



# İKVM NİTİMLİ



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## STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT IN A FRAGMENTED REGION: TÜRKİYE-EU DIALOGUE ON IRAN AND REGIONAL SECURITY

As the Iran conflict reshapes regional dynamics and global energy flows, Türkiye-EU engagement is emerging as an increasingly indispensable pillar of regional crisis management.

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The escalation of the Iran centred conflict since late February 2026 has exposed the fragility of the regional order in the Middle East and its wider implications for regional and global stability. What began as a coordinated US-Israeli strike on Iran has evolved into a broader confrontation involving Gulf tensions, maritime insecurity and disruptions to global energy flows. Instability in the Strait of Hormuz has once again demonstrated how regional crises can rapidly generate systemic effects for global markets, supply chains and European economic resilience.

In this increasingly fragmented geopolitical environment, the need for strategic alignment between Türkiye and the EU has become more urgent. While both actors have long shared concerns regarding regional stability, recent developments suggest a shift towards more structured engagement. The recent high level virtual meeting held between Türkiye and the EU on Iran marked an important step in this direction, bringing together senior representatives to assess the regional spillover risks of the conflict and the implications for wider European security. Rather than remaining a symbolic diplomatic exchange, this contact reflected a growing recognition that coordination between Türkiye and the EU is becoming strategically necessary.

### A Regional Crisis with European Consequences

The current conflict has evolved beyond a bilateral confrontation and now constitutes a multidimensional regional crisis. Military escalation, maritime tensions and the politicisation of strategic energy routes have transformed the conflict into a broader challenge for Europe.



Disruptions in energy supply chains risk increasing price volatility and complicating the EU's economic recovery and energy transition agenda. At the same time, prolonged instability in the Middle East raises the prospect of renewed migration pressures and wider economic uncertainty. The crisis therefore reinforces a key geopolitical reality: conflicts in Europe's neighbourhood can no longer be treated as geographically limited events. Their consequences are increasingly systemic, affecting not only security but also economic governance, trade continuity and societal resilience across Europe.

### Türkiye's Strategic Position

Among Europe's partners, Türkiye occupies a uniquely exposed and strategically significant position. Its geographical proximity to the conflict zone and its deep involvement in regional diplomacy place it at the forefront of potential spillover effects. Security risks, energy vulnerabilities and broader regional instability directly intersect with Türkiye's

national interests. At the same time, Ankara retains considerable diplomatic agency. Since the onset of the crisis, Turkish diplomacy has remained highly active through contacts with regional actors, European leaders and transatlantic partners. This diplomatic activism has strengthened Türkiye's role as a facilitator of dialogue in an increasingly polarised regional environment.

Türkiye's significance is further amplified by its position within NATO and its function as a bridge between the Middle East and the broader Euro-Atlantic security space. This dual identity, as both a regional actor and a European security stakeholder, makes Türkiye a critical interlocutor for the EU in managing the broader implications of the Iran crisis.

### The EU's Search for Strategic Coherence

The EU's response to the crisis reflects both diplomatic engagement and structural constraints. While Brussels has pursued de-escalatory diplomacy and maintained

communication channels with key regional actors, its ability to shape outcomes remains limited by internal divergences among member states and the absence of a unified geopolitical posture.

Nevertheless, recent engagement with Türkiye signals a gradual evolution in the EU's strategic thinking. The high-level virtual meeting on Iran is significant not only as a response to an immediate crisis, but also as a practical indication that issue-based engagement channels between Türkiye and the EU remain functional in times of regional instability. This matters because the current crisis has once again highlighted a structural gap in the EU's regional security approach: the absence of sufficiently institutionalised cooperation with Türkiye despite a clear overlap in strategic interests.

### From Ad Hoc Coordination to Strategic Convergence

The Iran crisis highlights the growing interdependence between Türkiye and the EU in energy security,

regional stability and humanitarian risk management. Both actors face overlapping challenges stemming from volatility in energy routes, conflict spillovers and broader geopolitical fragmentation. Recent diplomatic exchanges suggest the early contours of a more coordinated framework. Yet the real strategic task lies in moving beyond reactive consultations towards the revitalisation of existing high-level dialogue and regional consultation mechanisms, particularly on regional security. Such a shift would improve joint risk assessments, strengthen crisis preparedness and create a more resilient basis for future cooperation. In this context, Türkiye's diplomatic access and regional operational experience can complement the EU's economic leverage and regulatory capacity. Together, these assets could form the basis of a more effective framework for crisis response and long-term regional stabilisation.

### Conclusion

The Iran conflict represents a defining moment for both Türkiye and the EU. Beyond the immediate risks associated with energy disruption and regional escalation, the crisis offers an opportunity to rethink the practical foundations of Türkiye-EU relations.

