

There is never a dull moment in Turkish politics, and this week has been eventful with diplomatic, political, and economic developments. *Türkiye in Focus* will examine the following topics:

- Will the CHP succeed in satisfying its diverse supporter base? The anti-immigrant discourse within the party signals potential fissures.
- Türkiye is implementing various measures to navigate economic challenges, yielding tangible results. TRT World Research Centre's Hüseyin Özdemir provides insights on this week's progress.
- The visit of the Greek PM to Ankara signifies ongoing efforts to improve relations between the two nations.
- Is the F-16 deal between Türkiye and the US approaching a resolution? TRT World Research Centre's Çağdaş Yüksel offers commentary.
- Türkiye is conducting its largest-ever drug operations. TRT World Research Centre's Hatice Nur Keskin discusses key aspects of this issue with SETA's researcher Bilgehan Öztürk.

The CHP Mayors' War on Arabic Signboards Dents the Party's Internal Harmony

In the recent local elections held at the end of March 2024, there was a notable decline in the influence of far-right politics advocating an anti-immigrant agenda. However, while this voter demographic hasn't vanished entirely, it has shifted its support towards the main opposition party CHP, which stands as the primary opposition force against the AK Party.

In the past few days, several CHP municipalities have opted to raise certain official fees for migrants and have initiated efforts to eliminate Arabic signage. This focus on Arabic signs appears to be a move to bolster populist sentiments against Syrian migrants. Simultaneously, it serves as a signal to the ultra-secularist and nationalist factions within the CHP's supporter base. In response to President Erdoğan's recent statement on tougher penalties for hate crimes, CHP leader Özgür Özel voiced criticism towards his party's mayors, urging them to pursue more moderate actions.

In the upcoming period, the CHP leadership's ability to navigate contradictions will be put to the test. On one hand, it must prevent the loss of voters with anti-immigrant sentiments while also appealing to broader voter groups, including centrists and left-leaning individuals, to maintain its position as a viable candidate for power. Balancing these demands will require adopting a restrained stance, particularly in municipal administrations.

Beyond political factors, economic motivations seem also to be driving such an orientation. As the government is expected to implement more austerity measures, which will reduce financial resources for municipalities, this will push opposition-led metropolitan cities to seek alternative funding through European grants for refugee support. Hence the need for a more tempered rhetoric regarding migrants.

Türkiye's Credit Rating Upgraded as Central Bank Revises End-Year Inflation Forecast

Last week, statements from the economic administration and new developments were also on Türkiye's agenda. Researcher Hüseyin Özdemir commented:

"Fatih Karahan, the Governor of the Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye, announced during a press conference that they have revised their year-end inflation forecast for 2024 upward by 2 points to 38 per cent. Additionally, he unveiled a series of austerity measures. These developments indicate that the economic management is attempting to address real issues rationally.

The emphasis on 'tightening' was the main theme of the press conference. Karahan's statements were crucial for the goal of

lowering inflation in line with intermediate targets during the disinflation process expected to begin in June.

In the event of a significant and lasting deterioration in inflation, the expectation in the market is that the monetary policy stance will tighten.

In line with these developments, S&P has upgraded Türkiye's credit rating from B to B+, maintaining a 'positive' outlook. This reflects the anticipation of better coordination among Türkiye's monetary, fiscal, and revenue policies, particularly after local elections and amid external rebalancing efforts. Minister of Treasury and Finance Mehmet Şimşek's policies appear to be gaining favourable reception in global markets."

Mitsotakis' Visit to Ankara

On Monday, May 13th, Ankara received an important guest. Six months after President Erdoğan visited Athens in December, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis was in Türkiye. The two countries share historical affinities as well as deep-rooted problems, such as the Cyprus issue and regional rivalries. After 2020's escalation of tensions over natural gas exploration activities in the eastern Mediterranean, the two countries have recently witnessed a thaw in the frosty relationship.

During his visit to Athens in December, Erdoğan emphasized that there were [no unsolvable problems](#) between the two countries. During this week's visit, the two countries agreed

to establish a joint business council to increase trade volume. They also agreed to jointly combat the consequences of natural disasters. Both leaders conveyed similar positive messages about minorities in their countries as a bridge for dialogue.

Furthermore, historically, cordial relations between the two NATO allies have contributed positively to their rapport with the United States. Therefore, the trajectory of Türkiye-Greece relations holds significance not only for the interests of the two neighbouring nations but also for their positioning within the global landscape.

Türkiye and US Forge Path to Finalize \$23B F-16 Agreement

The F-16 deal, a thorn in the side of Türkiye-US relations, appears to be approaching its conclusion. Researcher Çağdaş Yüksel reports:

"The Ministry of National Defence (MSB) held its weekly press briefing. Ministry sources commenting on the latest status regarding the procurement of F-16s from the US stated, "We have conveyed the Draft Offer and Acceptance Letters to our relevant units for necessary review and evaluation before transmitting them to our counterparts. The process is progressing as planned."

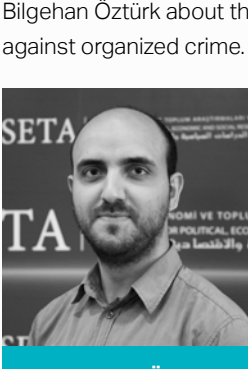
The US Department of State had officially notified Congress on January 26 about the sale of 40 new Lockheed Martin F-16 Block 70 fighter jets to Türkiye and the modernization of the existing 79 F-16s.

