

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

- Nationalist parties, led by the Good (İYİ) Party and the Zafer (Victory) Party, have set their sights on exploiting nationalist sensitivities emerging from the Terror-Free Türkiye process to boost their votes. However, this strategy does not appear to be yielding results.
- The defection of the Aydın mayor, along with several other CHP mayors, to the AK Party has further intensified internal debates within the CHP.
- The Turkish social media platform Next Sosyal is experiencing rapid growth.

Where Do Opposition Nationalist Parties Stand in the Terror-Free Türkiye Process?



(TBMM - Anadolu Agency)

The parliamentary commission established to shape the legal framework of the Terror-Free Türkiye initiative and ensure broad public participation held a landmark session this week. For the first time, it heard voices from outside parliament, most prominently families of martyred soldiers, the “Diyarbakir Mothers” whose children were drawn into PKK violence, and the “Saturday Mothers,” who for decades have sought justice for enforced disappearances and unlawful killings. Their presence signalled a conscious effort to prioritise those who have suffered most from violence, suggesting that the process aims to move forward with a sense of empathy, prudence, and reconciliation.

A defining element of the process is the leadership role taken by the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the traditional home of Turkish nationalism. MHP’s involvement has helped keep nationalist sensitivities calm while also compelling political actors and social groups to approach the initiative with seriousness. By anchoring the process within one of the most symbolically charged currents of Turkish politics, the commission creates an environment where dialogue can be framed as both patriotic and constructive.

Nevertheless, the initiative faces vocal opposition from smaller nationalist breakaway parties such as the İYİ (Good) Party, the Zafer (Victory) Party, and the Anahtar (Key) Party. These groups, which emerged after splits from MHP, have sought to exploit nationalist unease for political gain, positioning themselves as defenders of uncompromising nationalism. Their rhetoric has been sharp and confrontational, and some surveys suggest that such appeals, though limited in scope, have resonated with a segment of voters. This situation indicates that while their influence remains marginal, their disruptive potential cannot be dismissed entirely.

Even so, three major constraints weaken these parties’ chances of shaping the broader trajectory. First, MHP remains the central address for conservative nationalism, while secular nationalist constituencies largely remain anchored in the CHP, leaving little room for new actors to capture a durable base. Second, with three years until the next elections, the governing AK Party–MHP bloc has space to absorb potential costs without immediate electoral pressure. Finally, by framing their politics primarily as opposition to reconciliation, these parties risk alienating broader constituencies. The recent wave of resignations from İYİ Party officials—including its provincial head in Mardin, a Kurdish-majority province—underscores this dynamic. In fact, the resignations show that their brand of uncompromising nationalism is not without costs to them.

On the other hand, the sensitive approach of other actors supporting the process and the high representativeness of the National Solidarity, Brotherhood and Democracy Commission in parliament, as well as its finely calibrated approach, as seen in this week’s talks, further limit the potential for provocation by these nationalist parties.

Aydın Mayor’s Defection to the AK Party is Another Sign of the CHP’s Internal Crisis



(Erçin Ertürk - Anadolu Agency)

At the Justice and Development Party’s (AK Party) 24th anniversary celebrations last week, nine mayors resigned from their parties to join the AK Party. This mirrored the previous year’s anniversary, when 13 mayors made the same move, though most of those defections came from the Yeniden Refah (New Welfare) Party, which already shared a voter base close to the AK Party. What stood out this year was that six of the nine transfers were from the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP), marking a significant shift in the political landscape.

The most controversial of these defections was the move by Aydın Metropolitan Mayor Özlem Çerçioğlu, who has held her post since 2009 as a CHP member. Known to be close to former CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, Çerçioğlu decided to join the AK Party during the anniversary celebrations. Following her decision, CHP officials accused her and the

other defectors of betrayal, while she cited “anti-democratic practices” within the party as her reason for leaving. Her switch triggered heated debates, not only because of her prominence but also because it reflected deeper fractures inside the CHP.

These divisions have been amplified by the corruption case involving Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, in which several CHP figures have turned state’s witnesses. Their cooperation with the legal process has become another example of how party members are breaking ranks, underscoring the depth of internal rivalries. In this environment, CHP leader Özgür Özel has sought to project strength through sharp rhetoric, but the loss of high-profile mayors—combined with defections and internal splits surfacing in courtrooms—has cast doubt on his ability to maintain unity within the party.

Türkiye’s Social Media Platform Next Sosyal Surpasses 1 Million Users

The recent launch of Türkiye’s homegrown social media platform Next Sosyal (NSosyal), developed by Baykar and the T3 Foundation, has quickly gained momentum, surpassing one million users in a short time. Unlike established global platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, which are often criticised for disinformation, toxic language, and manipulation, NSosyal aims to provide a clean and authentic digital environment free from bot accounts and harmful content. Its rapid adoption signals both a demand for safer online spaces and a growing confidence in locally developed digital solutions.

The timing of NSosyal’s rise is particularly significant given recent frustrations in Türkiye over perceived censorship and algorithmic restrictions on major international platforms, especially in the wake of Israel’s genocide policies in Gaza, which sparked widespread criticism of global tech companies.



(Mustafa Hatipoğlu - Anadolu Agency)

President Erdoğan, First Lady Emine Erdoğan, the Foreign Minister, and several other high-ranking officials have also joined NSosyal, highlighting the scale of its early adoption.

Highlights

- Türkiye’s 2024 top taxpayers list placed Baykar chairman Selçuk Bayraktar first and CEO Haluk Bayraktar second, with both brothers paying record sums fuelled by the company’s booming exports.
- Border crossings from Türkiye to Syria have opened for Turkish citizens with passports. Ease of travel is considered an important step in the growing cooperation between the two countries following the fall of the Assad regime.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that long-awaited peace talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin could take place in Switzerland, Austria, or Türkiye once Kyiv secures the necessary security guarantees.

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