



# İKVM NHTLY



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www.ikv.org.tr / contact: ikv@ikv.org.tr

## POLAND'S TURN IN THE EU COUNCIL PRESIDENCY AND THE RELATIONS WITH TÜRKİYE

Poland, emphasising “security” as the central theme of its term priorities, takes its turn in the EU Council Presidency.

Tunç İbrahim Ceylan  
IKV Junior Researcher

Following Hungary's term, Poland assumed the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU for six months starting on 1 January 2025. After becoming an EU member in May 2004, as part of the “big-bang enlargement”, Poland is taking the post for the second time. In an international political context characterised by complexity and unpredictability, Poland highlights “security” as the main theme shaping its priorities for its term in the post.

The EU Council Presidency emerged as a position with the Lisbon Treaty entering into force in 2009. Although the role is carried out by only one EU Member State at the same time, Poland has assumed the EU Council Presidency as the first country of 13<sup>th</sup> Presidency trio. Presidency trios have common priorities and a programme which is planned for 18 months. 13<sup>th</sup> Presidency trio is made up with Poland, Denmark and Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus. The common priorities which are determined jointly by these countries are “Strong and Secure Europe”, “Prosperous and Competitive Europe” and “Free and Democratic Europe”.

### Political Context Shaping the Polish EU Council Presidency

It can be said that Polish EU Council Presidency is coincided with an international political context full of complexities and unpredictability. Apart from more broad and systemic problems such as climate change and related problems like droughts, water scarcity and extreme rainfalls, the geopolitical conjuncture is also changing rapidly and affecting the ways in which international actors move. The ongoing war in Ukraine, escalating tensions in parts of the Middle East, political instability, energy security challenges and Donald Trump's second term in the White House, raising concerns in Europe about international trade and transatlantic security, make



estimating and planning for 2025 particularly difficult. Polish Presidency needs to deal with all these problems and take them into the agenda of the EU Council meetings.

When it comes to EU affairs, Poland needs to address many questions and bottlenecks making cooperation harder than ever such as migration and policies and revisions made within the context of the European Green Deal, especially the ones in relation with agriculture. As a country with important and strong agricultural sector, Polish farmers and Poland are affected by twin transitions. Last year witnessed EU wide farmer protests against quick changes in agricultural regulations, EU imports from Ukraine without custom duties and quotas and lastly Mercosur deal. Polish farmers also protested EU policies. How Poland addresses these issues will also shape both Polish and the EU politics.

### Polish EU Council Priorities

The priorities announced by Polish EU Council Presidency emphasise the theme of “security” and all other topics are shaped around this common theme. Stating that Europe is at a stage of evaluation and decision-making, Poland says that the EU must protect itself and

its citizens while also taking care of its immediate neighbourhood. It is the EU's duty to provide Europeans with a sense of security and hope. In this challenging geopolitical context, the EU needs to stand united and work with partners who share common values with the EU, while defending the fundamental values on which the EU was built, such as democracy, freedom and the rule of law. Considering these requirements, the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU has highlighted seven dimensions of the common theme “security” as priorities:

**1. Defence and Security:** Given the need for a coherent European security approach complementary to NATO, Poland calls for increased military spending, a stronger defence industry and steps to address defence capacity gaps. Investments in relation to The Eastern Shield and the Baltic Defence Line should be supported.

**2. Protection of People and Borders:** Poland states that steps should be taken to protect the EU's external borders and address the problems shaped around irregular migration. Focusing on repatriation policies is underlined and instrumentalisation of migration, which is defined as a hybrid threat, should be averted.

### 3. Resistance to Foreign Interference and Disinformation:

This dimension is discussed in the context of increasing the resilience of democracy and preventing polarisation and radicalisation. It also highlights the importance of education and strengthening civil society as long-term goals and points out that the EU should focus on providing modern and secure digital services.

### 4. Ensuring Security and Freedom of Business:

Rapidly transforming technology, energy crises, climate change and geopolitical tensions pose challenges for businesses, while the EU Single Market needs to be deepened through greater cooperation and the barriers to cross-border activity, especially in the services sector, need to be removed.

### 5. Energy Transition:

The Presidency emphasises that reliable and certain energy supplies are of high importance for the EU's energy security. Energy security is not only about supply, but also about the ability of the EU citizens to use this energy in sufficient quantities and at affordable prices. In this context, the Polish Presidency will pursue efforts to completely phase out imports from Russia, work to lower energy prices in the EU and enhance the security of the EU energy sector's physical and cyber infrastructure.

### 6. Competitive and Resilient Agriculture:

The dimension emphasises the need to strengthen the position of farmers in value chains and ensure that they have a predictable and stable income. Taking initiatives in food security, less resilient areas of the agricultural sector and ensuring compliance of non-EU producers with EU food quality, safety and sustainability standards are underlined.

**7. Health Security:** The last dimension, health security, focuses on digital transformation in healthcare and EU medicines safety. Diversifying the sources of supply of medicines and supporting production within the EU are given as key actions in the field. Priorities include protecting and improving the mental health of children and adolescents in the digital age, promoting healthy activities and disease prevention.