The US administration had transmitted acceptance and offer letters concerning the sale of F-16s to Türkiye in February, and Türkiye has now completed its part by returning them to Washington as discussions on a \$23 billion sale package are underway.

Lockheed Martin's Vice President, OJ Sanchez, in an interview with Anadolu Agency on May 9th, stated that the parties are nearing the conclusion of the agreement. Sanchez said, "We are progressing through the final stages of the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) agreement, hoping for its conclusion very soon, and then we will discuss how to deliver these aircraft to Türkiye."

Türkiye Conducted Its Largest Heroin Bust: Interview with Bilgehan Öztürk

Researcher Hatice Nur Keskin interviewed SETA researcher Bilgehan Öztürk about the recent [drug operations](#) and the fight against organized crime.



Ali Yerlikaya has been the interior minister for less than a year, but he has carried out many successful drug operations, including the largest heroin seizure in Türkiye's history. Do you think Yerlikaya has made a difference in this context? How would you evaluate the 11-month performance of the new interior minister?

Overall, Ali Yerlikaya's performance over the past 11 months is impressive, evident in the significant quantities of confiscated products and drugs, as well as the number of apprehended individuals, both Turkish and international. During this period, there has been a notable increase in operations against organised crime networks and drug trafficking. Considering the large scale of confiscated goods and the frequency of arrests, it appears to have been a successful period.

What is Türkiye's position in the world drug routes? How can the increasing number of drug operations in Türkiye in recent years be related to global developments? Can it be said that there has been an increase in the use of the Türkiye route?

Regarding drug routes, Türkiye may not be a traditional or primary route, but due to its strategic geographic location, it serves as a fall-back option for drug cartels and rings. Türkiye's connectivity through various modes of transportation, including maritime and land routes, makes it an attractive place when traditional routes face disruptions. For instance, increased surveillance and crackdowns at Rotterdam port have led drug

networks to consider Türkiye's as an alternative route. This reliance on Türkiye's geographic advantage highlights the country's role in drug trafficking.

The increase in the number of drug operations can be attributed to two main factors. First, there may be a heightened intensity in drug trafficking by these networks. Second, Turkish security institutions may have increased their efforts to track and crack down on these activities. It is likely a combination of both factors. Globally, the current economic situation, marked by a general crisis and slow recovery from the pandemic, has created conditions favourable for increased drug trafficking. Economic downturns often lead to a rise in illicit activities like drug trafficking and organised crime. For example, the Assad regime in Syria serves as a stark example of how conflict and economic instability can push states towards illegal economic activities, with drug production becoming a major revenue source. Similar situations exist in other conflict zones, such as Russia, Syria, Gaza, and Afghanistan, where conflict and instability have made drug trafficking an attractive source of revenue for non-state groups and, in some cases, even state actors.

Drug trafficking is an international problem. What is the state of international coordination on this issue? What are the responsibilities of international actors, including Türkiye?

International coordination and cooperation are crucial in combating transnational organised crime and drug trafficking. While there have been efforts through international and intergovernmental organisations, these networks remain agile and adept at forming alliances. Challenges include varying levels of professionalism and, in some cases, the complicity of state officials in facilitating drug trafficking. There is a need to enhance coordination and cooperation among nations to address the increasing scale of illegal activities. The existing level of coordination may not be sufficient to tackle this challenge effectively.

Highlights

- Türkiye's Personal Data Protection Authority shared the Draft Regulation on the Procedures and Principles Regarding the Transfer of Personal Data Abroad. Researcher Şeymanur Yönt stated that the rules planned to be in effect in this regulation are especially important for companies that do business abroad or work with cloud systems that have servers located abroad or store their data abroad. This is because, if these companies do not harmonise their businesses and transactions with this regulation, they are at risk of administrative fines of up to 9 million TL.
- Türkiye's BOTAS signs \$1.1B long-term LNG deal with ExxonMobil.
- The Turkish Day Parade, which strives to reinforce the Turkish-American community's unity and solidarity, as well as their economic and cultural ties, will kick off on May 17 with a flag-raising ceremony at Wall Street-Bowling Green Park.
- Several senior police officials in Ankara have been detained. This development took place in the context of the Ayhan Bora Kaplan criminal organization investigation, a case closely followed by the public.

Publications by TRT World Research Centre

- Every year, the week of 10-16 May is celebrated as the "International Day of Persons with Disabilities," check out our [report](#) "Disability and the Public Sphere," by Researchers Hatice Nur Keskin and Burak Elmalı.

Recent publications:

- [Strategic Pivot: Türkiye-Iraq Cooperation Deepens](#), a Policy Outlook by Burak Elmalı
- [Israel's AI-powered Genocide Raises New Moral Perils](#), a Policy Outlook by Ravale Mohyidin
- [Has the two-state solution been jeopardised?](#) By İhsan Faruk Kilavuz
- [Iran's Aerial Retaliation on Israel: Evaluating Impact and Intent](#) By Mehmet Kiliç



Send us leads and feedback at:

turkiyeinfocus@gmail.com