**DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO TURKEY**

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**Subject: Turkey: Weekly update, 29 January – 4 February 2022**

**HIGHLIGHTS**

* ***On 01/02 the ECtHR issued a judgement on the 40 former HDP MPs (including former Chair Demirtaş) underlining that lifting of their impunities violated the Turkish Constitution and that their rights to freedom of expression were violated.***
* ***The CoE’s Committee of Ministers’ decision to initiate infringement proceedings against Turkey over its failure to release Osman Kavala, was harshly criticised by Turkey with an official statement by the MFA and strong public rebuke by the President.***

**ASSESSMENT**

As inflation reaches levels unseen during AKP two-decade rule, the resignation of MoJ Gul brings in the open the strengthening of MoI Soylu’s position within the Government, as advocate of a security-oriented approach. In line with this hardening positions, TR’s public statements reacting to the CoE CoM’s decision on the Kavala case reiterate previous maximalist positions.

TR (and the President’s) activism on the RU-UA crisis, widely touted by pro-Government media, tries to keep the country’s political agenda away from the economic difficulties (gas shortage, price hikes, etc.). Given that the economy situation is unlikely to improve significantly in the short-term, more of these agenda-diverting attempts can be expected.

**DETAIL**

**EU-Turkey relations**

**By 03/02, 12 refugees were found dead near the border with Greece.** MoI Soylu said the deceased people were among a group of 22 refugees pushed back by Greece's security forces. Greece's Minister of Migration and Asylum Notis Mittarakis denied Soylu's accusations. Commissioner Johansson referred to the issue after the JHA Council.

**Eastern Mediterranean**

Nothing to report.

**Domestic politics**

**Bekir Bozdağ, former Minister of Justice from 2013 to 2017, was appointed as new Minister of Justice**, following the resignation of Gül. He argued that one of the Ministry’s priorities would be the fight against gender-based violence.

**TurkStat head Sait Erdal Dinçer was dismissed** by Presidential decree just before the latest inflation figures were announced. He was replaced by Erhan Çetinkaya, a former Vice President of Turkey’s banking regulation agency.

**The January inflation was announced on 3/2 at 48.69%,** the highest since 2002 when the AKP formed its first Government. Independent inflation group ENAG put the figure at 114.87%.

Former EU accession chief negotiator and Chair of opposition DEVA party, Ali Babacan stated that “Whether Turkey is a member or not, we see the European Union process as very valuable. We think that EU norms are a good target to raise standard in Turkey”.

**Judiciary and Fundamental Rights**

**ECtHR Decision on HDP MPs:** On 01/02, the ECtHR issued a judgement on the 40 former HDP MPs (including former Chair Demirtaş) finding that lifting of their impunities was against the Turkish Constitution and that their freedom of expression was violated. The court ordered Turkey to pay a compensation of EUR 200,000 to the plaintiffs.

**The Constitutional Court (CC) on PKK leader Öcalan case:** The CC rejected the application of imprisoned PKK leader Öcalan’s lawyers who had filed an individual application for not having been able to meet their clients held in İmralı Prison.

**Freedom of expression and media**

**President circular “Press and Broadcasting Activities”:** A circular was issued in 29/1 addressed to all print, audio and visual media, including social media and digital platforms, aimed to “protect the youth from bad habits and ignorance, … protecting our national culture against alienation and degeneration”. The circular uses very generic definitions while threatening undisclosed “steps”, “sanctions enshrined in the Constitution” and “any necessary measures”, which have a further restrictive effect on freedom of expression and media in Turkey. (*Pls refer to EUD e-note 33*). The Union of Turkish Bar Associations filed a motion against this circular, pointing out to the negative consequence on freedom of expression.

**Human Rights Defenders (HRDs)**

**The Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers (CoE CoM) decided by majority votes to initiate infringement proceedings against Turkey** over its failure to release Osman Kavala. Turkey reacted very strongly, with a statement of the MFA, and public remarks from President Erdogan who stated: "We do not recognize anyone who does not recognize our court decisions", and "We expect our courts to be respected." It is to note that Erdogan himself had applied to the ECtHR three times in the past.