### Türkiye in the Polish EU Council Presidency

Türkiye is mentioned in two instances in the program. The first one is in the last paragraph of the section on enlargement. It is stated that the Polish Presidency will engage in a constructive dialogue with Türkiye, taking into account its status as a candidate country and in accordance with the Conclusions of the European Council. The other part where Türkiye is mentioned is in the section on external relations. It is stated that the Polish Presidency will make effort to keep the Western Balkans and Türkiye in close cooperation with the EU through continued political dialogue in the context of the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Türkiye and Poland have stable relations as Poland supports Turkish bid for the EU membership and Türkiye backs Polish integration into Euro-Atlantic organisations. Plus, Türkiye exported Bayraktar TB2s to Poland, which was the first NATO and EU country to buy these high-tech unmanned combat aerial vehicles. In line with this background, Polish Presidency of the EU Council can provide an opportunity for the parties to improve/revitalise Türkiye-EU relations.



## TOBB PRESIDENT HİSARCIKLIOĞLU ATTENDED EUROCHAMBRES BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING



**P**resident of the World Federation of Chambers and the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Türkiye M. Rifat Hisarcıklioğlu

attended the Board of Directors meeting of the European Union of Chambers (Eurochambres) in Brussels, of which Hisarcıklioğlu is the Vice

President. At the meeting, global and regional problems on the agenda of the business world, especially competitiveness, were discussed.

## EP MEMBER PIERRE PIMPIE PAID A WORKING VISIT TO TÜRKİYE



**M**ember of the Patriots for Europe Group of the European Parliament Pierre Pimpie paid a working visit to Türkiye between 21-24 December 2024 upon the invitation of IKV. Starting the first day of the programme, MEP Pimpie visited Autoport Terminal Operators and Kocaeli Free Zone and examined the trade relations with the EU on site. On the second day of the programme, MEP Pimpie came together with IKV Chairperson Ayhan Zeytinoğlu and IKV Deputy Secretary General M. Gökhan Kilit and visited "Chryso-Kat Türkiye" a company with headquarters in Paris producing concrete and cement chemicals. Afterwards, MEP Pimpie visited Kocaeli Chamber of Industry chaired by IKV Chairperson Ayhan Zeytinoğlu, where he was informed about

Turkish industry and foreign investors.

On the last day of his visit, MEP Pimpie came together with General Manager of Sanofi Pharmaceuticals Cem Öztürk, Deputy General Manager of MAIS-Renault-Dacia Lucas Bellieud and Director of Turkish-French Trade Association Ayşegül Arıcan and discussed the commercial relations between Türkiye and France. After the meeting, MEP Pimpie visited IKV and received information on Türkiye-EU relations, modernisation of the Customs Union and the activities of the foundation. Finally, MEP Pimpie met with Member of Women in Foreign Policy Initiative Prof. Zeynep Alemdar at IKV and discussed Türkiye's regional role, the future of the EU Enlargement and Türkiye's accession process.

## IKV CHAIRPERSON ZEYTİNOĞLU CAME TOGETHER WITH EUROPEAN COMMISSION MEMBER CHRISTOPHE HANSEN



**I**KV Chairperson Ayhan Zeytinoğlu came together with European Commissioner for Agriculture and Food Christophe Hansen, as part of the Brussels visit of the TOBB delegation headed by TOBB President

M. Rifat Hisarcıklioğlu on 10 December 2024.

On the margins of the visit, IKV Chairperson Ayhan Zeytinoğlu, TOBB President M. Rifat Hisarcıklioğlu and representatives of Chambers and

Commodity Exchanges participating in the "Connecting European Chambers" event organised by EUROCHAMBRES in Brussels, Belgium, came together at the TOBB-IKV Brussels Representative Office.

## IKV RELEASED TWO NEW PUBLICATIONS



**I**KV released two new publications about transformation of agricultural policies under the green deal and the impact of twin transformation on territorial cohesion. First publication titled "Transformation of the Agricultural Policies Under the Green Deal in Türkiye and the EU" written by IKV Junior Researcher Tunç İbrahim Ceylan analyses the current transformation of the CAP under the European Green Deal, the strategies

and legal acts adopted by the EU. The second publication titled "The Impact of Twin Transformation on Territorial Cohesion in the European Union and Türkiye" written by IKV Researcher Sema Nur Juncu assesses the economic, social and environmental impacts of Türkiye's Green and Digital Transformation processes at the regional level and analyses how these transformations can shape inclusive and sustainable development at the local level.

## HIGH-LEVEL EXCHANGES

# PRESIDENT ERDOĞAN SPOKE AT THE D-8 SUMMIT



President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan attended the 11<sup>th</sup> D-8 Summit in Cairo, Egypt on 18 December 2024. Upon his arrival at the summit venue, President Erdoğan was welcomed by President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt. In his speech at the Summit, President Erdoğan emphasised that institutions ensuring global security and stability have failed to meet their responsibilities in the face of rising conflicts, crises and wars. President Erdoğan further noted that the economic order, established after the Second World War, has experienced significant disruptions, leaving economic institutions struggling to deliver the necessary support. President Erdoğan expressed that the

decisions made at the D-8 Summit, convened during this critical period, would offer valuable guidance to member countries in addressing these challenges.

