

In this edition of Türkiye in Focus, we explore a range of pivotal topics:

- President Erdoğan’s significant address on the anniversary of the Battle of Malazgirt.
- Researcher Çağdaş Yüksel provides insights into Türkiye-US relations amidst the forthcoming US elections.
- The persistent rumours of Mehmet Şimşek’s resignation, despite denials, highlight the inadequacy of the opposition parties’ economic vision.

Important Messages in Erdoğan’s Malazgirt Speech

The Battle of Malazgirt, fought on August 26, 1071, saw the Great Seljuk Empire triumph over the Byzantine Empire. This event has increasingly been emphasised during the latter years of the AK Party governments. A presidential complex was constructed in Ahlat, the site of the battle. This year, marking the anniversary, President Erdoğan held a cabinet meeting outside Ankara for the first time in 21 years, with celebrations attended by leaders of the People’s Alliance, as well as high-ranking military and bureaucratic officials.

This date marks the start of the Turkish conquest of Anatolia. However, President Erdoğan’s speech this year highlighted a broader historical context: “Malazgirt was not only a Turkish victory but a Muslim victory. In Alparslan’s army, Kurds, Arabs, and other Muslims who had embraced Islam fought side by side. Their sacred blood was shed together on this land. The formidable alliance under Sultan Alparslan’s banner has bequeathed us the magnificent victory we have celebrated for 953 years.”

Erdoğan’s inclusion of Kurds and Arabs in the narrative of Malazgirt, a victory traditionally associated with the Turks, emphasising their shared Muslim identity, is a significant move.

In Türkiye, there is a noticeable rise in secular racist sentiments, particularly within certain factions of the CHP and in parties like the Good Party and Victory Party, which have adopted an anti-immigrant rhetoric. Erdoğan is countering this trend by promoting a narrative that embraces different cultures in Türkiye based on their Muslim identity. More critically, this approach proposes a new definition of citizenship.



(Utku Uçrak - Anadolu Agency)

This new definition of citizenship aims to address longstanding issues that have shaped Türkiye’s first century, such as the divide between religious and secular communities and the Kurdish question. This concept of a Muslim citizen, who is in harmony with the state’s fundamental secular structure, bridges the religious-secular divide and lays the groundwork for unity with non-Turkish groups such as Kurds and Arabs.

Within this framework, Islam is increasingly integrated into official state discourse. However, it remains to be seen whether this de facto situation will be reflected in the discussions surrounding the new constitution. It is likely that the Erdoğan government will continue to advance this discourse in the foreseeable future. The vision of the “Century of Türkiye” and the framing of 2071—the thousandth anniversary of the Malazgirt Victory—as a new milestone underscores this intent. Meanwhile, the ability of other political actors, particularly the CHP and MHP, as well as the bureaucracy, to align with this discourse will be a critical issue in Türkiye’s political landscape in the years to come.

Türkiye-U.S. Relations and the Implications of the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election

Researcher Çağdaş Yüksel commented on Türkiye-US relations in the run-up to the 2024 elections:

“As the 2024 U.S. Presidential election approaches, Türkiye is closely monitoring the race between former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris. The outcome of this election will determine the trajectory of Türkiye-U.S. relations, which have undergone a complex evolution in recent years.

Türkiye’s relationship with the U.S. in recent years has been marked by significant challenges. Washington’s support for the YPG, a terrorist organisation that directly threatens Türkiye’s security in Syria, and the harbouring of Fethullah Gülen, along with the F-35 crisis, have remained points of contention from the Trump era to the Biden administration.

Donald Trump’s presidency from 2017 to 2021 stands out as a unique period in Türkiye-U.S. relations. Known for his unconventional approach to diplomacy and governance, Trump frequently bypassed traditional diplomatic channels, prioritising direct communication and personal relationships. This created both opportunities and challenges for Türkiye.

During Trump’s presidency, Türkiye found itself both aligned with and opposed to U.S. policies. On one hand, Trump’s trade-based political approach allowed for more direct negotiations on issues such as the management of the Syrian conflict and the purchase of the S-400 missile defence system from Russia. However, this same unpredictability also meant that Türkiye could not consistently rely on U.S. support. The sanctions imposed under the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) following the S-400 deal highlighted the fragility of the relationship under Trump’s leadership.

However, historically, Ankara has established more positive relations with Republican administrations, which focus more on strategic concerns rather than ideological ones. A Trump victory could see this trend continue, focusing on pragmatic, transactional diplomacy that could benefit both countries.



