted.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has urged Turkey to swiftly process his legal case, saying his pre-trial detention had gone on longer than could be justified.

Hours after the ECHR's Nov. 20 ruling, Demirtas' lawyers applied for his immediate release, saying keeping the politician in jail would amount to a "restriction on freedom".

In its ruling on Friday, the Turkish court said the ECHR decision had not been finalised and unanimously rejected the appeal for Demirtas' release.

Benan Molu, one of Demirtas' lawyers, said the Turkish court ruling was unfounded. "The ECHR's 'immediate release' ruling does not need to be finalised for it to be implemented. Every second he (Demirtas) is held in prison despite the ECHR ruling, there is a crime being committed," Molu said on Twitter.

ECHR rulings are legally binding, but there have been many instances in which Turkey has not implemented them. President Tayyip Erdogan has dismissed the ruling on Demirtas, saying it amounted to support for terrorism.

At a tense news conference in Ankara last week, EU Foreign Affairs Chief Federica Mogherini called for the release of Demirtas. In response, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu called on the bloc to stop defending those aiming to "remove Turkey's democratically elected government".

Ankara accuses the HDP of ties to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has waged a decades-long insurgency in Turkey for Kurdish rights. The HDP denies direct links.