Referring to the latest developments in Syria during his speech, President Erdoğan expressed that Türkiye's most genuine expectation is "the establishment of a Syria free of terrorism, where all religious, sectarian and ethnic groups coexist peacefully." President Erdoğan emphasised the need for unity, solidarity, reconciliation and development among the Syrian people, highlighting Türkiye's ongoing efforts to support the stabilisation of Syria during this

challenging period. President Erdoğan also urged D-8 Member States to contribute actively to this process.

President Erdoğan, who also attended the "Special Session on the Situation in Palestine and Lebanon" at the Summit, remarked that Israel's expansionist policies now extend beyond Lebanon to include Syria. President Erdoğan stated: "We observe Israel's actions that violate Syria's territorial integrity, such as the expansion of illegal settlements in the Golan Heights. I believe that as D-8, we must respond more decisively to these unlawful acts that endanger Syria's stability and the security of our region."

# FOREIGN MINISTER FİDAN ATTENDED OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL MEETING

Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan attended the 31<sup>st</sup> Ministerial Council of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Malta, on 5 December 2024.

The Ministerial Council meeting of the OSCE, the most comprehensive platform for security and cooperation in Europe, was held on 5-6 December. Nearly 40 of the 57 Member States of the OSCE participated at the ministerial level, alongside the Organisation's Asian and Mediterranean cooperation partners. The security situation in the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian area and current challenges were discussed at the meeting. Participants exchanged views on key issues on the OSCE's agenda and its functioning.

Minister Fidan also met with Kaja Kallas, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy



and Vice-President of the European Commission, on the margins of the Ministerial Council meeting in Malta.

Additionally, during the occasion, Turkish Ambassador Feridun H. Sinirlioğlu, jointly nominated by Türkiye and Greece,

was appointed OSCE Secretary General. His election, achieved by consensus among 57 Member States, highlights the international community's trust in Türkiye's credibility, foreign policy and active diplomatic efforts to resolve crises.

## TIMELINE DECEMBER 2024

1	
2	President Erdoğan came together with his Montenegrin counterpart Jakov Milatović.
3	
4	Foreign Minister Fidan attended the Meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs.
5	President Erdoğan came together with the TRNC Prime Minister Ünal Üstel.
6	Foreign Minister Fidan came together with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas.
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10	President Erdoğan came together with the OSCE Secretary General Feridun Sinirlioğlu.
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12	President Erdoğan and Hungarian President Sulyok attended Closing Ceremony of Turkish-Hungarian Cultural Year.
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17	President Erdoğan came together with President of the EU Commission Ursula von der Leyen.
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21	Member of the European Parliament Pierre Pimpie paid a working visit to Türkiye upon the invitation of IKV.
22	Foreign Minister Fidan came together with his German counterpart Annalena Baerbock.
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26	President Erdoğan came together with Fener Greek Patriarch Bartholomew I.
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## HIGH-LEVEL EXCHANGES

## PRESIDENT ERDOĞAN CAME TOGETHER WITH HUNGARIAN PRIME MINISTER ORBÁN AND HUNGARIAN PRESIDENT SÜLYÖK



President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Hungarian President Tamás Sulyok in Ankara on 12 December 2024. During the meeting, President Erdoğan emphasised the strong will to further

enhance Türkiye-Hungary relations, which have a remarkable history spanning over a century. President Erdoğan highlighted the importance of intensifying efforts to raise the mutual trade volume to 6 billion dollars.

Expressing his pleasure at hosting Prime Minister Orbán and his delegation for the closing ceremony of the Turkish-Hungarian Cultural Year, President Erdoğan noted their commitment to strengthening solidarity in various sectors, particularly energy.

Touching on recent developments in Syria, President Erdoğan underscored the validity of Türkiye's principled and humanitarian foreign policy. President Erdoğan also stressed the need for cooperation with European Union countries in combating terrorism, rebuilding Syria and rehabilitating its institutions.

Subsequently, President Erdoğan, President Sulyok and Prime Minister Orbán attended the Closing Ceremony of the Turkish-Hungarian Cultural Year at the Beştepe National Congress and Culture Centre.

## PRESIDENT ERDOĞAN CAME TOGETHER WITH HIS MONTENEGRIN COUNTERPART



President Erdoğan came together with his Montenegrin counterpart Jakov Milatović at Ankara with an official ceremony, marking Milatović's first visit to Türkiye. The leaders held bilateral and delegation-level meetings to deepen cooperation between their countries. President Erdoğan emphasised the strong and comprehensive relationship between Türkiye and Montenegro, rooted in

political, economic and cultural ties, as well as a shared history. Highlighting the importance of the visit, President Erdoğan announced plans to establish a high-level strategic council to institutionalise bilateral relations.

