

In this edition of Türkiye in Focus, we analyse the key elements of the AK Party's 23rd foundation anniversary meeting. Additionally, we feature an in-depth interview with Dr. Ozan Ahmet Çetin about the newly unveiled Steel Dome air defence system project. We also explore another significant topic this week: the escalating internal conflicts within the CHP

Widening New Horizons: The AK Party Celebrates its 23rd Anniversary

Wednesday, August 14, marked the 23rd anniversary of the founding of Türkiye's longest-serving political party, the AK Party. Since its inception 14 months before the early elections in 2001, the party has held power continuously. President Erdoğan described the party's establishment as "the signboard of a movement of hearts that had been growing wave by wave until that day."

Erdoğan referred to this "movement of hearts" as the political expression of the religious-conservative majority, historically marginalised by the Republic's strict secular policies. Under Erdoğan's leadership, this movement catalysed significant transformations in Turkish politics, expanding the AK Party's popular support from 34% to over 50%, a phenomenon Erdoğan celebrates as "the embrace of the state and the nation."

Today, however, the AK Party and Türkiye are at a crossroads, facing a new era. The party's founding narrative no longer resonates as strongly with newer generations in a country that has seen profound social and political shifts.

In his anniversary speech, Erdoğan notably addressed the youth and highlighted a shift in the AK Party's strategy, evidenced by his comment that even the CHP no longer supports restricting religious freedoms. This reflects a broader repositioning of the party on the new political landscape, where Erdoğan also emphasised Islam's role in state discourse. He stressed respect for diverse lifestyles while expressing intolerance towards attacks on religious symbols, suggesting a resolution of long-standing tensions between the state and a significant portion of the Turkish populace.

Analysts often interpret Erdoğan's speeches within a narrow political framework. However, this speech indicates a strategic pivot to a new political arena, subtly highlighted by his references to the CHP. Erdoğan critiqued the CHP yet acknowledged it



(Mustafa Kamaci - Anadolu Agency)

as a legitimate interlocutor, indicating the AK Party's readiness for dialogue and moving beyond the traditional religious-secular divide that has characterised its conflict with the CHP.

Moreover, Erdoğan outlined new fronts of conflict, targeting secular racism and pro-LGBT stances, predominantly associated with the CHP. This aligns with global political debates, positioning the AK Party uniquely within them.

Significantly, the anniversary also showcased the AK Party's enduring appeal, evidenced by the defection of representatives from other parties, including two deputies from the Good (İYİ) Party and 13 local administrators mostly from the New Welfare Party (YRP), who joined the AK Party.

Erdoğan also foreshadowed major changes at the upcoming party congress in the fall, hinting at a renewal of party cadres and strategies, reflecting a dynamic re-evaluation of the AK Party's direction and discourse as it adapts to changing political realities in its 23rd year of power.

Türkiye Introduced the Steel Dome Air Defence Project. Interview with Dr. Ozan Ahmet Çetin



Dr. Ozan Ahmet Çetin

Q: How does Türkiye's Steel Dome project enhance the country's air defence capabilities, and what role does artificial intelligence play in this system?

A: Türkiye's Steel Dome project really steps up the country's air defence game by bringing all the different sensors, weapons, and communication systems into one big, integrated network. Türkiye has put a lot of effort into building defence systems that work at various altitudes and ranges over the years. You could say that the Steel Dome is the next big step in making sure we get the most out of these systems, improving the speed, effectiveness, and cost-efficiency of our air defence. It is a vision to get all the pieces of the puzzle to fit together perfectly. This makes it way more effective at spotting and dealing with potential threats, like missiles or enemy planes.

Currently, there is limited public information about the specific role artificial intelligence will play in this context. However, it is reasonable to anticipate that it will be a central element in this framework. It helps by quickly sorting through all the data from these various systems, figuring out what's a real threat and what's not, and making sure the right response happens fast. So, thanks to AI, the system becomes a lot smarter and faster, which is exactly what you need when dealing with modern air defence challenges.

Q: What are the potential challenges and risks associated with integrating multiple defence systems into a cohesive IADS, as exemplified by the Steel Dome project?

