

Türkiye in Focus breaks down the issues of the week. Ömer Carullah Sevim and the TRT World Research Centre's team navigate the nuances of Turkish politics.

- Is Turkish politics entering a period of détente? The domestic developments that have marked the recent period are the visits of the political parties to each other.
- Discussions on the new constitution will remain on the agenda for a while. This is one of the most prominent agendas in inter-party dialogues.
- Türkiye's stance towards Israel is hardening. TRT World Research Center's researcher Şeymanur Yönt shared her insights on this matter.
- The Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al Sabah, paid his first visit outside the Arab world to Türkiye on May 7. TRT World Research Center's researcher Burak Elmali shares the clues of this important visit.

A Period of Detente in Turkish Politics?

In the last two weeks, significant inter-party discussions have unfolded, with the highlight being CHP's new leader, Özgür Özel's visit to President Erdoğan at the AK Party headquarters. This marked the first leadership-level engagement between the two parties in eight years. President Erdoğan reciprocated by announcing his plan to visit the CHP headquarters, which would be his first since 2006.

Whether this marks the beginning of concrete cooperation remains to be seen, with discussions on the new constitution and the economy likely to be pivotal.

Notably, the meeting brought together leaders representing over 70% of the electorate, echoing the dominance of the two major parties in Türkiye's political landscape. While this fact is a direct reflection of the transition to the presidential system, which occurred in 2017, the recent local elections highlighted



a preference for larger parties capable of directly influencing governance. The disorganization among the opposition parties seems to have been overcome by the CHP's higher tally of votes. This trend suggests Türkiye may be moving towards a political climate dominated by two major parties, with smaller parties seeking to influence their agendas.

From this angle, the current thaw in Turkish politics could be interpreted as the parties adjusting to the presidential system. The discussions surrounding a new constitution may also aim to address some perceived shortcomings.

It remains to be seen whether there will be cooperation between the government and opposition on these issues. While the upcoming four-year period without elections presents a chance for ongoing dialogue, there are some caveats. President Erdoğan's dialogue with Özgür Özel has helped strengthen Özel's leadership status within the CHP. Despite this, Ekrem İmamoğlu and Mansur Yavaş are often cited as potential CHP frontrunners for the 2028 presidential race. Responding to speculation about his own aspirations, Özel assured that he would not impose his candidacy on the party, although such discussions are expected to grow. Meanwhile, the AK Party faces its own challenges reconciling positions with its coalition partner, MHP, particularly amid debates over the new constitution. How these discussions unfold could influence the contours of Türkiye's political landscape moving forward.

New Constitution Debates

The 1982 constitution, enacted in the aftermath of the 1980 coup d'état, has undergone numerous amendments over the years. However, the prospect of drafting a new constitution has once again emerged as a prominent issue in Türkiye. While specific discussions on its content have yet to commence, this process has sparked dialogue among various political factions. Parliament President Numan Kurtulmuş recently met with representatives from the CHP, DEM Party, Saadet Party, and Good Party, underscoring the significance of opposition party representation in shaping the new constitution. It is anticipated

that this debate will remain a focal point of Türkiye's agenda in the foreseeable future.

In this context, the discussions about the new constitution might be seen as part of a broader trend towards softening political stances. However, the near future could see rising tensions as well. Debates are expected to reveal significant disagreements among the parties on key issues such as the presidential system, the role of parliament in the balance of powers, and reforms in the judicial system.

Türkiye Suspends All Trade with Israel

On May 2, the Ministry of Trade announced a halt to all trade with Israel. TRT World Research Centre's researcher Şeymanur Yönt provides her insights on Türkiye's sanctions against Israel:

"Türkiye's move to cease all trade with Israel amidst the Gaza conflict carries significant legal and ethical ramifications. Initially, it ignited debates concerning the 1997 Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed between Israel and Türkiye, with Israel alleging Türkiye's breach of its terms. According to the terms of the agreement, Israel can take appropriate measures at its discretion against Türkiye's alleged breach. Additionally, Israel may bring the dispute to the Joint Committee established by the parties and, after that, submit it to arbitration.

Moreover, both Türkiye and Israel are parties to the WTO and GATT, obligating them to adhere to their regulations. WTO laws stipulate fair and equal treatment among nations, and Türkiye's

imposition of economic sanctions on Israel is likely to constitute a violation of GATT provisions. Accordingly, Israel might initiate panel proceedings under the WTO Dispute Settlement Understanding. However, given the current non-functionality of the WTO's appellate body, this legal path doesn't seem efficient.

On the other hand, Türkiye may establish a good case claiming that its imposition of economic sanctions are countermeasures against Israel's international law violations, which are lawful provided that certain conditions are fulfilled. This seems to be the most likely and strong justification for Türkiye to impose economic sanctions against Israel.

Ultimately, Türkiye's action underscores a prioritisation of its political and ethical stance against genocidal acts and war crimes over material concerns related to trade, illuminating its priorities."

Emir of Kuwait's Visit to Ankara

Burak Elmali, a researcher at the TRT World Research Centre, commented on this visit:

"Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Meshal al-Ahmad al-Sabah visited Türkiye on May 7 and was hosted by President Erdoğan. It is significant that the Emir, who took office in December, chose Türkiye for his first non-Arab country visit, coinciding with the 60th anniversary of bilateral relations. During the visit, agreements were signed in six areas including trade, defence, infrastructure, disaster management, etc. Kuwait also signed a \$367 million deal for Baykar's TB2 drones from the leading Turkish Defence

Industry. The current trade volume between Türkiye and Kuwait stands at \$688 million, with a target of reaching \$1 billion this year. Currently, more than 400 Kuwaiti companies are doing business in Türkiye, while around 50 Turkish companies are undertaking various projects in Kuwait. Turkish investments are crucial for Kuwait's economic diversification within the scope of its 2035 vision goals. Besides these cooperation areas, the agenda notably included Israel's war on Gaza as the top priority between the two states that also agreed on establishing strategic diplomatic dialogue."

Highlights

- Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan announced that Türkiye has decided to join the case filed by the Republic of South Africa against Israel at the International Court of Justice.
- TRTEspañol has commenced online streaming, marking Türkiye's official broadcaster's foray into the Spanish-speaking realm. This new digital news platform from TRT will enrich diversity and multiculturalism in international broadcasting.

Coming up ...

- President Erdoğan is expected to visit the headquarters of the main opposition party, CHP, in the coming days.
- Discussions on the new constitution may culminate after the Erdoğan-Özel meeting.
- As the halfway point of the year draws near, talks of a temporary hike in the minimum wage may intensify. Currently, the government's stance on this matter remains undisclosed. Divergent views exist among unions, the economic administration, which favours stringent monetary policies, and various political factions.