"We discussed bilateral relations extensively and evaluated steps for the coming period," President Erdoğan said and reaffirmed Türkiye's commitment to peace and stability in

the Balkans, a region he described as a "mosaic of religions and ethnicities." Milatović praised Türkiye as one of Montenegro's key economic and strategic partners and acknowledged the continuity of their diplomatic ties of 145 years. President Milatović emphasised the significance of Türkiye's role as a NATO ally and a stabilising force in the Balkans.

"Türkiye's constructive contributions to stability and prosperity in the region are invaluable," President Milatović said, announcing plans to further defence cooperation, including opening a Turkish military attaché office in Montenegro's capital, Podgorica. The leaders' discussions reflected a shared commitment to strengthening relations and addressing regional challenges collaboratively.

## TURKISH FOREIGN MINISTER FİDAN ATTENDED THE MEETING OF NATO MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS



The Meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs, held in Brussels on 3-4 December focused on three key issues: NATO's collaboration with the Middle East, enhancing the NATO-Ukraine partnership and actions to address Russia's aggressive behaviour. At this meeting, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan represented Türkiye. During the event, he also held bilateral discussions with his

counterparts: Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of Spain José Manuel Albares, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada Mélanie Joly, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany Annalena Baerbock and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece Giorgos Gerapetritis. Lastly, Fidan met with his counterparts from the "Nordic Five".

## TÜRKİYE DISCUSSED LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN SYRIA



President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen met on 17 December 2024 in Ankara. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, the President's Chief Advisor Akif Çağatay Kılıç and Communications Director Fahrettin Altun also attended the meeting. A joint press statement was issued afterward, highlighting key topics such as Türkiye's importance and its key role following recent developments, the revival of Türkiye-EU relations in terms of Türkiye's membership goal, the fight against terrorism, the situation in Gaza and the protection of Syria's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Lastly, von der Leyen announced that the EU had decided to provide Türkiye with an additional 1 billion

euros for potential needs in Syria. President Erdoğan also had a phone call with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on 10 December 2024. The call addressed topics such as the current situation in Syria, as well as regional and global developments. President Erdoğan emphasised the importance of Syria's territorial integrity, Türkiye's efforts to eliminate terrorism in Syria and helping Syrian refugees return to their home country.

Turkish Foreign Minister Fidan met with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on 2 December 2024 in Ankara where they discussed Turkish-Iranian relations and developments in Syria. Fidan also met with his German counterpart Annalena Baerbock on 4 December 2024. Baerbock highlighted Türkiye's key role in addressing the situation in the region, particularly regarding Syria.

Lastly, Minister Fidan and Syria's new Head of State Ahmad Hussein Al-Shara came together on 22 December 2024 for a joint press meeting where they made statements about cooperating against terrorism and further enhancing Turkish-Syrian relations. Bilateral meetings and positive dialogue between two states are continuing.

## TÜRKİYE BROKERED HISTORIC PEACE AGREEMENT BETWEEN SOMALIA AND ETHIOPIA

A peace agreement between Somalia and Ethiopia was reached with Türkiye's mediation, as Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali convened in Ankara. The leaders met with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on 11 December 2024 to sign the Ankara Declaration, which affirmed Somalia's territorial integrity and Ethiopia's access to the sea that constitute the key issues that had intensified tensions between the two nations.

The declaration enabled the parties to reconcile on several critical matters and agree on further cooperation. This includes initiating technical talks by the end of February 2025 and adhering to the principles of international law, the Charter of the United



Nations and the Constitutive Act of the African Union. Previously, mediation efforts by the League of Arab States, the African Union, Kenya and Djibouti had failed to resolve the long-standing disputes between the two countries. While the international press and several foreign state officials hailed the peace deal, Turkish state sources reiterated Türkiye's commitment to supporting the Ethiopia-Somalia peace process. Türkiye once again demonstrated its problem-solving approach and effective mediator diplomacy.

## FINANCING AGREEMENT FOR THE 2023 ANNUAL ACTION PROGRAMME FOR PRE-ACCESSION ASSISTANCE (IPA) FOR TÜRKİYE ENTERS INTO FORCE

The agreement, which will provide financial support for projects that will contribute to Türkiye's development and increase cooperation with the EU, has entered into force.

The "Financing Agreement on the Annual Action Programme for Türkiye for the Year 2023" signed by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Director for EU Affairs, Ambassador Mehmet Kemal Bozay on behalf of Türkiye and by the Director of the Southern Neighbourhood and Türkiye Francisco Joaquin Gaztelu Mezquiriz on behalf of the European Commission, was published in the Repeated Official Gazette dated 16 December 2024, with the approval of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and entered into force on 17 December 2024.

The funds to be delivered to Türkiye by the Commission, will be used to finance projects and programs under the Year 2023 Programming of Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III) covering the years 2021-27. The Agreement, with its 208.6 million euros budget, will be



used for projects and programs in six different sectors, such as fundamental rights, environment and climate change, sustainable transport, agriculture, energy and employment, education and social policies.