(Evrin Aydın - Anadolu Agency)

Trump’s willingness to engage directly with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and prioritise bilateral agreements might help ease current tensions and revive U.S.-Türkiye relations in areas such as defence cooperation and regional security. However, it is important not to overlook the possibility that Trump could also bring sudden and unpredictable changes to U.S. policy. Türkiye will need to carefully manage strategic dynamics by maintaining a stable diplomatic approach with Washington in a potential new Trump era.

On the other hand, during the Biden administration, U.S. support for the YPG in Syria, which Türkiye considers a terrorist organisation linked to the PKK – itself listed as a terrorist organisation by Türkiye, the US and the European Union – has remained a major point of friction. While the Biden administration has maintained a more distant and critical stance toward Türkiye, particularly on issues such as the acquisition of the S-400 air defence systems and Türkiye’s policies in the Eastern Mediterranean, NATO cooperation has continued. Especially with the Russia-Ukraine war, Türkiye’s responsibilities and mutual pragmatic approaches, such as the approval of new member states and the sale of F-16s, have persisted. Harris’s administration would likely continue Biden’s strategic but distant stance, requiring Türkiye to pursue a cautious and multifaceted foreign policy by balancing its relations with the U.S., the European Union, and other major powers like Russia and China.

An important point in Türkiye-U.S. relations, independent of the presidential candidates and the countries themselves, is the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Türkiye has been actively working towards resolving this crisis, while the U.S. continues to support Israel and offers weak and ineffective efforts to address the humanitarian situation. This issue appears likely to persist into the new presidential term, potentially remaining a source of tension between the two nations.

Given its geographical position, Türkiye is a strategic power serving as a bridge between the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Europe. Türkiye’s role within NATO and its cooperation with the U.S. is of great importance, especially in light of the Syrian civil war, Iran’s growing influence in the region, and Russia’s aggressive foreign policies. Considering Washington’s efforts to maintain global leadership and its competition with rising powers like China, the need for strategic allies such as Türkiye has increased. In this context, the U.S. reliance on Türkiye appears to be more pronounced than the other way around”

Misinformation Exposed: Political Rumours and Mehmet Şimşek’s Saga

Mehmet Şimşek has undoubtedly been Türkiye’s most discussed minister since his appointment in June 2023. He has introduced significant shifts in economic policies, including tightening measures such as raising policy interest rates and implementing a one-time increase in the minimum wage—a departure from the biannual increases seen in previous high-inflation years. Additionally, he has not proposed further salary improvements for pensioners and has imposed restrictions on instalment payments for purchases.

As one might expect, these decisions have drawn considerable criticism from the opposition. However, the orthodox liberal economic policies that Şimşek champions are broadly aligned with the economic visions of many opposition parties. Against this backdrop, there are circulating rumours suggesting Şimşek is discontent under Erdoğan’s leadership.

Recently, rumours of Şimşek’s resignation, which were claimed to be suppressed, were given a new lease of life by Democrat Party deputy Cemal Enginyurt. Despite Şimşek’s repeated denials, these unfounded gossips have caused volatility in the stock market.

Prior to Enginyurt’s claims, there were indications that Erdoğan’s administration might be at odds with Şimşek’s approach to economic management. In this light, two contrasting political narratives are being employed concerning Şimşek: one criticises his economic management, while the other suggests



(Hazine ve Maliye Bakanlığı - Anadolu Agency)

that although he is the appropriate minister for the role, he struggles to find his footing in Ankara.

The opposition, lacking a cohesive alternative economic strategy, often resorts to variable and inconsistent criticisms as their tactic.

For the time being, the opposition might view the ongoing public discussions about Şimşek as politically advantageous. However, with the economy expected to remain a central issue in Türkiye over the medium term, not only Şimşek and the government but also the opposition will face one of their biggest tests in this field.

Highlights

- Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan attends the EU’s informal foreign ministers meeting (Gymnich) in Brussels. It is the first time in five years that a Turkish minister takes part in this meeting.
- The list of tax record holders is announced. Selçuk Bayraktar and Haluk Bayraktar from BAYKAR, Türkiye’s leading defence industry company, top the list of individuals, while the dominance of the banking sector in the ranking of corporations drew attention.
- Türkiye has officially commissioned its first Reis-class submarine, TCG Piri Reis (S-330), marking a significant milestone in its naval capabilities. The submarine, equipped with advanced air-independent propulsion (AIP) systems, is the first of six planned under the project, with subsequent submarines scheduled for commissioning through 2029. Built with assistance from Germany’s Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems, the project strengthens Türkiye’s defence industry.

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