Recent high-level dialogue on Iran suggests that both sides increasingly recognise the strategic value of closer coordination. This may provide the basis for broader functional cooperation centred on shared geopolitical interests.

In a fragmented regional environment, strategic alignment between Türkiye and the EU is becoming more than a crisis management tool. It is gradually emerging as a necessary pillar of a more resilient and forward-looking relationship. In this respect, the Iran crisis may also provide additional momentum for the broader revitalisation of Türkiye-EU high-level dialogue channels on foreign policy, migration and regional security.



# IKV ORGANISED A MEETING WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF MINISTER OF TRADE PROF. BOLAT ON THE 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE CUSTOMS UNION

IKV organised a meeting on 9 March 2026 titled "The Future of the Customs Union, Free Trade Agreements and the 'Made in EU' Criterion on the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Customs Union Decision," with the participation of Minister of Trade Prof. Ömer Bolat.

In his opening remarks, IKV Chairperson Ayhan Zeytinoğlu underlined that the EU remains Türkiye's primary export market and that bilateral trade has become more balanced. He stressed the strategic importance of including Türkiye within the scope of the "Made in EU" criterion and highlighted the need to enhance innovation and high-tech capacity. Zeytinoğlu also emphasised the necessity of updating the Customs Union to cover services, agriculture and public procurement, while pointing to challenges such as asymmetries arising from the EU's FTAs, transport quotas, visa issues and the Green Deal.



Minister Bolat noted that despite global economic fragmentation and protectionism,

Türkiye's economy grew by 3.6% in 2025, with bilateral trade reaching 233 billion dollars and a nearly

balanced trade structure. He highlighted Türkiye's integral role in European production networks

and described its inclusion in the draft Industrial Acceleration Act as a strategic achievement. Bolat also addressed ongoing dialogue on updating the Customs Union and reiterated the importance of visa liberalisation and alignment with green and digital transitions.

Panel speakers emphasised the Customs Union's transformative role in strengthening Türkiye's integration into global markets and increasing foreign direct investment. They also pointed to structural asymmetries, particularly Türkiye's exclusion from decision-making mechanisms and the impact of the EU's new-generation FTAs. While underlining the need to update the Customs Union in line with evolving global conditions, speakers stressed the importance of proactive engagement, legal and economic reforms, and stronger lobbying efforts in Brussels. The meeting concluded with a question-and-answer session.

## MINISTER OF TRADE PROF. BOLAT VISITED IKV



Minister of Trade Prof. Ömer Bolat visited IKV on 9 March 2026 and came together with IKV Chairperson Ayhan Zeytinoğlu, Vice-Chairpersons Prof. Halûk Kabaalioğlu and Sedat Zincirkıran, Executive Board Members Dr. Zeynel Abidin Erdem and Murat Hazıroğlu, Board Members Yavuz Altun, Hakkı İsmet Aral, Ali Sami Aydın, Ömer Gülsoy, Adil Erkoç, Akansel Koç and Mustafa Şenoacak, as well as Supervisory Board Members Abdurrahman

Aslantaş and Mustafa Zeytin.

During the meeting, Minister Prof. Bolat addressed current issues in Türkiye-EU relations, particularly the Customs Union and the "Made in Europe" criterion. He also highlighted the critical role of the business community and civil society in the EU process and received information about IKV's activities. IKV Chairperson Ayhan Zeytinoğlu thanked Minister of Trade Prof. Ömer Bolat for his kind visit.

## DRAFT EU INDUSTRIAL ACCELERATOR ACT PUBLISHED: "MADE IN EU" CRITERIA ALSO COVERS CUSTOMS UNION PARTNERS



IKV Chairperson Ayhan Zeytinoğlu evaluated the draft EU Industrial Accelerator Act. Chairperson Zeytinoğlu stated that the EU aims to strategically use public procurement and support mechanisms to boost domestic production capacity and promote clean technologies. He noted that the draft act seeks to increase the share of manufacturing in EU GDP from 14% to 20% by 2035, while fostering leadership in decarbonisation and green

industries. Through "Made in EU" and low-carbon preferences, the EU intends to stimulate demand for a wide range of industrial products, including batteries, solar and wind energy technologies, heat pumps and nuclear energy, with additional incentives foreseen for low carbon steel.

A key aspect of the proposal is that the "Made in EU" criteria may also cover close partners of the EU. Countries with a free trade agreement or a customs

union with the EU, including Türkiye, could fall within this definition. Accordingly, products manufactured in Türkiye may be considered as Union-origin under certain conditions. However, this depends on compliance with obligations such as granting national treatment to EU products, as the Commission retains the right to exclude countries applying discriminatory measures.