The EU has been promoting reforms in the enlargement region by The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) with financial and

technical assistance since 2007. The aim of these funds provided to the enlargement countries throughout the accession process is to prepare them for the rights and obligations that come with the EU membership. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Türkiye are among the countries that current beneficiaries of IPA.

## POULTRY MEAT TO BE EXPORTED FROM TÜRKİYE TO THE EU

Speaking at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Global Farm Summit on 5 December 2024, the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, İbrahim Yumaklı, announced that, as a result of intensive negotiations, eight poultry meat processing facilities in Türkiye are now able to export heat-processed poultry meat to the EU.

According to data published by the Ministry of Trade, Türkiye ranks as the 9<sup>th</sup> largest producer of poultry meat and the 10<sup>th</sup> biggest exporter. Nearly half of Türkiye's poultry meat exports go to Iraq, followed by China and Iran. Türkiye stands out as an important regional exporter and its poultry meat sector continues to develop and expand.



The EU has quality standards and market measures concerning poultry meat. These standards help maintain product quality, protect both producers and consumers and harmonise the rules on poultry meat production and marketing across the EU. In addition, the EU has various trade measures and animal welfare standards covering areas

from production to transport, which require non-EU producers to be licensed and to comply with EU standards.

This development demonstrates that Turkish facilities meet EU standards in areas such as food safety, animal welfare and production quality. The opening of the EU market to Turkish poultry meat products presents a valuable opportunity for the sector to grow. The Ministry's concerted

efforts serve as a model for other sectors to achieve compliance with EU standards and expand into the EU market, leading to growth across those sectors. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's efforts underline Türkiye's commitment to trade relations with the EU and open new avenues for deeper cooperation between Türkiye and the EU.

## TÜRKİYE USES LESS PESTICIDE THAN THE EU COUNTRIES



Using agricultural chemicals, including pesticides, is a commonly used method to ensure food safety, prevent the spread of diseases in crops, increase efficiency and maintain product quality. However, excessive use of pesticides poses risks on human and planetary health. Therefore, there are certain standards and limits regarding the use of chemicals, including pesticides.

In recent years, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of the Republic of Türkiye has reduced the use of agricultural chemicals to minimise their effects on human and environmental health. In this regard, the Ministry implemented integrated pest management projects in 4.6 million hectares of land to promote the use of alternative pest control methods instead of chemicals.

In addition, farmers who employ the biological and biotechnical methods as an alternative to pesticide use receive subsidies. These subsidies helped increase the adoption of such methods.

Türkiye has banned the use of 223 active substances known to pose risks to the environment and human health, in alignment with the EU. Additionally, through the Residue Action Plan, the Ministry aims to address pesticide residues in selected product groups and cities through training and awareness-raising activities.

According to the 2022 pesticide consumption index of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, Türkiye used less pesticides than the EU average in 2022. Both Türkiye and the global average pesticide use per hectare were 2.26 kilograms, while the EU average was 3.2.

## TÜRKİYE'S "GAZİANTEP MENENĞİÇ COFFEE" GOT EU RECOGNITION



Gaziantep's Menengiç coffee received the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) from the EU on 2 December 2024, becoming Türkiye's 29<sup>th</sup> geographically indicated product in the EU. This development allows the name "Gaziantep Menengiç or Melengiç Kahvesi" to be recognised and protected in the EU market. President of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Türkiye (TOBB) M. Rifat Hisarcıkloğlu,

shared the news on his social media account and expressed that TOBB's efforts are ongoing to receive 66 geographical indications, and 6 traditional speciality guaranteed products from the EU.

The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry İbrahim Yumaklı welcomed the news on social media and expressed Türkiye's commitment to continuing efforts to increase the number of geographically recognised products. Product names can be registered as PDO if the product is entirely produced in the geographical area. The news was warmly welcomed in Gaziantep, the origin of the product. Menengiç coffee is a non-caffeinated drink made from fruit of the pistacia terebinthus tree. The product is Gaziantep's third geographically indicated product by the EU, after "Gaziantep Baklavası" and "Araban Sarmsağı".

## TÜRKİYE TO STRENGTHEN THE EU AND NATO DEFENCE TIES WITH THE FIRST MILITARY SHIP EXPORT

For the first time in history, Türkiye has finalised a groundbreaking agreement to export military ships to Portugal, a member of both the EU and NATO. Announced in Lisbon on 17 December 2024, the deal signifies Türkiye's growing expertise in naval engineering and defence manufacturing. STM, an Ankara based defence firm will serve as the prime contractor, designing and constructing two auxiliary oiler replenisher and logistics ships for the Portuguese Navy. These two vessels will be built at a private shipyard in Türkiye, with production scheduled to commence in 2025. STM's proposal was selected over leading global competitors, showcasing its innovative approach and Türkiye's expanding role as a defence exporter.

