

In this week's *Türkiye in Focus*;

- Pope Leo XIV selected Türkiye as the destination for his first overseas visit.
- Within the Terror-Free Türkiye initiative, the focus is increasingly shifting toward parliamentary steps and developments unfolding in Syria.
- The CHP is grappling with escalating challenges both inside the party and in its broader political environment.

Pope Leo XIV Makes His First International Trip to Türkiye

Pope Leo XIV chose Türkiye for his first international trip, a decision that has drawn significant attention. During the four-day visit, the Pope held a series of religious and diplomatic meetings, underscoring the Vatican's interest in deepening dialogue across regions and faiths. His program included a formal stop in Ankara, where he met President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Following their bilateral meeting, Erdoğan stated: "In the face of global challenges such as conflicts, humanitarian crises, poverty, injustice, and climate change, I personally took great satisfaction in seeing that we converge around an approach that upholds peace, prioritises justice, and rests on compassion."

Analysts note that Türkiye's role as a stabilising force constitutes a key backdrop to the visit. The country's longstanding role as a bridge between cultures and civilisations is often cited as a reason the Pope chose Türkiye as the first destination of his papacy. Reflecting this historical dimension, Pope Leo XIV also travelled to İznik in Bursa, the site of the First Council of Nicaea, one of the most defining moments uniting Western and Eastern Christianity.

Anatolia's deep Christian heritage remains central to this narrative. Experts emphasise that Türkiye's unique position, geographically connecting East and West and historically hosting some of Christianity's most significant early sites, makes the Pope's choice both symbolically rich and culturally coherent. In parallel, Türkiye has adopted a more visibly pluralistic official discourse over the past two decades. This shift has produced concrete outcomes: in 2023, the first new

church of the Republic era was inaugurated, and more than a hundred historical Christian sites have been restored and reopened to visitors.

This emerging multicultural climate signals not only a reconciliation with Türkiye's own historical depth but also an internal dynamic that aligns with the themes highlighted during the Pope's visit. By embracing a broader cultural horizon, Türkiye reinforces its profile as a regional actor capable of projecting peaceful influence across diverse communities. In this sense, the Pope's trip reflects both external recognition and the country's evolving self-perception, one that increasingly blends heritage, diplomacy, and a forward-looking vision of coexistence.



(TCCB / Murat Kula - Anadolu Agency)

In the Terror-Free Türkiye Process, Attention Turns to Parliament and Developments in Syria

Türkiye's "terror-free" future process continues to advance through a series of notable developments. Chief among them is the visit of the parliamentary commission's members to İmralı Island, a move that marked a turning point in the commission's work. Following the meeting, the body has now entered the drafting stage, with each political party preparing its own report. This week, the commission also held its 19th session, underscoring the initiative's momentum. Lawmakers expect these discussions to pave the way for upcoming legislative steps in Parliament.

Yet the aftermath of the İmralı meeting highlighted a critical external dimension: the need for the YPG/SDF in Syria to comply with the March 10 agreement reached with Damascus.



(TBMM - Anadolu Agency)

Reports indicate that Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned founding leader of the terror group PKK, emphasised this issue during the commission's contact. Analysts argue that the YPG's strategy of buying time has emerged as one of the most significant obstacles to meaningful progress in the broader peace trajectory.

Still, tangible positive developments have begun to surface. The PKK recently announced that it had evacuated six caves in the Zap and Metina regions of northern Iraq—an assertion subsequently confirmed by both the National Intelligence Organisation (MİT) and the Turkish Armed Forces. Experts note that, beyond symbolism, this withdrawal represents one of the clearest concrete steps taken so far. However, they caution that without a breakthrough on the Syrian front, establishing a realistic and sustainable peace framework will remain difficult.

Against this backdrop, the process now hinges on two interconnected tracks. The first involves securing a political and administrative arrangement in Syria that incorporates the YPG into the central authority. The second concerns the domestic front: formalising the legal architecture in Parliament once the commission finalises its reports. Analysts stress that these two tracks feed into one another, and that only after security and legal parameters are firmly established can Türkiye hope to consolidate a durable political and social peace.

CHP Faces Deepening Internal and External Crises

The crisis within the Republican People's Party (CHP) continues to deepen, as both internal dynamics and external pressures narrow the party's political room for manoeuvre. In an effort to recalibrate its direction, the CHP convened a new congress that included revisions to the party program, changes to the Party Assembly, and a fresh leadership vote. Paradoxically, despite the turbulence, delegates returned Özgür Özel to the chairmanship with 1,333 out of 1,357 votes. Yet analysts note that this show of internal consolidation does not necessarily resolve the party's structural problems.

One of the most significant challenges is the widening rift between the CHP and the DEM Party, its long-time informal ally. The CHP's decision not to participate in the İmralı meeting drew strong criticism from DEM Party circles, further escalating tensions between the two. For a party positioning itself as a contender for government, losing the support of DEM voters presents a serious strategic setback. Given current demographic and electoral projections, it appears highly unlikely that the CHP could win a national election without substantial backing from Kurdish voters.

Adding to the pressure, although no longer an active figure in daily party politics, former CHP chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu issued pointed criticisms on his social media accounts. He argued that the CHP must cleanse itself of corruption and bribery allegations, a remark widely interpreted as a veiled critique of the party's posture in the Ekrem İmamoğlu case.

He also faulted the leadership for refusing to join the İmralı meeting during the Terror-Free Türkiye process, insisting that the CHP should act as a bold, risk-taking actor in moments of national significance.

For now, Kılıçdaroğlu's comments have not visibly shifted internal balances, but the combined weight of the İmamoğlu case and the party's deteriorating relationship with Kurdish voters could ultimately re-energise internal factions. Although Özel has so far succeeded in rallying various wings of the party behind his leadership, the real test will come in critical political moments when the party must make decisive choices. As those moments draw nearer, managing these contradictions between ideological positioning, alliance expectations, and internal legitimacy may prove far more difficult than the current unity suggests.



(CHP - Anadolu Agency)

Highlights

- Türkiye's bid for full participation in the Security Action for Europe (SAFE) initiative did not reach a conclusion, as the November 30 deadline passed without progress. Observers note that the European Commission's slow handling of the process played a major role. Although this means Türkiye will not be among the first wave of countries, officials stress that the decision is not final.
- Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan met his Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi in Tehran, after which the two countries announced an agreement to build a new 200-kilometre railway along the historic Silk Road. The planned line will hold strategic importance by strengthening the transport link between Türkiye and Asia.
- Türkiye expressed concern after two commercial tankers were targeted in the Black Sea, warning that such incidents could undermine the region's security and overall stability, according to a statement from the Foreign Ministry.

Recent Publications by TRT World Research Centre

- [UNSC Resolution 2797 on Western Sahara: From a Status Quo to a Pragmatic Approach](#) by İhsan Faruk Kılavuz
- [The Forgotten Front: Displacement, Climate, and Conflict in the Sahel](#) Policy Outlook by Kübra Aktaş



Send us leads and feedback at:
turkiyeinfofocus@gmail.com