

In this week's *Türkiye in Focus*, we delve into the following topics:

- Partisan politics dominated the April 23 National Sovereignty and Children's Day celebrations.
- The terror-free Türkiye process continues to garner significant political and societal support. This week, we focus on the stance of smaller parties.
- The 6.2-magnitude earthquake has sparked renewed debates on urban planning and preparedness in Istanbul.

Partisan Politics Dominates April 23 Celebrations

April 23 holds deep symbolic significance for Türkiye's democracy. The first parliament in the country was established back in 1876 during the Ottoman Empire. However, parliamentary activity remained sporadic until 1920. On April 23, 1920, during the War of Independence led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, a new parliament was established in Ankara. This assembly later became the founding body of the Republic of Türkiye, marking a critical step toward a new democratic parliamentary system.

Since 1927, the date has been dedicated to children. Every year, April 23 is celebrated as "National Sovereignty and Children's Day." Traditionally, the Speaker of Parliament hosts a reception on this day, bringing together leading political figures, especially those from parties represented in the assembly.

This year, the most noteworthy development was the attendance of the DEM Party co-chairs at the official reception for the first time in eleven years. Another striking moment came from the warm interactions between DEM Party members and MHP representatives—traditionally seen as opposing sides. These images can be seen as reflecting the more constructive political atmosphere fostered by the ongoing terror-free Türkiye process.

On the other hand, the CHP chose to boycott the reception in protest of the imprisonment of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu. Instead, the party gathered in front of the historic First Parliament building in Ankara and held a symbolic march to Anıtkabir, the mausoleum of Atatürk. In this context, the tension between the main opposition and the ruling party emerged as another key theme shaping this year's April 23 commemorations.



(Harun Özalp - Anadolu Agency)

Small Parties' Approach to the "Terror-Free Türkiye" Undertaking

The transition to the presidential system in 2017 brought significant changes to Türkiye's political landscape. The requirement of securing 50% of the vote to form a government has consolidated the power of the two major parties—the AK Party and CHP—which represent the two ends of the political spectrum. However, smaller parties have found opportunities to influence Ankara politics by aligning themselves with these larger players.

One of the key elements enabling the process toward a terror-free Türkiye is arguably this very nature of the presidential system. The main opposition party, CHP, although in a relatively muted tone, has offered support to the ruling coalition's initiative, signalling a positive stance from a broad segment of societal representation. In the past, smaller parties were able to exert significant influence during critical junctures through their discourse. Given the sensitive and nationalist-triggering nature of subjects like the Kurdish question, this dynamic previously posed substantial risks. However, in the new system, the possibility of swift collaboration between the government and opposition—even if it does not necessarily lower political tensions—opens space for resolving major challenges.

That said, the potential influence of small parties on larger ones should not be underestimated. These parties can be broadly grouped into four categories: ruling coalition partners, conservative opposition parties, leftist parties, and nationalist opposition parties. Among the coalition-aligned smaller

parties, there is little criticism of the process. Hüda-Par, a party that has long supported the AK Party and appeals to Kurdish voters, especially in southeastern Türkiye, has taken on a role of embracing and promoting the process within society.

Conservative opposition parties have also expressed support. A notable example is an article by Mehmet Emin Ekmen, a DEVA Party MP and Vice Chair, in which he analysed speeches by MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli since the beginning of the process with a positive tone. It was later revealed that Bahçeli personally called Ekmen to express his appreciation.

On the left, relatively smaller parties like the Workers' Party of Türkiye (TİP) have shown support for the process, aligning themselves with the DEM Party, a key actor in the initiative. These parties benefit from parliamentary representation thanks to the DEM Party's voter base, which prioritises the Kurdish dossier, and they have opted to either remain silent or offer low-key support during this phase.

One might have expected the strongest opposition to come from nationalist opposition parties. However, since the initiative originated from the mainstream nationalist tradition led by the MHP, the opposition has remained limited. Parties like the İYİ Party and the Victory Party have issued sharp criticisms. However, their stance has not gained traction—partly because the MHP initiated the process and partly due to CHP's decision not to adopt a confrontational position.

Earthquake in Istanbul Rekindles Urban Planning Debates

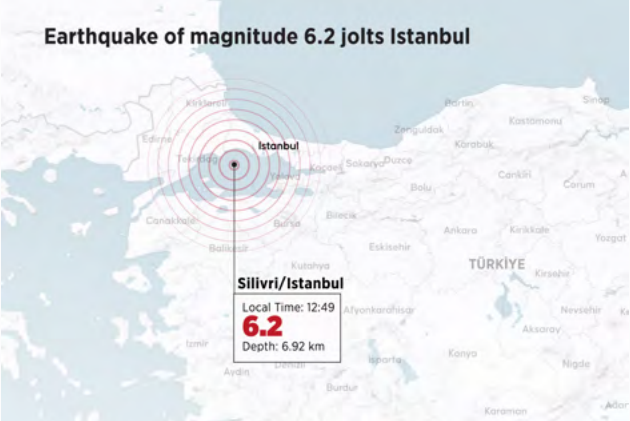
The earthquakes that struck Istanbul on Wednesday—one of which measured 6.2 in magnitude—caused widespread concern among residents. Many people spent the night outdoors. Fortunately, no building collapses, casualties, or injuries were reported. Experts remain divided on whether this recent quake is connected to the long-anticipated major Istanbul earthquake or whether it signals the possibility of new seismic activity. Meanwhile, state institutions and universities continue to conduct in-depth research across Türkiye.

Earthquakes have long been a focal point of urban life and political discourse in Istanbul, and this week, the issue resurfaced. MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli released a statement harshly criticising Istanbul's former mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, who is currently imprisoned.

Urban transformation efforts aimed at renewing Istanbul's ageing building stock have been underway for some time. However, debates persist over the slow pace of these projects and the insufficient number of designated gathering areas in the event of a disaster.

One issue that arose during this week's earthquake was a temporary disruption in communication. While services were quickly restored, there were some interruptions in mobile

phone connectivity immediately following the quake. Given the earthquake's impact on nearly twenty million people, particularly in Istanbul, this disruption could be seen as an understandable outcome in such circumstances. Minister of Transport and Infrastructure Abdulkadir Uraloğlu held a meeting with representatives from GSM operators to assess the situation and communicate the government's expectations to the telecom companies.



(Mehmet Yaren Bozğun - Anadolu Agency)

Highlights

- Justice Minister Yılmaz Tunç met with representatives of the DEM Party. The meeting reportedly focused on certain legal and technical aspects of the terror-free Türkiye process.
- Türksat 6A, Türkiye's first domestically produced communications satellite—which was launched into space in July—was officially commissioned in a ceremony.
- The Turkish Ministry of Defense strongly condemned recent remarks by the archbishop of the Greek Cypriot Administration, denouncing them as discriminatory and provocative. The archbishop had used his Easter message to call for a united Hellenic effort to remove Turks from the island.

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turkiyeinfofocus@gmail.com