

In this week’s edition of Türkiye in Focus, we highlight the following topics:

- Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli’s outreach to the DEM Party has garnered significant attention.
- The Parliament held a closed session to discuss the situation with Israel.
- Amendments to the enforcement law have come to the forefront following recent tragic events.

Turkish Nationalist MHP Extends Olive Branch to Pro-Kurdish DEM Party

Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli’s statements at this week’s parliamentary group meeting showed that winds of change will sweep domestic politics in the near future. At the opening of the new legislative year in parliament last week, Bahçeli unexpectedly shook hands with deputies from the pro-Kurdish DEM Party group. In his speech this week, he called the gesture “not an improvised, well-intentioned gesture”.

The leader of the MHP, the largest Turkish nationalist party and coalition partner, stated:

“The hand I extend is a message of national unity and brotherhood. The hand I am extending is the light that burns like a torch of the first parliament and the right words of Mr. President. The hand I am extending is the wish and offer to become a party of Türkiye, to take a front against terrorism, to unite in our thousand-year brotherhood.”

President Erdoğan has been increasing his moderate messages on domestic politics for some time. It was evident that a broad consensus was being sought in the efforts to draft a new constitution. At the same time, there were mutual visits and dialogue-promoting messages exchanged with the CHP. However, the stance of the MHP, the AK Party’s coalition partner, appeared less supportive of this rapprochement. In this context, the MHP’s overtures towards the DEM Party, which holds one of the most politically distant positions from it, could be interpreted as part of a strategic agreement between the AK Party and the MHP.

If we take a quick look at the recent past, it can be said that shocking events have marked the last decade in Türkiye. The Gezi Park events in 2013, the bombings and armed insurrection in 2015, the coup attempt in 2016 and the subsequent state of emergency were the most decisive events of the last decade. In addition, the civil war in Syria, where Türkiye has its largest land border, and PKK-linked YPG activity in northern Syria posed significant threats to Türkiye. The events in Syria have also led to a very high migrant flux to Türkiye.

The AK Party’s Century of Türkiye vision, announced in celebration of the republic’s centenary, aimed to address and resolve key points of tension within domestic politics. These points of tension are also rooted in the sociological backdrop of the significant events that have shaped the past decade. The religious-secular divide and the Kurdish question are among the



(Evrin Aydın - Anadolu Agency)

most critical issues. The first notable step in addressing these concerns was the discussions between the AK Party and the CHP, which both parties referred to as efforts toward normalisation and political détente.

Complementing the steps taken in domestic politics to address a challenging decade — and perhaps the first century of the Turkish Republic — are efforts to engage in dialogue with the Syrian government. Resolving the Syria issue is crucial for Türkiye in several respects. Türkiye currently controls certain areas within Syria’s borders and views YPG-controlled regions as a terrorist threat. Additionally, the presence of Syrian refugees has become one of the most significant issues in Turkish domestic politics in recent years. These aspects have led many political actors in Türkiye to advocate for dialogue with the Assad regime.

However, another potential approach to addressing the YPG issue in Syria could involve engaging with the DEM Party. In previous peace processes, the DEM Party’s predecessor parties played a key role in facilitating political communication. Moreover, expanding dialogue on the Kurdish issue within Türkiye could strengthen the country’s position in Syria as well.

It is still too early to predict the future of these issues in Türkiye. However, the outreach from the MHP to the DEM Party may signal a growing consensus between the AK Party and the MHP, hinting at a period of political moderation in domestic affairs. Additionally, these developments appear closely tied to the ongoing agenda regarding Syria.

Reforms on Türkiye’s Criminal Enforcement Regime on the Horizon

Türkiye started this week with very tragic criminal incidents, including the murder of two women. Most recently, the murder of police officer Şeyda Yılmaz by a man with 26 criminal convictions sparked outrage. With the impact of these events, some changes are expected to be made in the enforcement of punishment for first-time criminals or those with records to prevent the idea of impunity. Researcher İhsan Faruk Kılavuz shares his views on this issue:

Recent criminal incidents in Türkiye have reignited debates surrounding the country’s criminal enforcement regime. Once primarily a legal issue, this debate has shifted to the political stage, driven by public discontent and subsequent political responses. Key government figures have responded to societal concerns, indicating that reforms may be on the horizon.

Public criticism has mainly focused on the use of “good conduct” reductions, which allow for the early release of convicts who demonstrate good behaviour during imprisonment. The Justice Minister has suggested that stricter measures will be introduced to limit this practice, aiming to respond to widespread concerns about prematurely releasing convicts.

Moreover, one of the key factors fuelling public frustration is the growing perception that Türkiye’s criminal laws have lost their deterrent effect. In many recent high-profile cases, offenders were found to have extensive criminal records, and legal mechanisms such as probation and conditional release, which allow convicts to be freed after serving only a tiny portion of their sentence, have come under criticism. This has strengthened the belief that these mechanisms contribute to a sense of

impunity. This perception has led to calls for the government to ensure that penalties are stricter and proportional to the crimes committed, especially for repeat offenders, and to ensure that criminals fully serve their sentences.

Erdoğan Signals New Reforms

During the AK Party’s latest meeting, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan acknowledged the growing public discontent and signalled that a comprehensive reform of the criminal enforcement regime would be undertaken. Emphasising the need for detention periods and penalties to align with the severity of the crimes, he stated that the conditions for early release from prison would be tightened, ensuring that convicts serve longer sentences. Erdoğan also promised swift action to address inefficiencies in justice and security systems.

The government is also focusing on taking more concrete steps in addressing crimes against women and children. For instance, the Ministry of Justice is expected to establish a unit dedicated to these offences soon. Similarly, the public discussion raised by the Minister of Justice about reintroducing chemical castration as a deterrent measure for sexual crimes reflects the administration’s intent to combat these offences more forcefully.

Finally, there are growing expectations that these regulations and reforms, although not directly addressing the criminal enforcement regime, could be implemented swiftly as part of the Ninth Judicial Package currently being discussed in parliament.

Closed Session on Israel in Parliament

In recent weeks, the most notable theme in the statements of both President Erdoğan and Devlet Bahçeli has been the perceived Israeli threat to Türkiye. This marks the first time Israel is being officially regarded as a national security concern in Türkiye.



(Didem Mente - Anadolu Agency)

ye. In response to these statements, a closed session was held in parliament upon the request of the main opposition party and the parliamentary presidency. The records of this session will remain classified for ten years. However, it is significant to note that Israel has become a prominent topic in Türkiye’s official discourse.

In his speech to parliament last week, President Erdoğan emphasised the need for national unity and dialogue against external threats. This week, the MHP leader’s olive branch extended to the DEM Party also occurs within this context.

Conversely, the CHP is not entirely in line with this narrative. After the closed session, CHP leader Özgür Özel stated that this agenda was being used to distract from economic issues. He continued his sharp criticism of the government during this week’s group meeting.

Highlights

- Türkiye has sent ships to Lebanon to evacuate nearly 14,000 of its citizens stranded in Lebanon amid rising tensions in the region.
- During an inspection, the discovery of pork meat in the meat used in a chain of meatball restaurants caused widespread public outcry.

No Edition Next Week

We wanted to inform you that there will be no edition of *Türkiye in Focus* next week as we will be taking a brief break. We’ll be back the following week with fresh insights and updates on the latest developments in Türkiye. Thank you for your continued support and understanding!

Türkiye in Focus Team

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