The 137 metre vessels will feature an 11 thousand tonnes displacement and a maximum speed of over 18 knots. Designed to operate continuously for up



to 90 days, the vessels will house 100 onboard personnel along with an additional 100 external crew members. Their modular design will enable versatility in missions, including logistics, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and amphibious operations. Additionally, the ships will accommodate up to 20 light tactical armoured vehicles, enhancing their transport capabilities. Equipped with high technology, the ships will

feature integrated communication systems, advanced command and control capabilities and modern defensive systems such as Close-In Weapon Systems (CIWS) for air defence, remote-controlled 12.7 mm weapon systems and electronic countermeasures including chaff and decoy systems. They will also include platforms and hangars for helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles, offering enhanced strategic versatility.

## EU COUNCIL ENLARGEMENT CONCLUSIONS HIGHLIGHT TÜRKİYE'S STRATEGIC ROLE AND CHALLENGES IN ACCESSION PROCESS

The Council approved conclusions on enlargement that covers the six Western Balkans partners which are Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, as well as Türkiye, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia. Reframing the statements in each countries' enlargement reports, the conclusions report summarises the key points and elements of accession process for each country.

While the concept of strategic interest is reiterated for Türkiye, areas of common interests are stated to be prominent and the EU's eagerness to engage in a phased, proportionate and reversible manner is highlighted. The conclusions also emphasise Türkiye's position on various topics, such as its shift toward more conventional and stability-oriented macroeconomic policies since mid-2023, encouraging continued progress in this area. Moreover, the conclusions acknowledge Türkiye's key role in the Black Sea Grain Initiative, prisoner exchanges related to Russia's war in Ukraine and efforts to prevent the circumvention of EU sanctions, while urging continued



cooperation. Additionally, the European Investment Bank (EIB) is invited to consider private-sector re-engagement and to resume trade and economic dialogues. Finally, Türkiye's recent good neighbourly initiatives with Greece are regarded highly, while it is also criticised for its stance on the Cyprus issue. The report concludes by noting that Türkiye's accession process is

currently on hold, with no new chapters opened or closed.

In line with the Council's invitation, the EIB is currently preparing to relaunch operations in Türkiye, aiming to focus on areas of common interest; primarily climate action, green transformation, post-earthquake recovery and migration-related issues according to the statement given by the EIB Spokesperson.

## PRESIDENT ERDOĞAN UNVEILED TÜRKİYE'S QUANTUM LEAP



President Erdoğan has announced plans to establish a superconducting chip production facility, a landmark step in Türkiye's bid to become a global leader in quantum computing. Speaking at the TÜBA and TÜBİTAK Science Awards Ceremony in Ankara, President Erdoğan highlighted the transformative potential of quantum technology, emphasising its role in solving complex problems far beyond the capabilities of traditional supercomputers. "With this facility, we aim to place Türkiye among the 15 nations at the forefront of quantum computing," President Erdoğan said.

The facility will produce advanced superconducting chips crucial for next-generation quantum processors, paving the way for breakthroughs in computing power.

President Erdoğan stressed the importance of investing in research and development, citing this project as a strategic step toward technological self-sufficiency. President Erdoğan also celebrated the achievements of 57 scientists recognised

during the ceremony, quoting the renowned scholar Ibn Sina: "Science and art migrate from places where they are not appreciated." President Erdoğan called on researchers and private enterprises to collaborate and push innovation boundaries.

Beyond technology, President Erdoğan touched on Türkiye's growing regional influence, emphasising its role as a stabilising force amid global crises. "We cannot limit our perspective to 782 thousand square kilometres" President Erdoğan said, underscoring Türkiye's historical responsibility as a regional leader. President Erdoğan concluded by reaffirming Türkiye's commitment to justice, stability and progress, describing the nation's scientific and geopolitical advancements as key to securing its future on the global stage.

## TRADE VOLUME BETWEEN TÜRKİYE AND THE EU REACHED 216 BILLION DOLLARS IN 2024

According to Minister of Trade Ömer Bolat the volume of trade between Türkiye and the EU reached 216 billion dollars in 2024. Trade Minister added that there was a 4% increase compared to the previous year. Minister Ömer Bolat gave a speech at the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye and made a presentation on the 2025 budget. He said, "Türkiye-EU trade volume increased by 4% in 2024, reaching 216 billion dollars." In 2023, the trade volume between Türkiye and the EU increased and reached a record level of 206 billion euros. Türkiye represented 4.1% of the EU's trade in goods in 2023 and became the fifth largest partner.

During his speech he emphasised that efforts are continuing to modernise Customs Union between Türkiye and the EU. Minister Bolat highlighted that Türkiye has several demands that need to be addressed like visa barriers, free trade agreements discrepancies, truck transit documents and transportation



also, he added that negotiations are in progress about these issues. He said that Turkish sectors work to align with the EU's green and digital transformation processes.

Explaining the status of the Turkish economy and the objectives of the Ministry, the Minister stated that the Turkish economy showed a strong performance as it grew by 5.1%. According to the Minister, geopolitical tensions and protectionist trends in trade policies created significant uncertainties globally. Minister Bolat indicated that the world economy grew by 3.3% in 2023, performing below the historical average.

