

In this week's Türkiye in Focus;

- A new chapter is anticipated in the Kurdish dossier following the statement from İmralı.
- The ruling AK Party held its general congress. New members joining the party drew attention.
- President Erdoğan sent important messages to the European Union.

Significant Announcement on the Kurdish Dossier from Öcalan

The process that began with MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli shaking hands with DEM Party MPs at the parliamentary opening in early October, followed by his widely regarded historic call for the PKK to lay down arms on October 22, has now reached a critical juncture.

A delegation composed of DEM Party members has visited Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned founder of the PKK, twice on İmralı Island in recent weeks. Following these visits, they briefed political parties in parliament and engaged in consultations. Meanwhile, Devlet Bahçeli, the leading figure of mainstream Turkish nationalism, has emphasised the need to end terrorism and strengthen the historical bonds between Turks and Kurds in his statements.

Since the beginning of this process, a response to the call made by the leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) to Abdullah Öcalan had been awaited. Finally, after the third visit of the DEM Party delegation to İmralı this Thursday, a statement was read in which Öcalan explicitly called on the PKK to lay down arms and disband itself. In the statement, Öcalan notes: "The collapse of real socialism due to internal reasons and the resolution of identity denial in the country, along with developments in freedom of expression, have led to the PKK's loss of relevance and excessive repetition."

Türkiye has progressed from denying the existence of the Kurds to establishing a Kurdish-language state television channel over the past twenty years. The point reached in this process represents a significant opportunity for social peace and unity

within Türkiye. In his statement, Öcalan expresses his gratitude to the MHP leader and the President in the context of the opportunity that has emerged.

However, this process does not concern only the Kurds within Türkiye. These developments also hold significance beyond Türkiye's borders, particularly regarding key issues such as the shape of the relationship between the YPG-held territory in northeastern Syria and the Damascus regime, as well as the terrorist threats emanating from northern Iraq against Türkiye.

In this context, how Öcalan's call will be received by the PKK cadres based in the Qandil Mountains in northern Iraq and the YPG terrorist organisation in Syria is a crucial matter. Both groups had previously made statements emphasising the importance of any call that might come from Öcalan but others already misinterpreted Öcalan's statement. Mazloum Abdi, head of the umbrella organisation controlling the YPG/PYD terror group and a member of the Qandil cadres, stated that Öcalan's declaration pertains only to the PKK and does not affect activities in Syria. Meanwhile, terror leader Salih Muslim remarked, "When the atmosphere for democratic struggle is established, there will be no need for weapons. When the attacks against us cease, the reasons for carrying weapons will vanish."

In any case, if Öcalan's call materialises on the ground, a long-standing issue that has shaped the last forty years of Türkiye and caused immense human and material losses will be resolved.



(Ağit Erdi Ulukaya - Anadolu Agency)

New Members at the AK Party General Congress Draw Attention

For some time, Türkiye's focus had been on the highly anticipated eighth general congress of the AK Party. The process, which began last fall with leadership changes in local party organisations, culminated on Sunday, February 23, with the congress in Ankara. The most notable feature of the congress was the influx of new members into the AK Party. Three parliamentarians from the İYİ Party and the Future Party were officially welcomed into the party. Among them was Serap Yazıcı Özbudun, a nationally recognised constitutional law professor from the Future Party. Mehmet Salim Ensarioğlu, who joined from the İYİ Party, is a respected politician from the southeastern provinces, while Ünal Karaman, a former famous footballer with a nationalist political background, also joined the ranks.

Another notable development was the inclusion of seven politicians who had previously switched to the AK Party from other parties after the 2023 general elections, securing positions in the party administration. These new memberships carry three significant implications.

First, by attracting members from opposition parties in the centre-right, the AK Party reinforces its position as the primary representative of this political segment. This expansion

of the AK Party and the diminishing influence of relatively smaller political parties are closely linked to the nature of the presidential system. In a system where forming a government requires securing 50% of the vote, smaller parties have fewer opportunities to influence politics, making them less appealing to politicians.

Second, by incorporating figures from different political backgrounds, the AK Party is laying the groundwork for a broader societal representation in the new constitution, which is planned to be drafted soon. The new members include individuals from both nationalist and liberal backgrounds, indicating an effort to bring together diverse political perspectives.

Finally, these new memberships also carry significance regarding parliamentary seat distribution. With the latest additions, the AK Party has increased its parliamentary seats to 272. Along with its alliance partner, the MHP, the total number of seats stands at 319. While this is still far from the 400 seats required for constitutional amendments, potential new members joining the People's Alliance or support from smaller parties in parliament could help reach the 360-seat threshold necessary for decisions such as a constitutional referendum or early elections.



(Emin Sansar - Anadolu Agency)

President Erdoğan's Messages to the European Union

Following the cabinet meeting on February 24, President Erdoğan delivered key messages directed at the European Union. He stated that liberal democracy is facing a severe crisis, with political voids being filled by far-right demagogues. Given that his remarks came just one day after elections in Germany, he emphasised that developments in Europe are being closely monitored, particularly concerning Turks and Muslims living there.

One of Erdoğan's most striking statements was: "We find it significant that our relations with the European Union are regaining their previous momentum." He stressed that Türkiye's full membership could help Europe overcome its economic, demographic, defence, and political challenges.

Since its application to the European Economic Community in 1959, Türkiye has become integral to many institutions that now form the European Union. Full membership negotiations officially began in 2005. However, geopolitical shifts and domestic political turmoil on both sides—especially after the 2016 coup attempt—led to a downturn in relations. Recently, however, there have been signs of a positive shift.

In August 2024, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan was invited to the informal Gymnich meeting of EU foreign ministers for the first time in five years. Prior to the Trump administration's return to

the White House, Fidan had expressed that Türkiye-EU relations should return to the relatively positive trajectory of the pre-Sarkozy era.

At a time when Washington is pressuring and isolating the EU amid geopolitical crises, Türkiye's warm approach appears to be strategically timed. As Erdoğan highlighted in his speech, developments concerning Syria and Ukraine make it essential for both Türkiye and the EU to consider the mutual benefits of closer cooperation.



(TCCB/Mustafa Kamacı - Anadolu Agency)

Highlights

- As part of normalisation talks in U.S.-Russia relations, Russian and U.S. delegations met at the U.S. Consulate residence in Istanbul.
- Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan stated that Türkiye would not accept Trump's plans to take ownership of Gaza.
- Türkiye's Defense Ministry is advancing the procurement of Eurofighter Typhoon jets, with an operational requirements document submitted to the U.K. Ministry of Defense and BAE Systems. The process continues as Türkiye awaits a price proposal, while working to integrate advanced jets until the KAAAN aircraft is operational.

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No Edition Next Week

We wanted to inform you that won't be an edition of Türkiye in Focus next week as we take a short break. We'll return the following week with fresh perspectives and updates on the latest developments in Türkiye. Thank you for your ongoing support and understanding!

The Türkiye in Focus Team