

In this week's Türkiye in Focus, we cover the following topics:

- Türkiye closely monitors the recapture of Aleppo from the Assad regime and the latest developments in Syria, with Ankara adopting a strategic and holistic approach to the conflict.
- Researcher Mehmet Kılıç provides insights on Türkiye's diplomatic efforts regarding Syria, including the recent visit of Iran's Foreign Minister to Ankara.
- As the year draws to a close, discussions on the new minimum wage have begun.

Türkiye's Role in Shaping Syria's Future: Diplomacy, Security, and Humanitarian Efforts

Syria and Türkiye are closely connected not only due to their shared long border but also through deep historical and cultural ties. Cities like Adana, Kahramanmaraş, and Gaziantep, now major cultural and commercial hubs in Türkiye, were once part of the Aleppo province during the Ottoman Empire. Historically, trade and culture in these regions have been intertwined. Additionally, familial bonds exist between the two peoples, with Turkish and Syrian relatives visiting one another during festive occasions before the Syrian civil war.

With the start of the civil war in Syria, which was imposed by the Assad regime to avoid any democratisation, Türkiye has become one of the leading host countries for Syrian refugees, accommodating nearly 3 million Syrians. For the 4 million residents of Idlib, mostly displaced Syrians, Türkiye's border has served as their primary lifeline. Turkish NGOs are recognised for their significant humanitarian work in the region.

Throughout the Syrian uprising and subsequent civil war, Türkiye has been one of the most active countries in diplomatic efforts surrounding the crisis. Ankara played a key role as a guarantor in the Astana Process alongside Russia, working to safeguard its national interests and those of the opposition for a period of time. Most recently, President Erdoğan called for direct talks with Bashar al-Assad, but these overtures have been repeatedly rejected by Assad and have yet to receive a response.

As part of ongoing efforts to bring stability to Syria, Türkiye has engaged in diplomatic discussions with relevant parties, including after the latest round of escalation that began on November 27. All eyes are now on the upcoming emergency Astana meeting, which will take place on the sidelines of the Doha Forum. The foreign ministers of Iran, Türkiye, and Russia, the three guarantor states of the Astana Process, will hold talks. Qatar will host the meeting but will not participate.

While emphasising Syria's territorial integrity, Türkiye's main concern is the activities of the YPG/PYD, which Ankara designates as a terrorist organisation, near its borders.



(Şadi Dubeyisi - Anadolu Agency)

The Turkish leadership has set clear red lines, including the establishment of a 30-kilometer-deep safe zone along its borders and ensuring no YPG/PYD presence west of the Euphrates River. These measures are aimed at reducing insecurity and preventing future influxes of illegal migrants.

The risk of a potential new wave of migration was also discussed during Thursday's National Security Council meeting. Another possibility is the creation of new safe zones within Syria, such as Aleppo, for Syrian refugees currently residing in Türkiye.

Domestically, many analysts believe that Devlet Bahçeli's proposals on the Kurdish issue are closely linked to the instability in Syria. He has suggested that PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan issue a statement urging the PKK to disarm and proposed that Türkiye's pro-Kurdish DEM Party distance itself from the US-backed PKK and its offshoot the YPG/PYD. It is uncertain how the PKK and YPG/PYD would respond to a potential disarmament call from Öcalan. Nevertheless, this ongoing process will be crucial for Türkiye's next military, political, and diplomatic steps. Additionally, the recent developments in Syria could also have a bearing on internal political dynamics in Türkiye.

The Iranian Foreign Minister Visited Ankara Amidst Developments in Syria



(Arda Küçükaya - Anadolu Agency)

Researcher Mehmet Kılıç evaluated Türkiye's Syria policy and the visit of Iran's foreign minister to Ankara amidst the ongoing conflicts.

The unexpected offensive launched by Syrian opposition groups against the Bashar al-Assad regime, which led to the capture of Aleppo, took regional actors by surprise and prompted them to make swift strategic decisions. This development affected the balance of power within Syria and influenced the positions of regional actors, such as Iran.

Immediately after the fall of Aleppo, on December 1st, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi visited Damascus and openly expressed his support for Assad. This visit underscores the continuity of Iran's policy of supporting the Assad regime and highlights the seriousness with which Iran views the threat facing the regime. The following day, Araghchi visited Ankara and met with his Turkish counterpart, Hakan Fidan, revealing that the Syrian conflict was at the centre of the diplomatic agenda between the two countries. The talks further emphasised Türkiye's influence over the opposition groups in Syria and its pivotal role in the regional resolution process.

