

In this week's *Türkiye in Focus*:

- Investigations have been launched into some personnel in connection with allegations surrounding the high school entrance exam. However, certain politicians and journalists are using these inquiries to fuel political polarisation.
- President Erdoğan was in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus as part of the Peace and Freedom Day celebrations.
- Turkish authorities welcomed the European Union's decision to ease visa procedures for Turkish citizens.

High School Exam Allegations Stir Controversy Amid Political Polarisation



(Kerem Kocalar - Anadolu Agency)

Summer marks an exciting yet tense period for millions of students across Türkiye, as it coincides with the announcement of results for both high school and university entrance exams. Following the end of the academic year, students await the outcomes of these centralised exams that play a decisive role in shaping their educational paths. With results now released, a new academic journey begins for many young people who are preparing to step into new schools and campuses.

This year, the high school entrance exam was overshadowed by controversy after claims emerged that some of the questions had been leaked online during the test. The public was quick to recall past instances, particularly during the period when the FETO organisation was active within state institutions, where exam questions were systematically shared with affiliated individuals, leading to unjust placements and deep damage to public trust. That painful memory remains vivid and continues to heavily influence how similar incidents are perceived today.

The current incident reignited similar concerns. Some journalists, particularly those associated with opposition-aligned, hard-line secularist media outlets, used the incident to cast suspicion on the success of students from religious vocational schools (Imam Hatip). Accusations were made, directly or indirectly, that the strong performance of these schools might be linked to leaked questions. In response, the Ministry of Education launched an investigation, confirming that certain exam observers had breached protocol by leaking questions after the exam. However, the Ministry emphasised that this did not compromise the overall fairness or integrity of the exam, and disciplinary action was initiated against 29 personnel.

Still, the episode has reopened longstanding social divisions, especially the secular-conservative fault line in Turkish society. Imam Hatip schools, which combine religious instruction with a standard curriculum in sciences and humanities, have long been the subject of political debate. Critics have historically attempted to limit their influence, including past policies that reduced students' exam scores and hindered their university admissions. Today, some commentators continue to portray their success as abnormal, subtly implying it must be artificial. However, these schools have consistently produced high-achieving students, even during periods of institutional bias. Today, no concrete evidence has surfaced to support claims of pre-exam question leaks. In the absence of such proof and with the Ministry's active investigation, public debate has begun to cool, though the cultural tensions behind it continue to simmer.

Erdoğan in Northern Cyprus to Commemorate Peace and Freedom Day

July 20 marks the anniversary of the Cyprus Peace Operation and is celebrated each year in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) as the Day of Peace and Freedom. Fifty-one years ago, Türkiye launched a military intervention in response to the systematic oppression, violence, and discrimination faced by Turkish Cypriots under the Greek Cypriot administration. Acting within its rights as a guarantor power under international treaties, Türkiye aimed to restore peace and protect the lives and rights of the Turkish population on the island. The intervention eventually led to the founding of the TRNC. However, despite establishing a functioning democratic administration in the north, Turkish Cypriots have long faced international isolation, political non-recognition, and economic embargoes, which have hindered their global integration and development.

Türkiye has remained a steadfast ally of the TRNC, actively working to counteract this isolation by supporting infrastructure development, education, healthcare, and diplomatic engagement. Beyond economic and technical assistance, Türkiye has also advocated for the TRNC's voice to be heard on international platforms. Each year on July 20, Türkiye reinforces this support through high-level official visits, emphasising the historical and strategic bond between



(Doğukan Keskinliç - Anadolu Agency)

the two states. This year, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan participated once again in the national celebrations held in Lefkoşa, underlining Türkiye's unwavering commitment to the island's future. He pointed out that the TRNC now has a growing presence in key international organisations such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the Organisation of Turkic States, reflecting an important step toward broader international recognition and diplomatic engagement.

EU Visa Easing: A Step Towards Strengthening Türkiye-EU Relations



(Metin Aktaş - Anadolu Agency)

In recent years, Turkish citizens have encountered increasing difficulties in obtaining visas for travel to European Union countries. Complaints about prolonged processing times, unexplained rejections, and inconsistent treatment had become more frequent, drawing reactions from both citizens and official institutions in Türkiye. In response to these ongoing concerns, Turkish authorities, most notably the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, had already been engaging in dialogue with EU counterparts to find a constructive solution. These negotiations appear to have yielded results: last week, the European Commission issued a new set of guidelines, shared with member states, introducing notable visa facilitation

measures for Turkish applicants. According to the decision, Turkish citizens who have previously held Schengen visas will benefit from simplified procedures, including the issuance of longer-term, multi-entry visas. This step marks an important shift in EU visa policy toward Türkiye and was met with a broadly positive response from the Turkish side.

In addition to the Foreign Ministry's diplomatic efforts, the Turkish Ministry of Trade also announced that it will initiate further discussions to ensure that first-time visa applicants are not left behind and benefit from the new climate of cooperation. Analysts suggest that this development should not be viewed merely as an administrative improvement but also as a potential sign of thaw in political relations. Despite periods of political friction and diverging agendas, Türkiye and the European Union remain vital partners in terms of economy, strategy, and social relations. Türkiye continues to host an important number of refugees, playing a critical role in managing migration toward Europe, especially in the aftermath of the Syrian war. Furthermore, Türkiye's growing geopolitical relevance and advances in defence technology have elevated its position in regional and global affairs. Against this backdrop, the EU's move to ease visa procedures is seen by some observers as a step toward rebuilding trust and reviving dialogue, possibly laying the groundwork for deeper engagement in the near future.

Highlights

- As negotiations between Türkiye and the United Kingdom continue, it has been reported that Germany, previously reluctant, has now given the green light for the sale of Eurofighter Typhoon jets to Türkiye.
- As wildfires intensify amid rising temperatures, ten personnel lost their lives while responding to a blaze in Eskişehir, located in Central Anatolia.
- The third round of Ukraine-Russia talks took place in Istanbul, where both sides reached an agreement on a new prisoner exchange.
- The Central Bank cut its policy rate by 300 basis points, bringing the new interest rate down to 43%.

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