**DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO TURKEY**

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**To:** EEAS MD Angelina EICHHORST, Acting COM NEAR DG Maciej POPOWSKI

**Subject: Turkey: Weekly update, 12-18 March 2022**

**HIGHLIGHTS**

* ***The RU war in UA continued to dominate Turkey’s agenda, also reflecting the President and FM’s activism in trying to find a mediation role for TR (the FM travelled to Moscow and L’viv in the second half of the week).***
* ***The long-awaited election law draft was finally submitted to the Parliament by the ruling coalition. The proposal might deter small opposition parties’ to nominate their own candidates.***

**ASSESSMENT**

TR leadership’s activism in the RU-UA focusses on trying to secure a ceasefire as soon as possible*.* Beside the obvious humanitarian reasons, there may also be more practical concerns for TR at play, notably its increasing difficulty to maintain a ‘neutral’ position in the face of mounting Russian atrocities, as well as the need to prevent further external shocks to its teetering economy.

With all attention focused on the war, the ruling coalition presented its long-awaited electoral reform, which foresees few technical changes with the aim to improve the ruling coalition chances at the election.

**DETAIL**

**EU-Turkey relations**

On 13/03 President Erdoğan met Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis; they exchanged on their common priorities regarding the war in Ukraine war and vowed to improve bilateral ties. Reportedly, there was a markedly more positive atmosphere.

On 14/03, German Chancellor Scholz paid his first visit to Ankara in his current capacity. In addition to a joint call for a ceasefire in Ukraine, Chancellor Scholz praised Turkey for its mediating role and his decision to abide by the Montreux Convention’s provisions. He also underlined the importance of energy cooperation between the EU and Turkey. He brought up the "differences" that put Germany-Turkey relations under strain, such as the rule of law and human rights while President Erdogan underlined the strong economic ties between the two countries.

Polish President Andrzej Duda visited Ankara on 16/03 where he praised Turkey-Poland bilateral relations and President Erdogan for sharing Turkey’s experience on hosting migrants and refugees. The two Presidents discussed RU’s war in UA.

Following a three year break, the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee was held in Brussels on 17/03 in the presence of high-level officials from Turkey and the EU. Parliamentarians from Turkey and the European Union vowed to boost EU-Turkey long-stalled parliamentary cooperation. The co-chairs underlined in their final statement their unequivocal commitment to good bilateral relations, the importance of strengthening principles of rule of law and democracy, as well as economic and trade cooperation. They also underlined that EU-Turkey relations are essential against the background of the ongoing international crises triggered by Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine.

**Eastern Mediterranean**

Nothing to report.

**Domestic policy**

**Electoral law reform.** On 14/03, the much-anticipated election draft law was submitted to the Parliament by the ruling coalition. If adopted, the new legislation might deter small opposition parties’ (DEVA, Gelecek, Saadet) to nominate their own candidates. They would therefore need to nominate their candidates under CHP and IYI banners. The draft law also envisages reducing the election threshold from 10 to 7% and eliminating the impact of the alliance votes in calculating the parliamentary seats won by every single party of the alliance in the related district.

**Migration**. Anti-immigrant sentiment is on the rise and migration features high on the political agenda in the run up to the next elections given the clear anti-migrant stance displayed by several political parties. A recent poll also indicate that over 80% of the Turkish population would like to see refugees going back to their countries; the percentage varies little between ruling and opposition party supporters, indicating a hardening of public views on migration.

**Judiciary and Fundamental rights**

**Dismissal of Prosecutors:** On 16/03, the Council of Judges and Prosecutor (HSK)’s decision to dismiss five prosecutors was published in the OG. The decision is based on allegations that they had links with the Gulen movement.

**Draft law submitted to the Parliament related to fight against violence against women:** The new reform package referred to as "emergency judicial package" was submitted to the Parliament on 16/03. The draft covers violence against women and healthcare workers. Experts argue that the draft contains positive elements such as defining persistent stalking as a crime, but also that it is not enough to trigger deterrence in violence against women cases. They also argue that the sanctions introduced still fail to be preventive and some will not even ensure defendants’ imprisonment.

**Freedom of association and assembly.** The Constitutional Court revoked State Supervisory Council (DDK)'s power to suspend association executives: The CC annulled last year’s Presidential Decree, which granted to the DDK the power to suspend executives of associations during inspection. Recalling that the right to establish associations is regulated in the constitution, the CC noted that a decree cannot be issued on individual rights. Although this is a positive move, the DDK will still continue to exercise its power to propose state bodies for removal of executives from associations, “whenever necessary/circumstances are in place”.

Van Governorate continued its bi-weekly blanket bans since November 2016 and declared ban on all demonstrations and outdoor activities as of 15/03.

**Pressure on Turkish Medical Association (TMA):** It is reported in the media that the Anti-Terrorism Department of the Security DG filed a criminal complaint at the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office against Chairperson of the TMA, Prof. Şebnem Korur. The doctors have been increasingly targeted and insulted by the President and the MHP leader due to recent news that many doctors are leaving Turkey due to violence against medical staff and lack of economic and social rights. Health workers protested against their working conditions and salaries, and went on a two-day national strike earlier this week, joining the growing public discontent fuelled by a strained economic situation. The protests were first dismissed by President Erdogan as he said that the unhappy medical workers should simply leave the country, but he then backtracked.

