

In this week's edition of Türkiye in Focus, we explore several key topics:

- We spoke with Dr. Hamdullah Baycar regarding Türkiye's application to join BRICS.
- Researcher Ferhat Polat provided insights on Egyptian President Sisi's recent visit to Türkiye.
- Controversy emerged after newly graduated lieutenants recited unsanctioned oaths at the Turkish Military Academy.

Interview with Dr. Hamdullah Baycar on Türkiye's BRICS Process



Dr. Hamdullah Baycar

Following Türkiye's application to join BRICS, the AK Party spokesperson confirmed that their intention is clear. We spoke with Dr. Hamdullah Baycar from Karadeniz Technical University to delve deeper into this topic.

Does BRICS serve solely as a platform for economic collaboration, or does it present a broader alternative vision for the international order? In this light, how would you assess BRICS' membership strategy?

Few international organizations and blocs wield significant influence. Even the most prominent groups like the G8 or G20 have limited power, and their collaborative efforts often remain unseen by the public. Yet, membership in such international entities remains crucial, serving as both a symbol of status and a platform for engaging in global dialogue. This is evident in Türkiye's bid to join BRICS, which reflects strategic objectives beyond mere economic collaboration.

While economic ties are a key factor, Türkiye's primary motive for seeking membership in BRICS likely centres on solidifying its alliances with non-Western states such as China and Russia. Türkiye's move to join BRICS, along with its interest in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, should not be seen as turning away from the West but rather as a strategy to balance and diversify its international relationships. This approach allows Türkiye to foster strategic partnerships with these non-Western states and leverage these relationships as a diplomatic tool in dealings with Europe. A prime example is Türkiye's ongoing relationship with Russia, which positioned it as a mediator in the Ukraine-Russia conflict, a role that has garnered appreciation from Europe.

Additionally, the recent push to expand BRICS, potentially including regional powers like Egypt, Iran, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, has hastened Türkiye's efforts to join. Türkiye aims not to lag behind these countries, highlighting the strategic nature of its bid to secure a place within this influential bloc.

What significance does Türkiye's bid for BRICS membership hold for its foreign policy direction?

The orientation of Türkiye's foreign policy has long been a subject of debate. Despite this, the founding ideology of Türkiye has consistently leaned towards the West, underscoring a robust and enduring preference for alignment with Western blocs. This inclination surpasses any transient policy shifts. Although the relationship between the EU and Türkiye has experienced its share of challenges, these issues do not overshadow the fundamental ties. Furthermore, Türkiye's recent diplomatic moves towards the EU illustrate that its application to join BRICS isn't intended as a replacement for its Western alignments but rather as a means to introduce greater flexibility into its foreign policy.

How might its Western allies perceive Türkiye's relationship with BRICS and its potential membership?

Although Türkiye's aim is not to detach from Europe and the Western bloc, its actions may not be perceived as such by its Western allies. Public opinion, the media, and some Western political figures might view Türkiye's moves as an attempt to distance itself from the West. Recent developments in the expansion of BRICS exemplify this conflict of perceptions. On one hand, Egypt and the UAE, both traditional US allies, have joined the bloc. On the other, Saudi Arabia's hesitation to accept an invitation is often seen as caution due to its ties with the US. Thus, while the EU and US are aware of BRICS' limited influence and its somewhat anti-Western rhetoric, Western allies may still erroneously regard Türkiye's involvement as a shift away from the West.

Egyptian President El Sisi's First Visit to Ankara Signals a New Era of Regional Cooperation

Researcher Ferhat Polat discussed the first high-level Head of State visit from Egypt to Türkiye in 12 years:

"Egyptian President El-Sisi met Turkish President Erdogan in the Turkish capital, Ankara, on Wednesday, the first such presidential visit in 12 years, marking the beginning of a new era in diplomatic, economic, and military relations between the two regional powers. Ankara and Cairo have been making efforts to repair their strained relationship, especially since the start of 2021.

Ever since the 2013 military coup in Egypt, the leaders of these two countries have maintained a deeply hostile relationship. From 2013 to 2021, the conflict between Ankara and Cairo intensified due to their differing positions and perspectives on regional matters. One of the critical points of contention was the conflict in Libya, where both sides backed opposing factions. Another source of disagreement was the dispute over maritime boundaries in the eastern Mediterranean.

The current normalisation between Ankara and Cairo began almost three years ago through discussions between officials. These talks laid the groundwork for the resumption of relations and marked the beginning of a new chapter in their relationship. The recent visit of President Erdoğan to Cairo in February 2024 marked the culmination of the normalisation process.



(Emin Sansar - Anadolu Agency)

Both countries are re-evaluating their ties due to geopolitical changes and shared challenges. The visit aims to promote normalisation and enhance cooperation in various areas. During Sisi's visit, 17 agreements were signed, primarily focusing on trade deals, were signed. Both leaders also discussed Israel's war on Gaza, with a focus on finding solutions to coordinate the delivery of humanitarian aid to the besieged Palestinian territory."

For a more detailed analysis read our Policy Outlook: <https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/policy-outlooks/from-tension-to-reconciliation-mapping-the-future-of-egypt-turkiye-relations/>

Newly Graduated Lieutenants' Oath Sparks Controversy

On August 30-31, the graduation ceremony of the Turkish Military Academy took place. After the ceremony was over and the president and other guests had left the grounds, the newly graduated lieutenants recited an oath that is no longer officially recited and chanted the slogan "We are the soldiers of Mustafa Kemal", sparking controversy. MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli issued a message saying that this situation should be investigated, while AK Party spokesperson Ömer Çelik said that the old tutelage system was no longer in place and that no meaning should be drawn from the images. However, the CHP leader defended the slogans and the lieutenants.

Discussions on military tutelage in Türkiye have been very important until recently. Statements from the top levels of the military, including in the early 2000s, had the capacity

to intervene in politics. The last coup attempt took place in 2016. Since that time, more decisive measures have been implemented to regulate civil-military relations and the military's involvement in politics.

It is significant that the slogans recited by the young lieutenants mirror those used by Kemalists during civilian demonstrations. Further investigation is necessary to determine whether these actions were spontaneously initiated by the newly graduated soldiers present or if they were prearranged. It is fair to suggest that a political stance was displayed in this instance. The endorsement of this action by the CHP leader should be considered in this light. Additionally, such a statement may overshadow the CHP's attempts to dissociate itself from the long history of military tutelage over Turkish democracy.

Highlights

- The Central Decision and Management Board, the AK Party's supreme decision-making body, has convened. The process for the upcoming party congress, scheduled for this fall, has been initiated.
- The Türkiye-Iraq Development Road Project summit was convened in Istanbul. For a more detailed analysis: <https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/blogs/turkeyes-development-road-a-new-era-in-eurasian-trade-and-inter-connectivity/>
- The new Medium-Term Program was unveiled. The growth target for 2024 has been lowered from 4% to 3.5%, and the inflation expectation adjusted to 41.5%.
- Liridon Rexhepi, a Kosovo citizen alleged to be managing Mossad's financial operations in Türkiye, was arrested in Istanbul.

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