A: Integrating multiple defence systems into a cohesive Integrated Air Defence System, like with the Steel Dome project, comes with its fair share of challenges and risks. First off, getting all these different systems—radars, missiles, communication networks—to work together smoothly is no small task. Each system needs to communicate perfectly with the others, which requires sophisticated software, rigorous testing, and a lot of

coordination. Luckily, the Steel Dome functions as a federated system, which means that each part, or "node," can operate on its own but also work together as part of the whole system. So, that will surely decrease the risks.

Then, there's the risk of delays. Since every component must be tested both on its own and as part of the bigger system, any issue with one part can slow down the entire project. This kind of complexity can also lead to higher costs than originally expected, as we've seen with other big defence projects. Another big concern is cybersecurity. When you're linking so many systems together, it presents more opportunities for cyber-attacks. Ensuring that the whole system stays secure is a constant challenge. So, while the Steel Dome is a huge leap forward, it's important to be mindful of these potential hurdles to make sure everything works as intended and stays reliable over time.

Q: How does Türkiye's Steel Dome project reflect the country's broader strategy to achieve greater self-reliance in defence?

A: The Steel Dome is a clear reflection of Türkiye's broader push to become more self-reliant in defence. Over the years, Türkiye has realised that relying too much on other countries for critical defence systems isn't always ideal, especially when those allies might not fully understand or prioritize Türkiye's specific security concerns. We see this same reflex in many other defence industrial efforts of the country such as the 5th generation aircraft, KAAAN.

By developing the Steel Dome, Türkiye is taking control of its own air defence, creating a system that's tailored to its unique needs. It's about ensuring that the country can protect its airspace independently, without having to depend on outside help or be at the mercy of political decisions from other nations. A project of this scale is also about creating a whole new concept in air defence. If we can show that this system is a success, we'll also have the opportunity to tailor it for our allies and potentially export it to them.

Internal Turmoil Grows in CHP

Recent internal power struggles within the CHP, previously rumoured, are becoming increasingly public. These conflicts fall into three main categories. The most evident is the rift between Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who lost his chairmanship to Özgür Özel in the November 2023 election, and the new leadership. Tunç Soyer, the former mayor of Izmir and a Kılıçdaroğlu ally, hinted at a potential run for the chairmanship but gathering the necessary signatures for a new chairmanship election under Kılıçdaroğlu and Soyer's banner appears challenging. This difficulty is likely to increase as the new leadership adjusts the party's delegate composition in the coming months, potentially diminishing Kılıçdaroğlu and his supporters' influence within the party. Despite this, Kılıçdaroğlu has been more visible in the media recently, which could be part of a broader strategy, possibly even leading to a new political venture if they break away from the CHP.

The second area of contention involves the selection of the party's presidential candidate, with notable rivalry between

Ankara Mayor Mansur Yavaş and Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu. Chairman Özel has so far managed to keep this competition from erupting into open conflict, although İmamoğlu, in particular, is actively campaigning to secure the nomination.

The third conflict emerged following comments by the mayor of Üsküdar, Sinem Dedetaş, who expressed readiness to become the Mayor of Istanbul should İmamoğlu pursue the presidency. This statement has sparked further speculation that other district mayors in Istanbul are eyeing İmamoğlu's position.

These internal disputes are tarnishing the CHP's public image. While these issues have not yet escalated significantly, the ability of the CHP to manage these conflicts will face a severe test as the next election cycle approaches and internal dynamics continue to evolve.

Highlights

- An 18-year-old teen carried out a random stabbing attack in Eskişehir province. Five people were injured in the attack. The suspect, who used far-right racist symbols, broadcast the attack online. This attack sparked a public debate on the impact of racism in Türkiye and the negative effects of computer games on children and youth.
- Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas spoke about Israel's genocide policies in the Turkish Grand National Assembly.
- After reaching a compromise on catalog crimes, Türkiye lifted the access block on Instagram. However, the app's deletion of posts about Palestine by Ali Erbaş, the head of Religious Affairs, sparked a renewed debate on censorship by META.
- Izmir Municipality cancelled its sister city protocol with Tel Aviv. Previously, cities such as Antalya and Adana cancelled their sister city protocols with Israeli towns in line with BDS Türkiye's calls.

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