

This edition of Türkiye in Focus covers the following topics:

- The debate on the stray dog law is currently the country's top agenda. This discussion provides important insights into various aspects of Turkish politics.
- The leaders of the AK Party and the CHP were photographed together once again. Meanwhile, the MHP's reservations about the détente process persist. New dynamics in the relations between the government and the opposition have begun to emerge.

Insights from the Stray Dogs Controversy

The proposed law on stray dogs remains a highly debated topic in both parliament and the country. The ruling AK Party's proposal has undergone several revisions in the parliamentary commission. These amendments narrowed down the conditions under which stray dogs will be euthanised. Following these debates, the draft is expected to become law in the near future.

This process has served as a significant test for various actors in Turkish politics. The next step is to observe how municipalities will implement different practices within the framework provided by the new law.

The Turkish Left's Disconnect from the Lower Classes

The Stray Dogs debate has highlighted some chronic issues within Turkish politics, particularly the elitist approach of the Turkish left. The Turkish left, especially those aligned with the socialist left, has struggled to establish a realistic connection with the problem, often adopting a moralistic and condescending perspective.

A few representatives from the Turkish left were among the MPs in the parliamentary committee who voiced the strongest opposition to the proposal. In one clip released to the press from the commission, Workers' Party of Türkiye (TİP) MP Sera Kadigil is heard shouting, "Why is this person here?" at a mother who lost her son to a stray dog attack. Videos of similar heated exchanges between other MPs and individuals directly affected by the issue have also circulated on social media.

Türkiye's streets are home to dogs and cats in a way that is uncommon in Western countries. However, rapid urbanisation, inadequate sterilisation, and insufficient shelter numbers have led to a disproportionate increase in the stray dog population. In many parts of Türkiye, reports of stray dog packs attacking people and other living creatures have surfaced, resulting in deaths and serious injuries. This is a significant safety and health issue, particularly in rural areas and working-class suburbs where dogs collected from urban centres are released. Despite this concern, people in every Turkish neighbourhood continue to care for stray animals.

There exists an elitist political culture that assumes being an animal lover is characteristic of the urban secular class, overlooking one of Turkish culture's most deeply rooted traditions: living with stray animals. Many conservative circles close to the AK Party opposed the bill that would have paved the way for mass euthanasia. Due to this backlash, the term euthanasia was removed from the bill.

Although the Turkish left was the most vocal in its opposition, it failed to connect with the problems and feelings of the people. Kadigil's confrontation with a grieving mother epitomised this disconnect. The left's self-righteous, moralistic language,



(Ömer Ürer - Anadolu Agency)

combined with a disregard for a problem affecting a significant portion of the public and a lack of concrete solutions, meant that the Turkish left could neither genuinely address the issue of stray dogs nor the concerns about euthanasia.

Moreover, the Turkish left's relative silence on issues directly affecting the working class is striking. For example, in an environment of high inflation, July has typically been a time when a second increase in the minimum wage is discussed. However, the fervent opposition seen this year regarding stray dogs was not matched by similar outcry on an issue directly impacting the working class. It is also noteworthy that these leftist parties receive the highest votes from Türkiye's most socio-economically developed regions.

This situation underscores the Turkish left's failure to engage with class-based politics and the everyday problems of the people.

An Experiment for Municipalities

The final version of the stray dog law will serve as a test for local authorities and could also be viewed as an opportunity for Turkish democracy. Traditionally, Turkish politics has relied on the central authority to resolve vital and popular issues. However, this time, some ambiguous areas in the new law allow municipalities to adopt different practices.

The law permits euthanasia for diseased or aggressive dogs but also requires the collection of stray dogs and their placement in shelters. The responsibility for collecting dogs, constructing and maintaining shelters, and most importantly, deciding which animals will be euthanised will lie with the municipalities.

The CHP spokesperson has already stated that CHP municipalities will not practice euthanasia. Over time, we will see various approaches to this issue. Municipalities will compete to develop practices that address both moral concerns and concrete security problems. In a political atmosphere where the performance of local administrations is frequently scrutinised, the issue of stray dogs—encompassing ideological, ethical, and public health concerns—will continue to be significant.

Has Turkish Politics Normalized? Are the AK Party - CHP - MHP Balances Settling?

After a long hiatus, President Erdoğan, who leads the AK Party, and the main opposition leader, Özgür Özel, were seen together at the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Cyprus Peace Operation in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. They were accompanied by MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli.

As with previous encounters, it was not an extended one-on-one meeting. Mustafa Elitaş of the AK Party, who also attended the previous meetings between the two leaders, mentioned that Özel and Erdoğan are expected to meet again at the October 29 Republic Day reception at the presidential palace.

The former CHP leader boycotted the new presidential palace, but the new leader Özel has adopted a softer stance. The process, referred to as normalization by the CHP and détente by the AKP, should be understood in this context. A political environment has emerged where mutual criticism and opposition persist, but the channels for dialogue remain open. Although the recent interactions have not been as extensive as the initial meetings, a political platform has been established where the leaders were photographed together.

There are still objections from the MHP to this situation. The most significant concern may be the potential for a constitutional amendment that could weaken the MHP's influence in the ruling bloc. If the requirement for the presidential election is set at 40+1%, the AK Party's reliance on the MHP would decrease. A possible compromise with the CHP could facilitate such a change.



(TUR Presidency/Mustafa Kamacı - Anadolu Agency)

It is noteworthy that MHP leader Bahçeli made statements aligned with the CHP's position on the stray dogs' debate. It remains to be seen how the MHP will react when this law reaches parliament. However, these statements can be interpreted as a reminder to the AK Party of the MHP's power in parliamentary politics. Despite the MHP's current reservations about the rapprochement with the CHP, this rapprochement could potentially expand the MHP's political opportunities.

Meanwhile, Numan Kurtulmuş, the speaker of parliament, continues discussions with other parties on the new constitution. The involvement of relatively small parties in parliament and their positions on the new constitution may also influence this process.

Highlights

- During his party's parliamentary group meeting, President Erdoğan announced that the debts of municipalities would be collected as part of economic measures. The CHP interpreted these statements as a threat to the municipalities under its administration.
- The 2024 Paris Olympics are commencing. Türkiye will be represented in 18 sports by a total of 102 athletes, including 54 women and 48 men.

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