

In this edition of *Türkiye in Focus*, we cover the following topics:

- As key diplomatic efforts concerning Ukraine's peace negotiations continue, Türkiye hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Researcher Hüseyin Özdemir analysed the visit.
- Political statements from TÜSİAD, one of Türkiye's leading business associations, remain a hot topic of debate.
- Notable developments are taking place in industrial cooperation between Türkiye and Italy.

Zelensky's Visit to Türkiye at a Pivotal Moment for Ukraine's Future

Researcher Hüseyin Özdemir assessed the Ukrainian President's visit to Türkiye and the country's potential contributions to Ukraine's future.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's visit to Ankara coincided with U.S.-Russia discussions in Saudi Arabia, underscoring Türkiye's enduring diplomatic relevance in the Ukraine conflict. His meeting with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan strongly signalled Türkiye's readiness to play a role in upcoming peace negotiations.

Establishing a fair and inclusive negotiation table has become paramount as the war progresses. The ideal mediator should maintain a balanced position between both warring sides, ensuring that all perspectives are adequately represented. Türkiye's track record in diplomatic efforts pertaining to the Ukraine War, including the Istanbul peace talks, the Black Sea Grain Initiative, and prisoner exchange agreements, reinforces its credibility as a mediator.

Zelensky articulated this point, stating during the press conference with Erdoğan that peace talks should involve Türkiye, the USA, the EU, and the UK. This suggests that Ukraine sees Türkiye's participation as necessary in any future diplomatic resolution. Erdoğan, in turn, affirmed that Türkiye is an ideal host for U.S.-Russia-Ukraine negotiations, further solidifying Ankara's positioning as a central figure in peace efforts.

Türkiye's diplomatic stance has been defined by its ability to engage both Moscow and Kyiv while advocating for Ukraine's territorial integrity. Erdoğan has consistently emphasised that "there will be no winner in war, and no loser in peace." This principle guided Türkiye's involvement in previous negotiations, making it the only NATO member state with open channels to both belligerents.

Beyond diplomatic engagement, Türkiye's role in the humanitarian and economic dimensions of the war cannot be overlooked. Ankara has facilitated prisoner exchanges and, despite the ongoing conflict, has continued to build economic ties with Ukraine. With an ambitious goal of reaching \$10 billion in bilateral trade, Türkiye is also positioning itself for active participation in Ukraine's post-war reconstruction.

One of the critical discussions between Erdoğan and Zelensky focused on Black Sea security. Erdoğan highlighted the necessity of a regional framework to ensure maritime safety, a move that could serve as both a trust-building measure and a pathway to renewed diplomatic engagement. Given that the Black Sea remains a crucial theatre of geopolitical contestation, any progress on this front could have far-reaching implications for broader regional stability.

As negotiations gain momentum, the success of Türkiye's mediation efforts will hinge on the geopolitical calculus of major stakeholders, including the U.S., Russia, and Ukraine. With U.S. President Donald Trump turning the process upside down, the international architecture for peace negotiations is shifting. Should key actors demonstrate a genuine willingness to engage, Türkiye's ability to bridge divides and facilitate discussions could prove instrumental in shaping the trajectory of a potential settlement.

While uncertainties persist, Türkiye's role as a diplomatic intermediary remains significant. By capitalising on its strategic location, proven track record in mediation, and well-balanced diplomatic relationships, Ankara is positioned to play a significant role in future peace negotiations, with the coming months set to determine whether this potential will translate into meaningful progress toward ending the conflict.



(TUR Presidency/ Murat Cetinmuhurdar - Anadolu Agency)

TÜSİAD – Government Tension

The speech by Ömer Aras, President of the High Advisory Council of the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD), at the association's general assembly has ignited significant debate. Aras made bold political statements, criticising both the judiciary and the government. Similarly, TÜSİAD's chairman, Orhan Turan, spoke at the same meeting and echoed Aras's views. These remarks have sparked widespread discussions in both political circles and the public.

Another business association, MÜSİAD, criticised TÜSİAD's remarks as "damaging to social harmony."

TÜSİAD is one of the most prominent umbrella organisations representing Turkish businesspeople. However, it is also known for its politically influential statements throughout Türkiye's modern political history. Some argue that TÜSİAD played a role in paving the way for the militarist regime that led to the 1980 military coup. Similarly, during the February 28 process in 1997 and the era of military tutelage, TÜSİAD was perceived as a supporter of oppressive policies.

TÜSİAD has also become a prominent figure in the national discourse due to its political position within Türkiye's secular-conservative divide. In this regard, many segments of society view it as a "club of business elites" representing the hardliner secularist establishment. President Erdoğan, addressing the remarks made by Aras and Turan in this context, stated:

"You may long for the old Türkiye, but in the new Türkiye, you will know your place. If you are a business association, you will learn to act like one. You will not incite the public, you will not provoke state institutions. You will not attempt to pressure the judiciary."

Some experts argue that TÜSİAD no longer holds the same level of influence it once did, and that its statements should be seen simply as political criticism. Meanwhile, an investigation has been launched against TÜSİAD officials on charges of "attempting to influence judiciary" and "publicly spreading misleading information."



(Mehmet Futsi - Anadolu Agency)

Closer Cooperation Between Türkiye and Italy in the Defence Sector

Last week, Italy's Minister of Made in Italy, Adolfo Urso, and Türkiye's Minister of Industry and Technology, Mehmet Fatih Kacir, held a meeting in Istanbul. Following the meeting, Kacir stated, "new cooperation opportunities between Türkiye and Italy, particularly in high-tech sectors such as defence, aerospace, and space, were discussed in great detail."

Urso also visited Baykar, one of Türkiye's leading defence companies, along with the President of the Italian defence firm Leonardo. Reports about potential future collaborations between Leonardo and Baykar have surfaced in the media for some time. A senior Leonardo official previously noted that the technologies of both companies complement each other well and that inter-company discussions have been progressing positively.

Baykar had already drawn attention with its acquisition of the Italian firm Piaggio Aerospace. These developments are seen as significant steps toward closer ties between the Turkish and European defence industries.



(BAYKAR - Anadolu Agency)

Highlights

- The first round of technical talks between Ethiopia and Somalia took place in Ankara. Previously, the two countries had reached an agreement through Türkiye's mediation.
- Turkish and Pakistani forces conducted a joint military exercise in Pakistan, which lasted for two weeks.
- The Consumer Confidence Index rose by 1.4 points in February, reaching 82.1—the highest level in the past twenty months.

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