**DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO TURKEY**

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**Subject: Turkey: Weekly update, 28 March – 1 April 2022**

**HIGHLIGHTS**

* ***The Plenary continued to discuss the AKP-MHP co-sponsored electoral reform. The first part of amendments to the Electoral Law was approved by the Parliament where the current 10% country election threshold is reduced to 7%.***
* ***The Court ruled for the continuation of the DEVA’s founding member and security analyst Metin Gurcan’s arrest.***
* ***A re-shuffling took place in the IYI Party Presidential Board where nationalist politicians were sidelined by the İYİ Party chair.***
* ***President Erdogan expressed TR’s readiness to host a meeting between Putin and Zelensky as part of his government’s mediation efforts. He also expressed TR’s readiness for guarantorship.***

**ASSESSMENT**

The latest survey on TR public’s attitude towards the RU – UA conflictshowed that Turks do not trust Western actors in the international politics. Leaving aside the historical reasons, the decades long anti US/EU/NATO rhetoric by the Turkish political elite and intelligentsia has eroded Turks’ trust.

The change in the first string of IYI Partyis widely perceived as Akşener’s attempt to sideline popular nationalists’ names in order to prevent more outbursts alliance towards CHP. It also contributes to IYI Party’s desire to be perceived as a center-right party.

**DETAIL**

**EU-Turkey relations**

1. Turkey and Poland held bilateral political consultations on 30 March 2022 in Ankara. The two deputy foreign ministers discussed bilateral relations, Turkey’s accession process to the EU as well as current regional issues.
2. EU funds have been targeted several times this week notably by a CHP deputy leader who claimed that the government received a grant of €800,000 from the European Commission in November 2019 and questioned the use of these funds since Turkey withdrew from the Istanbul Convention. The Court of Cassation, which referred to an audit report on the Agriculture and Rural Development Promotion Agency and its use of funds for unrelated areas, including for wedding venues, also criticized IPARD funds.
3. A delegation from the French Defense Ministry held talks in Ankara following Turkey, Italy and France decision to resume trilateral cooperation on defense and revive steps previously taken regarding SAMP-T systems.

**Eastern Mediterranean**

1. Nothing to report.

**Domestic policy**

1. **Electoral reform:** The first seven articles of the amendments to the Electoral Law were approved by the Parliament. Accordingly, the general election’s threshold has been reduced from 10% to 7%. A political party will also have to hold its district, provincial and grand congresses twice in a row within the specified period in order to be able to run in the elections, thus adding to the already existing condition of having established a parliamentary group in order to be able to participate in the elections.
2. **Polls - Economy trumps over politics:** One of the main trends observed in the polls has consistently been the worsening of the people’s economic expectations. In the IE’s March survey, 56% of the participants evaluated the state of the economy as very bad, and 21% as bad. While 59% of the participants said their income did not meet their expenses, 27% said that their income barely covered their expenses. Konda Polling’s March survey measure the parties’ vote shares as follows: AKP: 31.8%, MHP: 9.2%, CHP: 25.9%, IYI: 17.5%, HDP: 11.6%, others: 4%.
3. **The Court ruled for the continuation of Metin Gurcan’s arrest, DEVA’s founding member and security analyst.** Gurcan, who is an ex-military personnel and contributed occasionally with articles to Al Monitor and Jane’s Defence, was on remand for espionage charges.EUDEL attended Gurcan’s hearing until the moment the judges decided for secrecy of the adjudication and emptied the courtroom. The defence lawyers, who spoke to EUDEL, claimed that Gurcan merely referred to the open sources in his consultancy work with the embassies.
4. **Opposition front’s work:** DEVA Party Chair Ali Babacan hosted a dinner of the six opposition parties’ leaders on 27/03. At the end of the dinner, the 6 leaders issued a joint statement re-affirming their strong commitment in continuing working united in view of the upcoming elections and in light of the recent amendments to the electoral law that were put forward by AKP-MHP coalition. The revised electoral legislation is widely perceived as another attempt by the ruling camp to undermine the united opposition and further discredit it.
5. **Change in the executive cadres of IYI Party:** A re-shuffling took place in the IYI Party Presidential Board where nationalist politicians were sidelined by the İYİ Party chair, Aksener. The commentators claimed that Aksener’s reshuffling aimed to direct the İYİ’s ideological positioning towards center-right. Accordingly, the Organization and Youth Policy chairs of the party were directly attached to Akşener, while the Head of Organization, Koray Aydın, became the Head of Political Affairs. Popular names such as Yavuz Ağıralioğlu and Nuri Okutan were not appointed to the new Presidency Council.
6. **Non-prosecution for the warning letter of alleged assassination of Mayor İmamoğlu:** Regarding the warning letter addressed to Istanbul Mayor Imamoglu, Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office gave a decision of non-prosecution on the grounds that "there has not been an action that requires punishment that could remain within the scope of an enforcement action or at the stage of attempt". The lawyer of Imamoglu stated that “Prosecutor’s office, within only one day, decided not to prosecute on the grounds that our client had not been attacked yet. We will of course pursue this inconceivable decision.”
7. **Government continued to pressure the opposition parties for their relations with the foreign diplomatic missions:** The recent accusations by Minister of Interior Soylu claiming that the opposition is working hand in hand with foreign representations and ambassadors, adds to the constant attacks against the opposition.
8. **TR public’s attitude towards the RU – UA conflict:** Metropoll’s latest survey showed that 33.7% of the Turks say RU is responsible for the war in Ukraine, while 48.3% put the blame on US/NATO [sic]. Most notably, the voters of the two nationalist parties (IYI and MHP) see overwhelmingly the US/NATO as the ones to blame for the war. This is particularly interesting given the IYI Party leadership’s vocal pro-NATO stance calling for aligning with the sanction against the RU.

