**DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO TURKEY**

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**Subject: Turkey: Weekly update, 5-11 February 2022**

**HIGHLIGHTS**

* **Economic hardships continued to dominate the political agenda over the week, with increases in the gas and electricity bills as the most debated political topic. Street protests against the skyrocketed bills took place in several cities across the country, while opposition leader publicly called for not paying the bills.**
* **Against this background, the Government tries to shift focus on UA/RU crisis and TR’s attempts to carve out a ‘mediating role’, while downplaying expectations.**

**ASSESSMENT**

With the aim of deflecting the debate from the ‘electricity crisis’, the Government and pro-Government media kept focus on TR’s alleged ‘mediating’ role in the RU/UA crisis. To note that now focus has changed to having Presidents Putin and Zelenski in Turkey for a meeting. Once the Beijing Olympics are over, the probability of such meeting would increase, and, regardless of the actual output of such meeting, it would allow the Government to score an important goal for its domestic audience.

**DETAIL**

**EU-Turkey relations**

Finland's Foreign Minister Haavisto visited Turkey on 8/02 and discussed with FM Çavuşoğlu bilateral relations, EU-Turkey relations, migration, Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as regional and international developments.

Several Turkish authorities continued strong criticism against Greece, FRONTEX and the EU on alleged refugee pushbacks, following the recent deaths of 19 migrants. FM Çavuşoğlu alleged that pushbacks have become “a state policy” which is being supported allegedly by FRONTEX.

**Eastern Mediterranean**

Following the visit of Director General of the European Commission's DG for Structural Reform Support, representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community criticized the EU official’s statement reiterating for EU’s position disapproving a two-state solution for Cyprus.

**Domestic policy**

After months of inter opposition party talks, the leaders of the six opposition parties stated that they would meet for the first time on 12/02. While they agreed so far on restoring a strengthened parliamentary system, the opposition parties still have not developed any joint economy program and a joint Presidential candidate.

A political debate regarding President Erdogan’s eligibility to run for the next Presidential elections resurfaced during the week. While MHP chair Bahceli and AKP Parliament Speaker Sentop, among others, dismissed any legal impediments to prevent President Erdogan from running (as, they considered, he would run only for a second term under the current Presidential system), opposition figures argued on the contrary that this would be a third term, in contradiction with the Constitution’s provisions.

Protests against higher electricity bills erupted in several cities across the country and were sometimes met with police intervention. The opposition was vocal on the increasing burden over low and middle-income households, with CHP chair Kilicdaroglu announcing on TV that he would not pay his electricity bill.

While many world leaders and Turkish politicians wished a speedy recovery from COVID 19 to the President and his wife, 32 people were detained for commenting about Erdogan's illness, and later were released.

**Judiciary**

A report (alleging **torture** against suspects detained in Ankara Police Directorate) prepared by lawyers of Ankara Bar Association Human Rights Centre was not published under direction of the newly elected President of Ankara Bar Association Koranel. Mr Koranel is increasingly being criticised for moving the Ankara Bar Association away from its rights-based policy.

**Non observance of court orders.** The Ordu Metropolitan Municipality did not halt a coastal reclamation project, despite a court order to do so. Ordu 1st Administrative Court had halted the execution of the "Coastal Reclamation and Land Fill for Recreational Purposes" project, on the ground of environmental irreversible damages. However, the Municipality did not comply with the Court’s order. Ordu Environment Association (ORÇEV) submitted petitions to the Ordu Governor's Office and the Provincial Directorate of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change and will file a criminal complaint against the municipality for violating the court order.

**Freedom of Expression and media**

The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) issued a “short” decision with majority vote giving 72 hours to apply for a license to Deutsche Welle - DW Turkish, Euronews Turkish and Voice of America (VoA) news sites. The 72 hours deadline will start after the publication of the full, motivated decision, expected in about two weeks.

In 2021, RTÜK levied 71 administrative finesagainst independent channels, ordering them to pay 21,500,000 Turkish Lira in total. The fines were imposed on Halk TV, Tele 1, Fox TV, KRT and HaberTürk, which are known for their critical reporting. In a statement about the issue, RTÜK member from the CHP quota İlhan Taşçı argued that RTÜK gave “zero fines to the channels that broadcast in favour of the government and praised the government."

