

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

- A paradigm shift appears to be occurring regarding the Kurdish question, with the potential to influence both regional developments and national politics.
- The verdict in the child murder case in Diyarbakır sparked more controversy.
- TRT Tabii's new series *Gassal* has garnered widespread acclaim while sparking debates about cultural hegemony in Türkiye.

A Paradigm Shift on the Kurdish Dossier?

The process initiated by MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli has reached a new phase this week. DEM Party members of Parliament Pervin Buldan and Sirri Süreyya Önder visited PKK figure Abdullah Öcalan on İmralı Island. A brief written statement released the day after the visit indicated Öcalan's willingness to support "the new paradigm empowered by Mr. Bahçeli and Mr. Erdoğan." In an interview, MP Pervin Buldan expressed optimism about this process compared to previous ones. On Thursday, the DEM Party delegation met first with Parliament Speaker Numan Kurtulmuş and later with MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli to provide updates on the İmralı meeting and the ongoing dialogue. The delegation will meet with the AK Party and CHP next week.

The initial political party contact was with Bahçeli, the leader of mainstream Turkish nationalism, and his gesture of personally welcoming the delegation at the door is noteworthy. It signifies that Bahçeli has not only initiated the process but is also actively backing it. This gesture aims to ease nationalist opposition to the process and underscores a strong commitment to the initiative, especially given that this support carries significant political risk for the MHP.

"Paradigm shift" is a key term used by both sides involved in the discussions. Presidential advisor Mehmet Uçum utilised this expression in his remarks. On the same day the DEM delegation visited İmralı, Uçum described the concept of the "Century of Türkiye" as the "Century of Turks and Kurds." One interpretation

of this paradigm shift is that it signals a resolution to the long-standing debate over the definition of Turkish citizenship, particularly in terms of its recognition of Kurdish identity.

These developments should not be viewed in isolation from the broader picture in the Middle East. Kurds are spread across four countries, with the largest population residing in Türkiye. A new opening in Türkiye's approach to the Kurdish dossier would significantly strengthen Ankara's regional influence at the expense of secessionist and fanatic movements. Conversely, Türkiye's support is essential for enhancing Kurds' political status. If the current optimistic scenario comes to fruition, it could result in a win-win outcome for both sides.



(Raşit Aydoğan - Anadolu Agency)

Verdict Announced in Narin Murder Case, But Debate Continues

The murder of a child in the Tavşantepe neighbourhood of Diyarbakır has captivated Türkiye's public since the first day it was reported. While the trial has finally concluded, the debates surrounding the case are far from over. Both official and civil institutions, as well as lawyers, are expected to appeal the verdict, leading to a potential review by higher courts.

This case touches on cultural themes that are subject to interpretation and potential exploitation by various political factions in Türkiye, particularly those with so-called progressive

ideologies. Tavşantepe, where the crime took place, is a traditional Kurdish settlement with strong familial ties. Kurdish political circles and Turkish opposition groups have criticised the incident as emblematic of a backward tribal system. Moreover, the emotionally charged nature of the crime has kept the public on edge since the case began. Social media and national television channels have been rife with campaigns targeting the family and the village, hindering a calm and rational discussion of the issue while exerting undue pressure on the judicial process.

On Saturday, the court announced its verdict. Narin's mother, brother, and uncle were sentenced to life imprisonment, while Nevzat Bahtiyar, a key figure in the case accused of disposing of the child's body, received a relatively lenient sentence. This discrepancy has reignited public controversy. Minister of Family and Social Services Mahinur Özdemir Göktaş announced that her ministry would appeal the decision.

This case is a striking example of the intersection between judicial procedures and political interpretations, as well as the influence of media and social media pressure on the justice system. Critics of the verdict argue that these pressures led to a rushed and unconvincing judgment. Attention now turns to how the appeals process in higher courts will unfold.



(Aziz Aslan - Anadolu Agency)

TRT Tabii's New Series Sparks Cultural Hegemony Debates

TRT's digital platform, Tabii, has garnered widespread acclaim and stirred debate with its new series *Gassal*. The show portrays the life of a gassal, a person responsible for washing the deceased as part of Islamic funeral rites and delves into the tragic and comedic events surrounding this occupation. With a mix of thought-provoking and humorous reflections on death and life's inherent contradictions, the series has received critical acclaim for its direction, performances, and screenplay.

However, *Gassal* has also reignited discussions on cultural hegemony in Türkiye. For much of the last century, Turkish art and cultural productions were largely shaped by ultra-secular progressives with an anti-religious stance. This perspective often depicted Anatolian people as uneducated and backward, with religious culture framed as the root of societal problems.

Since the mid-20th century, conservative communities in Türkiye have undergone significant urbanisation, accompanied by growing artistic and cultural production. Yet, some argue that despite conservatives having more political clout since 2002, Kemalist elites retained their hegemony over theatrical and cinematic productions. The debates surrounding *Gassal* are deeply rooted in this historical context.

As a technically well-executed production with a conservative perspective, *Gassal* has achieved remarkable success, with its first episode on YouTube amassing over 13 million views within two weeks. This success has unsettled some opposition circles, who view the series through the narrow lenses of "culture wars".



(Erhan Elaldı - Anadolu Agency)

Highlights

- On the first day of 2025, a rally in support of Palestine was held in İstanbul, with over 300 NGOs and tens of thousands of people in attendance.
- Türkiye's Ministry of National Defense (MoD) has reported significant progress in its ambitious naval projects, including the National Submarine (MILDEN), the TF-2000 Air Defense Destroyer, and the National Aircraft Carrier (MUGEM). These advancements represent a crucial step in enhancing Türkiye's maritime capabilities on the global stage.
- Türkiye's first domestic electric car maker, Togg, announced that the number of vehicles delivered to consumers is approaching the 50,000 mark, as the company shared its latest figures on the first day of the new year. Togg's sales surged by approximately 53.6% year-over-year, reaching over 30,000 units in 2024.

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