**The Diyarbakır Branch of the Human Rights Association (HRA) was raided by the police** on 01/02. Board member Ferhat Berkpınar was detained from his home. The raid was part of an Adıyaman-based investigation. HRA explained that the Police entered the building of the association without prior information, by forcing the door open, and that, during the search, documents and digital materials that were not within the scope of the investigation were also seized, and the objections made by the lawyers were not recorded in the minutes.

**Cultural rights- Kurdish language**

**Education in mother tongue**: According to the results of a recent survey carried out by the Socio-Political Field Research Centtre in 19 provinces, 87.7% of respondents say that education should be in the mother language starting from pre-school. The surveyed population consisted of speakers from Kurdish, Armenian, Syriac, Arabic, Circassian and Laz languages.

Access to the web page of Kurdish internet site Xwebûn newspaper was banned. On 28/01 the stand of Kurdish Language Platform in Batman was not allowed by the governorate’s Office on the grounds of precautions for Covid-19 pandemic.

**Kurdish street musicians detained and tortured**: Four street musicians playing Kurdish music in Beyoğlu district of Istanbul were detained by the police on 29/01. The musicians, who were later released, told media that their instruments were seized, they were subjected to torture and ill-treatment under custody and were given pecuniary fines.

**Minorities**

**Case of murdered Syriac Christian couple**: The Syriac-Chaldean Diril couple disappeared on 07/01/2020 in Şırnak. Shmuni Diril was found murdered nearby their village in March 2020. Hurmuz Diril is still missing. In the investigation, the First Heavy Penal Court in Şirnak last week dismissed the initial indictment submitted by the prosecutor’s office as insufficient. The indictment came after 2 years and only after much public pressure. Victim’s lawyer Cengiz stated that “the perpetrators are clearly being protected. It is an example of a policy of legal impunity.”

**Foreign policy**

**Ukraine:** TR President Erdogan visited Kiev on 3/02 to attend the 10th meeting of the TR-UA High-Level Strategic Council. President Erdogan and his UA counterpart Zelensky reviewed the two countries' relations, discussed possibilities for further deepening cooperation and exchanged views on regional and international issues. The two sides signed various agreements and memoranda of understanding. It was announced that a free trade agreement would be signed, after many years. Other agreements to be signed include cooperation on hi-tech, aviation and space, youth policy, and law enforcement. UA Minister of Defence also announced a framework agreement on manufacturing Turkish drones in UA.

**Russia:** TR PresidentErdogan said relations between TR and RU are now better than at any point in history, which has allowed them to seriously boost their trade volume. TR’s coordination with Russia on strategic products is strong, particularly on the natural gas supply, he furthermore said. The Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant, a joint project of Ankara and Moscow, will be online in 2023, and TR could consider a second plant with RU. Erdogan also defended the purchase of RU S-400 missiles to TR, as NATO members can make their decisions in acquiring weapons.

**Ukraine-Russia tensions:** President Erdogan mentioned this week that TR did not want a war between RU and UA and hoped the issue would be resolved peacefully. Reportedly, plans are being made for Russian President Putin to visit TR after the Winter Olympics in China (Feb. 4-20). Defence Minister Akar stressed TR will continue to abide by the rules set by the 1936 Montreux Convention on the passage of ships in the Straits. He warned that RU/UA tensions risk uncontrolled escalation and urged all parties concerned to remain calm and engage in coordination, cooperation, and dialogue.

**Lebanon:** President Erdogan received the Lebanese Prime Minister Mikati in Ankara to discuss TR-Lebanon relations and cooperation opportunities. Erdogan mentioned that TR is ready to undertake infrastructure projects, including rebuilding the Port of Beirut.

**Syria/Iraq:** A significant military escalation took place in northern Syria/northern Iraq this week, marked by tit-for tat shelling between TR/SNA forces and SDF/YPG militants. The TR Air Force struck YPG/PKK terrorist targets in northern Iraq and parts of northern Syria, the TR Defense Ministry declared. Separately, TR security forces "neutralized" four YPG/PKK militants in Operation Peace Spring zone. Seemingly, in retaliation YPG militants bombed Al-Bab in Euphrates Shield Area, resulting in the death of 9 Syrians. The TR Defense ministry also claimed the militants had also opened fire on TR bases in al Bab and three others in the region, leading to a counter reaction which reportedly resulted in 43 YPG/SDF militants being “neutralized”(killed/wounded/captured). One TR soldier was killed in a mortar attack on a border post with Syria in the province of Sirnak.