During the joint press conference, "At this stage, it would be inaccurate to attribute the events in Syria solely to foreign intervention," Minister Fidan stated. "We have always supported the preservation of Syria's territorial integrity and unity, and we will continue to do so," he added, noting that they will continue coordination with Iran within the Astana Process.

Araghchi echoed these sentiments, expressing mutual concerns over a potential new wave of terrorism and insecurity in the region. He highlighted the importance of regional cooperation and synergy, particularly between Iran and Türkiye, to ensure stability and security.

Although mutual goodwill was expressed and the importance of dialogue emphasised during the meeting, Araghchi may not have received what he hoped for during his visit to Türkiye. Nonetheless, the relationship between these two authorities will be crucial in shaping Syria's future, one that considers the interests of all parties, not just the Assad regime.

Türkiye has played a key role in seeking a solution to the Syrian crisis, particularly through the Astana Process, which was launched in 2015. Throughout this process, Türkiye has consistently underscored its commitment to Syria's territorial integrity and raised concerns about the presence of the PKK and YPG/PYD in the region. However, despite assurances that Tel Rifaat and Manbij would be cleared of PKK and YPG/PYD elements, the lack of tangible actions on this front hindered progress. Türkiye's efforts to normalise relations were largely met with indifference from the Assad regime, Iran, and Russia, which contributed to the ongoing crisis.

Iran, on the other hand, has provided strong support to the Assad regime since the beginning of the war and has further complicated the conflict by sending various proxy forces, including Hezbollah, to the region. The weakening of Hezbollah in its conflicts with Israel and the Assad regime's failure in Aleppo shows the weakening of the proxy power system that Iran has built over the years. To safeguard its interests in Syria and maintain its land connection with Hezbollah, Iran has made it clear that it will not compromise on this issue, offering military support if requested by Assad. However, while the rhetoric is firm, the actual capabilities within the current geopolitical context remain a different matter. Meanwhile, Russia's intense focus on the war in Ukraine limits its ability to intervene in Syria. While the Russian/Iranian/Hezbollah alliance has previously been effective in supporting the Assad regime, a new reality on the ground could shift the regional balance of power.

Türkiye emerges as a key actor due to its benevolent presence on the ground and active diplomacy. Key priorities such as border security, the construction of a safe zone, and the liberation of Manbij from YPG/PYD elements are central to Ankara's efforts to stabilise the region. Despite recent developments that are unfavourable for the Assad regime, Türkiye has reaffirmed its commitment to resolving the conflict in Syria by advocating for reconciliation between the opposition and the government. This indicates that the Astana negotiations with Russia and Iran are likely to regain some traction soon. Addressing Türkiye's concerns in this process presents a key opportunity for regional security and a lasting solution in Syria.

The Minimum Wage Increase Negotiations Have Begun

As the year draws to a close, millions of workers' attention has turned to the new minimum wage rate to be set. The determined rate will not only affect minimum wage earners but will also serve as a benchmark for all employees. Since Mehmet Şimşek took over the Turkish economy in 2023, a series of tightening measures have been implemented as part of the fight against inflation. For example, the annual wage increase, which is typically applied during periods of high inflation, was not implemented in 2024. However, with the release of November 2024 data, the annual inflation rate stands at 47.1%. While this is the lowest inflation rate since November 2021, there is still progress to be made for the Turkish economy.

Under these circumstances, the minimum wage increase has become a central point of political and economic debate. While some argue that excessive wage hikes fuel inflation, others emphasise the economic struggles of low-income groups. President Erdoğan has made it clear, "We will not let any segment of society be crushed by inflation." Meanwhile,



(Dilara İrem Sancar - Anadolu Agency)

opposition parties continue to push for unrealistic and drastic wage increases, without regard for the long-term economic stability of the country.

The Minimum Wage Determination Commission, made up of representatives from labor unions, employers' associations, and government bodies, is set to hold its first meeting on December 10.

Highlights

- Türkiye's defence industry has broken its [annual sales record](#) with an export of 5.8 billion dollars.
- Hakan Fidan participated in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) ministerial meeting held in Malta.
- Türkiye boosts education expenditures by 92.5% in 2023

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