**Disinformation**

1. A workshop on Combating Disinformation in the Audio-Visual Media was held in Ankara on 30/03. In his opening speech, the Chairman of Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), Ebubekir Şahin said that "disinformation has become a national security issue for the countries and even a global security challenge by overcoming it”. He also targeted the popular Turkish actress Beren Saat, who criticized the government’s policies in areas such as climate and gender, by spreading disinformation.

**Foreign policy**

**UA-RU war**:

1. **RU – UA talks in Istanbul on 29/03**: TR provided the facilities for the RU-UA talks on 29/03 in Istanbul. Before the meeting started, President Erdogan called, in a televised speech upon the UA and RU negotiators to agree on an immediate ceasefire in the war. According to Erdogan, "*it is up to the sides to stop this tragedy*”. Furthermore, Erdogan mentioned that progress in talks between Russian and Ukrainian negotiators would pave the way for a meeting of the countries' two leaders.
2. Later in the week in a telephone call with UA President Zelenskyy, Erdogan assessed that the talks have given “*meaningful impetus*” to efforts to end the war. He furthermore welcomed Russia's decision to reduce significantly its military operations in Kyiv and Chernihiv as an “*important step*”.
3. **On Turkey’s possible guarantor role in an UA-RU agreement**, Erdogan said that Turkey is open in principle to act as a guarantor for Ukraine, but details need to be clarified. FM Cavusoglu said Russia does not oppose Turkey and Germany acting as guarantors for Ukraine, but it is out of the question for Turkey to send troops and get involved in the war if it becomes a guarantor country.
4. **TR’s position on sanctions**: President Erdogan underlined that the international community appreciates Turkey’s efforts aiming for peace, and reiterated that TR will not join sanctions against Russia, placing importance on maintaining the dialogue with RU on UA, SY, LY and the South Caucasus. FM Cavusoglu mentioned that it “*would not be correct and realistic for TR to participate in the sanctions while mediating*”. Still according ot FM Vacusolgu, in this context “*there is no reason for Russia to cut off TR’s gas supply*”. On RU oligarch Abramovich's participation in the Istanbul peace talks, President Erdogan claimed that he took part in the negotiations as a member of the Russian delegation.
5. **TR’s position on the Crimea and the Donbas**: Presidential Spokesperson Kalin said, that the issues of the “*Donbas and Crimea should be discussed seriously and that the RU demands on this issue are very maximalist and unrealistic”*, which led to a reaction by the RU MFA.
6. **Uzbekistan:** After 4 years and at the invitation of the Uzbek President Mirziyoyev, President Erdogan paid a two-day official to Uzbekistan on 29-30 March. The two leaders discussed political, economic, military and social aspects of their bilateral relations as well as regional and international issues in particular the war in UA and the situation in AFG. The two leaders co-chaired the 2nd High Level Strategic Cooperation Council and elevated their bilateral relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership. TR and UZB set the target of their bilateral trade to 10B USD and signed 10 agreements in a number of fields such as defence, health, labour and media including a Preferential Trade Agreement.
7. **Saudi Arabia:** The TR prosecutor overseeing the legal proceedings of the Khashoggi case asked the court to conclude the case in TR transfer the file to KSA on the grounds that the 26 suspects are Saudi nationals. Reportedly, the prosecutor also asked the drop of the international warrants against those suspects. The court announced that will seek an opinion from the Justice Ministry and the next hearing is set on 7 April. FM Cavusoglu stated that TR-KSA relations were affected by “the lack of trust between the two countries’ judiciaries” however the cooperation between them has improved. Cavusoglu also said that important steps were taken to revive TR-KSA bilateral relations and ones that are more concrete are upcoming.
8. **Israel:** **Energy** - Cost calculations have shown that Turkey is the most affordable route for exports of Israeli natural gas, President Erdogan said. FM Cavusoglu however cautioned that fast supply through this route in the short term would not be possible.
9. **US:** President Erdogan said that during the talks on the F-16 jets, US is showing a positive approach on the modernisation and purchase of new fighter jets. A 10 member TR trade presidential delegation met with US State and Commerce Department officials, businesspeople and think tanks in US in an attempt to improve the TR-US trade ties. One of the main topics of the discussions were the S-400. The State Department said that TR should not become a base for RU capital. A US delegation of politicians and businesspeople is planned to visit TR in the coming period and TR-US business meeting is scheduled to take in June in the US, the first in two years.
10. **Armenia:** Following the recent tensions between AZ and ARM, President Erdogan called on ARM to abide by the terms of the trilateral agreement with AZ and RU and to fully withdraw its troops from “internationally recognised Azeri territory”.
11. **North Macedonia:** In a statement, the TR Foreign Ministry said that the results of the census demonstrated that they ignored the points made by the representatives of the Turkish Community. The statement calls on the official authorities to take into consideration the points underlined by the Macedonian Turks National Census Coordination Committee.
12. **Lebanon:** The Turkish Armed Forces sent 80 tons of foodstuffs and mechanical spare parts for cars to the Lebanese military as instructed by President Erdogan. Few days earlier the Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) has also sent 524 tons of food aid to the Lebanese security forces.

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