

In this week's *Türkiye in Focus*;

- Türkiye is experiencing World Cup fever once again after a long absence.
- Tensions over Cyprus are rising even as fresh hopes for a new diplomatic opening are emerging.
- Part of the crisis within the CHP reflects a broader struggle among the party's competing factions to adapt to and make sense of contemporary Türkiye.

World Cup Fever Returns to Türkiye After 24 Years

For the first time in 24 years, the Turkish national football team is competing at a FIFA World Cup. The team's steady rise in recent years, its quarter-final run at UEFA Euro 2024 and a squad featuring several high-profile players have fuelled expectations across the country. As a result, the World Cup has become one of the most widely discussed topics in Türkiye.

Türkiye's opening match against Australia took place last Sunday. Despite the early kick-off time of 7am local time, large screens were set up in town squares, municipal venues, mosque conference halls and other public spaces across the country. Thousands of supporters gathered to watch the game together, creating a festive atmosphere despite the inconvenient hour.

The occasion also produced several memorable moments. At one public viewing event, organisers accidentally played footage from a PlayStation football game at the start of the broadcast, prompting amusement among fans. Elsewhere, images of supporters watching the match together at historic and archaeological sites quickly spread across social media, becoming a popular talking point.

The World Cup has also generated excitement among Turkish communities living in the host countries. In Vancouver, Canada, where Türkiye played its opening match, Turkish supporters organised a march in support of the national



(Tezcan Ekizler - Anadolu Agency)

team before the game and turned out in large numbers at the stadium. Similarly, members of the Turkish community in California staged support events ahead of Türkiye's upcoming match against Paraguay.

Meanwhile, the unexpected defeat in the opening game has sparked debate within the football community. Nevertheless, messages of support for the national team have come from across the political and sporting spectrum, including from President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Overall, the widespread public enthusiasm for the World Cup highlights football's continued importance as a source of national pride and unity in Türkiye.

Tensions Over Greek-Administered Cyprus Rise as Fresh Signs of Dialogue Emerge



(Republic of Türkiye - Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Anadolu Agency)

Recent developments in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean have once again brought the Cyprus question to the forefront of regional politics. Increasingly close ties between the Greek Cypriot administration and Israel have contributed to growing tensions around the island. At the same time, Ankara continues to closely monitor the role of third countries in the region.

One of the most notable developments in recent months was the defence agreement signed between the Greek Cypriot administration and France, which drew strong criticism from both Ankara and Lefkoşa. Earlier, following an increase in the military presence of countries without guarantor status on the island and in the Eastern Mediterranean, Türkiye deployed six F-16 fighter jets and air defence systems to the northern part of the island.

The expanding relationship between the Greek Cypriot administration and Israel is also being watched closely by Turkish policymakers. This week, Nationalist Movement

Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli devoted a significant part of his parliamentary group speech to what he described as the Israeli threat in the Eastern Mediterranean and to growing cooperation between Israel and the Greek Cypriot administration. Türkiye views this rapprochement as a direct challenge to both the island's balance and its own security interests. The authorities in Lefkoşa have voiced similar concerns.

Yet alongside the rising tensions, there have also been signs of renewed diplomatic activity. This week, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan hosted Maria Angela Holguín Cuéllar, the United Nations Secretary-General's Personal Envoy on Cyprus, in Ankara. Holguín Cuéllar had met the leaders of both sides on the island the previous week and later told journalists in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus that an expanded meeting aimed at restarting negotiations could take place in July or August.

For many Turkish Cypriots, as well as for Türkiye itself, past experiences make it difficult to approach new diplomatic initiatives with optimism. Nevertheless, both Ankara and the Turkish Cypriot leadership continue to emphasise the importance of dialogue. As Foreign Minister Fidan has repeatedly argued, any viable settlement must be based on sovereign equality and equal international status for the two sides. It has also been widely suggested for some time that UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres may seek to advance efforts towards a settlement before his term ends in late 2026.

In summary, while high tensions and instability persist, ongoing diplomatic dialogue keeps the Cyprus issue a central topic in regional politics, signalling continuous efforts toward possible solutions.

The Main Opposition's Search for Recalibration

For some time now, the term "main opposition" in Türkiye has no longer referred to a single, unified political force. Instead, the Republican People's Party (CHP) has been grappling with an increasingly visible internal divide. This week, however, tensions appeared to ease somewhat. Both sides announced that they would not hold parliamentary group meetings, avoiding a repeat of the highly charged scenes witnessed the previous week.

At the same time, despite statements from imprisoned Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu that some interpreted as signalling the possibility of a new political movement, CHP leader Özgür Özel, for now, appears determined to continue his struggle within the party's existing structures.

Yet, the internal dispute is not the party's only challenge. More broadly, opposition figures are facing questions about how to adapt to Türkiye's changing political environment and articulate a new vision for the country. In that context, comments made last week by former CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu attracted attention. His argument that Türkiye



(Erçin Ertürk - Anadolu Agency)

should pursue a proactive foreign policy was widely seen as being broadly consistent with Ankara's current approach to international affairs.

Some observers viewed these remarks as evidence that parts of the opposition are seeking to align themselves more closely with Türkiye's evolving priorities and the realities of a changing regional environment. Others remain unconvinced, arguing that the CHP still approaches such issues superficially and struggles to keep pace with developments.

Highlights

- President Erdoğan launched the Artificial Intelligence Action Plan, a comprehensive roadmap encompassing initiatives in education, workforce development, technology investment, and digital transformation.
- Ankara Airport has officially opened ahead of the NATO summit, providing additional capacity to ease congestion at Esenboğa Airport, particularly during periods of heightened diplomatic and protocol activity.
- Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan met with Vladimir Putin in Russia.

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