## ANCIENT FRESCO OF MARY AND JESUS WAS DISCOVERED IN BURSA

A significant discovery has been unveiled at the ancient Roman theatre in Bursa, where a fresco depicting Mary and Baby Jesus was restored and revealed to the public. Estimated to date back nearly 2,000 years, the fresco is considered one of the earliest examples of its kind. The fresco, portrays Mary seated on a richly adorned throne, holding Baby Jesus. Restoration efforts also revealed an adjacent fresco featuring Jesus gazing towards Mary. These findings reveal the site's transformation from a Roman theatre to a religious centre, especially from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries after the First Ecumenical Council in İznik in 325 AD.



## 1800-YEAR-OLD STAGE WAS UNCOVERED IN ÇANAKKALE

An excavation that began in July this year as part of the "Heritage for the Future Project" by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism has revealed a stage building and an orchestral site located in the Çanakkale Alexandria Troas Archaeological Site. It was noted that the findings indicate the stage was used to host musical events and dates back 1,800 years. The excavation, carried out by a team of 15 people, is expected to be completed within a month and the site will eventually be opened to visitors.



## THE SARCOPHAGUS OF SANTA CLAUS WAS DISCOVERED IN ANTALYA

Archaeologists uncovered a sarcophagus believed to belong to Saint Nicholas, famously known as Santa Claus in Antalya. The discovery was made during excavations at the Saint Nicholas Church in Demre, a site of immense historical and religious significance. The sarcophagus was found beneath a two storey structure within the church's southern courtyard. Encased in layers of sediment deposited after coastal inundations and floods, the sarcophagus has been exceptionally well preserved, with only its lid currently exposed. The sarcophagus's location near the sacred temenos area aligns with historical accounts suggesting that Saint Nicholas was buried in Myra, now Demre.



## ROMAN AQUEDUCTS WAS RESTORED IN UŞAK PROVINCE

Blaundos Ancient City, located in the Ulubey district of Uşak, continues to captivate with its historical significance and ongoing restoration efforts. Known as the "Garrison City," Blaundos was established by Macedonian soldiers during the era of Alexander the Great. The city has been excavated since 2018. As the excavations were continuing, archaeologists discovered some blocks and stones which were parts of the aqueducts. Today, only one aqueduct stands while the other ones could not remain intact in time. With significant efforts to resurrect the history, restoration works were given start and completed. There are still four aqueducts waiting for restoration.



## KUZEY TUNÇELLİ BROKE THE WORLD JUNIOR RECORD

National swimmer Kuzey Tunçelli achieved remarkable success by winning a bronze medal at the 2024 Short Course World Championships. According to a statement by the Turkish Swimming Federation, the 17-year-old athlete competed in the 1500-metre freestyle final at the championship held in Budapest. Tunçelli finished third with a time of 14:20.64, setting a new world junior record.



## HITTITIAN DAM WAS INCLUDED IN INTERNATIONAL RANKING

The Gölpinar Hittite Dam in Alacahöyük, Çorum, has been added to the World Heritage Irrigation Structures List, following the 2,800-year-old Şamran Canal. An archaeological park project to boost tourism, started in 2015 and completed in 2018, led to the expropriation of 277 acres around the dam. The site remains significant due to its role during the Hittite period's drought.



## BUSE ÇAVUŞOĞLU WON BEST FEMALE WRESTLER TITLE

Buse Tosun Çavuşoğlu, who earned a bronze medal in the women's 68 kg category at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games and became a world champion, has brought pride to Türkiye with her remarkable achievements. A graduate student at Bayburt University and a national wrestler, Buse Tosun Çavuşoğlu was named the Best Female Wrestler of 2024 by United World Wrestling. The national athlete, who attracted attention with her superior performance in 2024, also won the first European championship of her career this year and made her name at the top of wrestling.



## EASTERN EXPRESS CONTINUES ITS JOURNEY IN 2025

Transport and Infrastructure Minister Abdulkadir Uraloğlu announced that the 2024-2025 season of the touristic Eastern Express will run from 23 December to 2 March 2025, offering 60 trips between Ankara and Kars. The route, which expects 10,500 passengers this season, includes stops in Erzincan, Erzurum, Iliç, Divriği and Sivas, showcasing Anatolia's natural and cultural beauty. Minister Uraloğlu also introduced the Kars-Erzurum Express, operating 24 trips on weekends between 18 January to 23 February 2025, to meet high demand, offering 291-passenger capacity per trip.



# A FRAGILE FUTURE: HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES IN POST-ASSAD SYRIA

The future of Syrian refugees remains uncertain as host countries navigate domestic political pressures, international responsibilities and the complexities of rebuilding a fractured Syria.