**Women activists detained in Diyarbakir:** In house raids in Diyarbakır on 16/03, 23 women were detained, including former Sur Municipality Co-Mayor Filiz Buluttekin, Şırnak's İdil Municipality former Co-Mayor Nevin Oyman, Health and Social Workers' Union (SES) Diyarbakır Branch Secretary Fatma Yıldızhan and Nihal Yanık, Adalet Kaya - chairperson of Rosa Women’s Association. Rights activists issued a press statement demanding the immediate release of the detained women, and emphasized that the operation specifically targeted Kurdish women's organisations. The detentions were reportedly due to 8 March activities and protests on Istanbul Convention’s annulment.

**LGBTI - Hate crimes.** The first session of the court case against Serhat Arpa, for stabbing and heavily injuring two trans-women on 20/11/2021, was held at the 14th Izmir Heavy Penal Court on 14/03. The Court rejected intervention demands by LGBTIQ and human rights NGOs. The case was adjourned to 11/05.

**Southeast – Kurdish issue -** Pressures on the HDP continued. The police arrested three of the HDP’s Youth Council leaders, in Van. Many court cases against former mayors/executives continued. The Kurdish parties in Diyarbakir, and primarily the HDP, announced their plans to celebrate Newroz on 21 March across the country under a new slogan, “It’s the era of victory.”

The Kobane case against 108 HDP officials continued in Ankara. The Court rejected demands for release of 21 imprisoned executives and adjourned the trial to between March 28 and April 8.

**Right to life:** The Penal Department of Diyarbakır Regional Court ruled in the case of police’s fatal shooting of a university student Kemal Kurkut during Newroz celebrations in Diyarbakır in 2017. The Appeals Court changed the local court’s acquittal on the grounds that Kurkut’s death was in the scope of “legal framework” and ruled that the final verdict should be “no legal ground for sentence” since it is not clear that the crime was committed by the accused.

Prominent feminist activists Silvia Federici and Angela Davis announced their support for imprisoned HDP politician Aysel Tuğluk whose health is deteriorated severely due to dementia. Like many other national and international campaigns for Tuğluk before, they also urged immediate release of Tuğluk.

**Disinformation**

Nothing to report.

**Foreign policy**

**RU war in UA.** President Erdogan reiterated, in separate phone calls with UA President Zelinski and RU President Putin, the TR offer to host both for talks in order to find a diplomatic solution. The TR statement of the calls emphasized the need for a permanent cease-fire, as well the importance of the effective functioning of humanitarian corridors. President Erdogan also held a phone call with UN Secretary-General Guterres, who thanked Erdogan for his mediation initiative. TR FM Cavusoglu travelled to RU and UA. After his meeting with RU FM Lavrov, Cavusoglu stated that TR is promoting a “*balanced approach*” and has as first priority the evacuation of its nationals from besieged Mariupol, along with an urgent humanitarian ceasefire. Furthermore, TR would gladly host a meeting between Presidents Putin and Zelenski and will continue to implement the Montreux Convention. However, according to Lavrov, meetings on the presidential or ministerial level need solid preparation. In the second leg of his vist, FM Cavusoglu paid a visit to Lviv to meet with UA FM Kuleba. FM Cavusoglu mentioned that hopes for a cease-fire in the Russia-Ukraine war “*increased a bit more after visits to both Russia and Ukraine*”. UA FM Kuleba emphasized that TR “*is among the countries Ukraine wants to agree deal with on security guarantees*.” HRVP Borrell discussed on 12/03 the war in UA in a bilateral meeting with FM Cavusoglu. FM Cavusoglu held a telephone conversation with US Secretary of State Blinken to discuss the latest developments in Ukraine, with Blinken thanking TR for its assistance to Ukraine. TR Defense Minister Akar held phone conversations with his UA and RU counterparts and attend an extraordinary NATO meeting.

At the opening of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum on 11/03, President Erdogan criticized the West over Russia’s 2014 invasion of Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula, saying that a stronger response then could have prevented Moscow’s current war on Ukraine. Erdogan spoke also out against “demonizing” Russian art performers in the West.

A survey by the Areda polling company, found that 68.8% of the TR public believes that the RU aggression against UA is unjust. 60% of the surveyed indidcated that the US and Europe's reaction to the RU attack on UA was “grossly insufficient”.

Evacuation: At least 14,480 Turkish citizens have been evacuated from Ukraine since the start of the war, according to FM Cavusoglu, with efforts ongoing to evacuate TR nationals from besieged Mariupol. On 18/03, TR media highlighted that 65 TR citizens and their relatives had been evacuated from Mariupol.

TR Pegasus Airlines declared that it suspended temporarily its flights to Russia, following Western sanctions imposed against RU.

**Syria**: President Erdogan declared that the AKP would not deport Syrians, in contrast to the reported oppositions claims that they would deport Syrians if they win the elections.  According to a survey by Metropoll Research, 82% of the public are in favor of Syrian refugees returning to their home country. A breakdown of party affiliation puts this figure at 85% among AKP supporters, 90% of CHP voters, 98% of IYI Party voters, 88% of HDP voters.

**UK:** The UK will provide funding for a sustainable and civil infrastructure agreement, amounting to $2.3 billion, for the construction of TR’s new high-speed electric railway line.

**Qatar**: TR and QAT are still working on a joint project for the security and management of the Kabul International Airport. QAT Deputy FM said that the bilateral relationship is a strategic one, which has been strengthened with a number of agreements signed in the economic, military and tourism fields.

**Turkmenistan:** President Erdogan held a telephone call with President Berdimuhammedov and discussed bilateral and regional issues and focused on steps to improve the relations of the two countries.

**Yemen**: In a statement, the TR MFA condemned “the heinous” attack at the Turkish memorial cemetery in Sana’a.

**VISA: S. FANTARONI**

**SIGN-OFF: N. MEYER-LANDRUT, HoD**