Pro-opposition Halk TV reporter Ayşenur Arslan was targeted on social media over her remarks about the killing of the casino tycoon Halil Falyalı in occupied Northern Cyprus. Arslan argued that Falyalı claimed to be a member of the “Turkish Resistance Organization” (TMT), an alleged illegal entity known for assassinations on the island.  TMT members are usually described by Turkish nationalists as fighters for independence of Turkish Cypriots. FM Çavuşoğlu and AKP Spokesperson Çelik publicly criticized Arslan. RTÜK launched an inquiry against Halk TV.

The Coalition For Women In Journalism (CFWIJ) and 37 press freedom organizations and journalists have called on Turkey to release journalist Sedef Kabaş, who was arrested on 22/01 on charge of "insulting the President" over her words during a TV program.

**Freedom of Association**

Ida Mountain (Kazdağı) Protection Association’s Chairperson Süheyla Doğan was sentenced to 51,000 TL (EUR 3,300) administrative fine, following Governorate’s inspections on the Association. The Association appealed to the Penal Judgeship of Peace against the fine.

**HRDs**

**Kavala’s appeal for release was rejected** once againat the monthly routine procedure by the Istanbul’s 13th Heavy Penal Court.

**The Diyarbakır Branch of the Human Rights Association (HRA) b**oard member Ferhat Berkpınar, who was detained last week, was released on 10/02.

L**GBTIQ**

Pride March’ case against LGBTIQ+ Assemblies ended in the acquittal of all 8 activists on 08/02. The LGBTI activists were on trial for joining the 2021 İstanbul Pride March.

**Prisons**

**NGOs reported grave human rights violations in prisons in** Amasya E Type Prison, Aksaray T Type Prison, Mersin Tarsus Women’s Closed Prison, Van High Security Prison, Kayseri Prison, Ankara Sincan Women’s Prison, and Malatya Prison. During the transfer from Istanbul to Afyon Prison, a prisoner’s ear drum was burst due to being subjected to torture and ill-treatment. In Tekirdağ F Type Prison six inmates are on hunger strike since mid-January prisoners demanding an end to right violations.

**Minorities – hate speech**

On 06/02, media reported on threats and hate speech against Arabs written on the walls of two districts in Mersin. Writings "Mersin will be a grave for Arabs" and "Fascists are here" were found on walls in the city, populated by many residents of Arab origin as well as refugees.

**Refugees – asylum seekers**

Four refugees (formally recognised as such) from Iran who attended the protests against Turkey's withdrawal from the İstanbul Convention were taken into custody in Denizli and the authorities decided to deport them. The refugees were detained on the grounds of "disturbing public order" and "participating in unlawful demonstrations"; there were claims that they were subjected to torture in detention. HDP MPs raised the issue in the Parliament and argued that their deportation would violate the obligations of Turkey arising from the UN Convention and the ECtHR.

**Foreign policy**

**Afghanistan:** TR FM Çavuşoğlu had a telephone call with Taliban acting FM Muttaqi, who thanked him for the charity train TR sent to AFG with 750 tons of emergency supplies. Çavuşoğlu stressed the importance of an inclusive government and raised concern on the disappearance of some women activists. The two sides aslo discussed the status of negotiations on the operation of the airports in AFG including the Kabul International airport. FM Çavuşoğlu announced that a visit to AFG depends to the final agreement between the Taliban and the partner company and that the parties are discussing the details for the operation of 4 airports.

**Armenia:** TR VP Oktay announced that the ARM PM Pashinyan would attend the Antalya Diplomatic Forum in March.

**US:** TR MoD Akar said that TR expects an invitation by US for the second meeting on the ongoing F-35 talks (the first one was held in Ankara last October). US Ambassador Flake visited the Incirlik Air Base and discussed the importance of collaboration between the Air Forces of the two countries for the regional stability. A bipartisan group of more than 50 US Congress members urged the US State and Defence departments to block the sale to TR of F-16 jets and modernisation kits.