**Israel:** President Erdogan announced that IL President Herzog would visit TR soon, adding that both countries were looking to improve ties.

**Armenia:** The second meeting of TR and ARM Special Representatives will be held on 24 February in Vienna. AKP spokesperson Celik said that TR is “keeping a close eye on efforts to normalise relations with ARM and has “waged a robust campaign against diaspora’s attempt to poison its relations with ARM and Western democracies”. As earlier agreed, TR and ARM launched on 02/02 reciprocal charter flights between Istanbul and Yerevan. ARM has yet to decide whether its FM and Special Envoy will participate at the Antalya Diplomatic Forum.

**US:** TR Presidential Spokesman Kalin held a telephone conversation with the US National Security Advisor Sullivan and agreed on “improving bilateral relations by creating a joint strategic mechanism to allow sustainable dialogue”. They also discussed RU-UA crisis and efforts to de-escalate the crisis through dialogue; Kalin reiterated TR’s readiness to provide the necessary support as NATO ally. The US State Department voiced its strong disagreement on TR’s involvement in recent conflicts undermining regional security, and on the acquisition of the S-400. Regarding the purchase of F-16, the Department said are in early stage on the review process, which would require a Congressional notification.

**Bahrain:** TR FM Cavusoglu paid a two-day official visit to Bahrain and met with his homogolue as well as the Bahrain Crown Prince Al Khalifa. The two sides discussed steps to further improve bilateral relations and the enhancement of economic and trade ties. The two Foreign Ministers emphasised their common vision for a “united, stable and secure Gulf region.”

**Sri Lanka:** TR FM Cavusoglu visited Sri Lanka on 28/01, an “extremely valuable and important ally”. Cavusoglu underlined the importance of TR’s Asia Anew Initiative and the establishment of stronger ties with the Asian countries. The two countries signed a double taxation avoidance agreement and agreed to improve relations in defence industry, health, pharmaceuticals, construction and tourism. They also agreed to enhance their joint efforts in combatting terrorism and Cavusoglu thanked his homologue for Sri Lanka’s support in the fight against “FETO”. Turkish airlines aim to increase the number of flights between Istanbul and Colombo from 11 to 14 per week.

**Azerbaijan:** TR Parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee approved the Shusha Declaration with AZ, which focuses on defence cooperation between the two countries and the establishment of new transport routes. TR MoD Akar met his Azeri counterpart and stressed the importance of “continuing their existing cooperation in the fields of military cooperation and defence industry”. Separately, Cavusoglu had a phone call with his Azerbaijani counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov, and discussed bilateral and regional issues.

**UAE**: As President Erdogan prepares to visit UAE on 14-15 February, UAE’s MoD Al-Bowardi met TR’s Ambassador Tuncer and discussed ways to strengthen bilateral defence and military cooperation.

**Iraq:** President Erdogan met in Ankara with the President of KRG Nechirvan Barzani. The TR Embassy in IRQ condemned the recent rocket attack, which targeted Baghdad’s international airport.

**Hong Kong:** The MoU between the TR Financial Crimes Investigation Board (MASAK) and the Joint Financial Intelligence Unit (JFIU) of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region on money laundering and terrorism financing, was published in TR’s Official Gazette.

**Pakistan:** TR’s DFM Onal visited Pakistan and met PAK Foreign Secretary Mahmood to discuss bilateral relations, regional and international issues.

**Myanmanr**: At the occasion of the anniversary of the military coup, TR MFA issued a statement, expressing its concern on the situation in Myanmanr and emphasising that TR was against any “kind of coups and military interventions as a matter of principle”.

**Afghanistan**: TR Deputy FM Onal participated at the High Level Joint Discussion on Preventing Catastrophe in Afghanistan co-chaired by UNOCHA and ICRC. TR is “determined to continue its bilateral efforts and support international efforts to that end.”

**Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan conflict**: In a statement TR’s FM welcomed the decision for a complete cease-fire between the two countries and reiterated TR’s “sincere desire for a peaceful resolution of border tensions between the two brotherly and friendly countries through negotiations”.

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