Laura BATALLA ADAM  
Analyst

The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, has caused immense suffering and displacement, resulting in one of the largest humanitarian challenges in modern history. More than 6.4 million Syrians fled to other countries, while another seven million remain internally displaced. Neighbouring countries bore the brunt of this exodus, with Europe becoming a destination for more than 1.5 million refugees. The fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in late 2024 has shifted the global conversation to questions of refugee returns and asylum policies. At this turning point, issues such as safety, reintegration and Syria's political future are at the forefront of international discussions.

## Refugee Returns and Europe's Contentious Policies

The December 2024 announcement that Damascus had been liberated by Syrian rebels marked the end of Assad's decades-long rule. This historic moment prompted a swift and, arguably, premature reaction from European governments. Germany, hosting nearly 1 million Syrian refugees, halted decisions on more than 47,000 pending asylum applications within 36 hours. Other nations, including France, Britain and Austria, followed suit, with Austria even offering financial incentives to encourage voluntary returns.

These moves have stirred unease among Syrian refugee communities and exacerbated political tensions in Europe. Anti-immigration factions, particularly on the far right, have capitalised on the developments to amplify their platforms, especially in the lead-up to critical elections, such as Germany's February 2025 vote. Meanwhile, both the European Commission and the UN Refugee



Agency (UNHCR) have urged caution, emphasising that Syria is still unsafe for large-scale returns. UNHCR insists that repatriation must be voluntary and predicated on significant, sustained improvements in safety and stability-conditions that are far from being met.

## Germany's Balancing Act: Integration and Repatriation

Germany exemplifies the tension between domestic political pressures and the tangible contributions of refugees. Since the outset of the crisis, Syrian refugees have integrated into the workforce, helping to alleviate labour shortages in sectors such as healthcare and manufacturing. By late 2024, approximately 287,000 Syrians were employed, including over 6,000 doctors who are crucial to the healthcare system.

Yet integration has not been seamless. Refugees face challenges such as cultural differences, bureaucratic hurdles in credential recognition and lower workforce participation among women. Nonetheless, surveys indicate that over 90% of Syrian refugees in Germany wish to remain, having built lives, careers and social networks. German policymakers now face a dual challenge: continuing to

support these contributions while addressing growing public demands for repatriation.

## Türkiye: A Pillar of Refugee Support

Türkiye hosts the world's largest refugee population, including 3.2 million Syrians under temporary protection. Since 2011, its open-door policy has been widely acknowledged, supported by nearly 10 billion euros in funding from the European Union, with an additional 1 billion euros pledged for 2024. This funding has supported critical services such as healthcare, education and infrastructure, benefiting both refugees and local communities.

Unlike Lebanon and Jordan, where many refugees live in camps, most Syrians in Türkiye have integrated into towns and cities, working in agriculture, construction and the service industries, often informally. Many Syrian children attend Turkish schools, further embedding them in local communities and reducing the likelihood of return to Syria.

However, Türkiye's stance has shifted in response to rising public discontent, fuelled by inflation and economic instability. Stricter immigration policies have

emerged, reflecting growing resentment toward refugees. Despite these challenges, Türkiye remains pivotal in managing Syrian displacement. The 2016 Türkiye-EU Statement, which significantly reduced irregular migration, demonstrated the potential of international cooperation, though its implementation often sidelined humanitarian considerations. Future collaboration between Türkiye and the EU could focus on durable solutions, including enhanced support for integration and structured programs for voluntary returns, such as housing, legal aid and job creation in Syria.

## Rebuilding Syria: Obstacles to Large-Scale Returns

The fall of Assad has left Syria in a precarious state. Over a decade of war has devastated infrastructure: more than half of healthcare facilities are out of service, unexploded ordnance poses persistent risks and entire cities remain in ruins. These conditions make large-scale returns both impractical and unsafe.

Many refugees express a desire to return, but their priorities have evolved. Beyond safety, they now value access to education, employment opportunities and basic services. For younger

generations who grew up abroad, the idea of returning to a country they barely know is even less appealing. Any realistic strategy must address these complex needs by offering alternative pathways, including permanent resettlement and local integration for those who choose not to return.

Efforts to support voluntary returns must be deliberate and well-resourced. Addressing issues such as property disputes, documentation gaps and mental health needs is essential to ensure successful reintegration. Without such measures, even those who return may face overwhelming challenges, risking further displacement.

The international community has a critical responsibility to sustain humanitarian aid for the 90% of Syrians still dependent on it, ensuring access to food, healthcare and education. Simultaneously, long-term investments in rebuilding Syria's infrastructure and economy are essential to creating conditions for voluntary returns, with priorities including affordable housing, healthcare facilities and local business development to support returning Syrians.

Building on the 2016 Türkiye-EU Statement, collaborative efforts must expand to include comprehensive integration programs, joint resettlement initiatives and shared investments in refugee-hosting regions. For those who choose to return, targeted support addressing housing, employment and legal issues will be crucial. This is not merely a regional challenge but a global one, with far-reaching implications for how the world addresses displacement. Decisions made now will shape the lives of millions of Syrians and set a precedent for future migration and resettlement. A coordinated and humane approach is essential to ensure that Syrians can rebuild their lives with dignity, whether in their host countries or in their homeland.