**Azerbaijan:** Under a bilateral agreement, TR and AZ will hold joint regular “national security” meetings to further deepen “their unique two states-one nation principle”. The modalities of the cooperation will be “executed in different ways depending on the developments in the field”. At a conference TR DFM Kiran described the liberation of Karabakh “as a watershed moment that will open new opportunities”. He stressed that TR and AZ act as “a unitary state” if needed and emphasised that one of the important pillars of TR’s foreign policy is to ensure peace and stability in the South Caucasus”.

**Uzbekistan**: FM Çavuşoğlu had a telephone call with his Uzbek homologue Kamilov and discussed bilateral relations and international issues including the situation in AFG.

**Qatar:** The TR and QAT Chiefs of military land forces met in QAT to improve bilateral defence relations between the two countries.

**UA-RU tensions:** TR President Erdoğan and FM Çavuşoğlu criticised the “Western approach” on the tensions with RU. After his visit to UA, President Erdoğan stated that US President Biden had not been able to show a positive approach to the process and there were no European leaders fit to resolve it. FM Çavuşoğlu declared that there is no need to raise the issue with “a megaphone diplomacy”, (like certain Western countries do) and stated he was not as pessimistic as the statements by some politicians in the West, but neither was TR naive.

President Erdoğan said that that there was a positive response from Moscow to Putin paying a visit to Turkey at Ankara’s invitation, after returning from China. Erdoğan was also quoted as saying he "greatly values" a planned visit by Russian President Putin to Turkey. He finally expressed also his hope that a mediating role would be assigned to TR after this meeting and that Putin and UA President Zelensky could be brought together. Presidential Spokesperson Kalin stated that TR is the only country that can meet both with UA and RU on resolving this crisis.

TR President Erdoğan spoke this week with NATO Secretary-General Stoltenberg on UA-RU situation. FM Çavuşoğlu discussed RU-UA tensions with US Secretary Blinken over the phone. Çavuşoğlu told his counterpart about Turkey’s attempts to reduce the tension between RU and UA through dialogue, said a statement by TR’s Foreign Ministry.

**Israel:** TR President Erdoğan commented that **a** dialogue with IL had begun. According to Erdoğan, TR and IL can work together to carry natural gas from IL to Europe and the two countries would discuss energy cooperation during talks next month. Israeli President Herzog phoned President Erdoğan, who tested positive for Covid-19, to wish him well.

**Syria:** FM Çavuşoğlu and UN’s Special Envoy for Syria Pedersen discussed developments related to the Constitutional Committee during a meeting in Ankara. TR MFA issued a statement on the killing of the leader of DAESH in Idlib Province by US forces, emphasizing the active role TR plays in the fight against DAESH. FM Çavuşoğlu and US SoS Blinken in their phone call discussed developments in northern Syria, with Cavusoglu pointing to the activities of the YPG and its attacks on local civilians. TR Defense Minister declared it “neutralized” two dozen YPG members in northern Syria in TR’s Peace Spring, Euphrates Shield area and Olive Branch. A recent SODEV survey showed that 66% of Turks want Syrians to be *'sent back to their country*’.

**Libya**: FM Çavuşoğlu met in Istanbul with the President of Libya’s High Council of State, Al Mishri, discussing ensuring unity in Libya and holding elections on constitutional basis.

**UK**: TR and the United Kingdom held their first “strategic dialogue” meeting in Ankara as part of their common policy of deepening bilateral relationship, at the level of Deputy FM Kaymakcı and permanent Under-Secretary of the British Foreign Office Sir Philip Barton. Bilateral relations, Turkey-EU relations and regional issues were reportedly discussed.

**Somalia**: TR MFA condemned recent terror attacks in Somalia, which killed at least 11 people and injured more than 25.

**Disinformation**

During last week’s Friday Sermon (4/2), the Presidency of Religious Affairs shared ‘guidelines’ for proper conduct on social media. Few extracts: "Let's be truthful in our words and actions. …Unfortunately, social media is one of the places where lies spread the most and the fastest. However, lying, which is haram in the real world, is also haram in the virtual world. It is our duty, as believers, to make truth prevail in social media without breaking away from our world of truth …. It is a great sin to share every news we hear without research and to cause lies to spread knowingly or unknowingly".

MHP’s MP Halil Öztürk informed that his party submitted to the Parliament a legislative proposal comprising regulatory provisions on the social media. The proposal envisages penalties against those who open “fake accounts”.

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