The draft also introduces conditions for large scale foreign direct investments exceeding 100 million euros in strategic sectors, requiring contributions to employment, innovation, and value creation within the EU, including a proposed minimum of 50% European employment. Additionally, the act envisages faster and digitalised permitting processes and the creation of "Industrial Acceleration Areas" to support industrial clustering and clean manufacturing. The proposal will now be examined by the European Parliament and the Council.

## IKV AGENDA

# IKV CHAIRPERSON ZEYTİNOĞLU: "A SOCIETY CAN ONLY BE CONSIDERED DEVELOPED WHEN WOMEN ARE EQUAL, SAFE AND PROSPEROUS"

IKV Chairperson Ayhan Zeytinoğlu commented on the FTA signed between the EU and Mercosur and its potential impact on EU agriculture. Chairperson Zeytinoğlu made the following statement on the issue: "Mercosur countries such as Brazil and Argentina have a highly competitive structure in products such as beef, poultry and soy. This competitiveness stems from factors such as lower labour costs for farmers in South America, the larger size of farms in the region and the strict health and environmental regulations applied in Europe. In response to this risk, the EU grants only limited access to its market for imports of agricultural and food products. In particular, access to the EU market for sensitive products such as beef, poultry and sugar will be implemented gradually and restricted through quotas.

In addition to quotas, on 5 March 2026 the Council of the EU approved a new regulation designed to provide safeguards against potential harm to EU



farmers arising from the Mercosur FTA. Through this regulation, the EU aims to protect producers from sudden market shocks and import surges by ensuring the rapid implementation of protective measures. The regulation establishes a threshold for launching investigations concerning sensitive products. Accordingly, the EU will

be able to initiate an investigation if import volumes exceed the average of the previous three years by 5%. Investigations will be completed within four months, and provisional measures will be introduced within 21 days. The Commission will monitor imports of sensitive products and publish regular reports on market developments."

## IKV SECRETARY GENERAL NAS ATTENDED THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE MEETING

IKV Secretary General Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas attended the committee meeting on "Strengthening EU Economic Security", organised under the External Relations Section of the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels on 24 March 2026.

The EESC, which represents employers, workers and civil society organisations in the EU, introduced the "Enlargement Candidate Member" initiative during the previous presidency of Oliver Röpkke. Under this initiative, selected civil society organisations from candidate countries are invited to EESC committee meetings and contribute their views. The initiative, which



enables candidate countries to participate in and contribute to one of the EU's key bodies, has continued under the new President Séamus Boland. During the committee meeting, Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas contributed to

the draft text prepared by the rapporteur. She emphasised the importance of external partners, particularly Türkiye, in ensuring the EU's economic security and underlined the need to update the Customs Union relationship.

## TIMELINE MARCH 2026

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4	Galatasaray University student group visited IKV.
5	IKV attended the meeting titled "Women Beyond Borders: Diplomacy, Private Sector and Civil Society Summit".
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7	IKV Chairperson Zeytinoğlu issued a statement on the occasion of 8 March International Women's Day.
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9	IKV organised a meeting with the participation of Minister of Trade Prof. Ömer Bolat on the 30 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Customs Union.
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12	President Erdoğan came together with UN Secretary General António Guterres and received German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul.
13	IKV Chairperson Zeytinoğlu gave a statement on EU-Mercosur Trade Deal.
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24	IKV Secretary General Assoc. Prof. Nas attended the European Economic and Social Committee meeting.
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27	President Erdoğan received Co-Chairman of the World Economic Forum Laurence D. Fink.
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29	Foreign Minister Fidan came together with his Bulgarian counterpart Nadejda Neynski.
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31	Foreign Minister Fidan came together with Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine Rustem Umerov.

## IKV CHAIRPERSON ZEYTİNOĞLU: “EU TAKES PRECAUTIONS AGAINST POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF EU-MERCOSUR FREE TRADE AGREEMENT”

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volumes exceed the average of the previous three years by 5%. Investigations will be completed within four months, and provisional measures will be introduced within 21 days. The Commission will monitor imports of sensitive products and publish regular reports on market developments.”

## IKV ATTENDED THE MEETING TITLED “WOMEN BEYOND BORDERS: DIPLOMACY, PRIVATE SECTOR AND CIVIL SOCIETY SUMMIT”



IKV Junior Researcher Deniz Bal took part as a speaker in the meeting titled “Women Beyond Borders: Diplomacy, Private Sector and Civil Society Summit”, organised by students from the International Relations Club of Marmara University on 5 March 2026.

The panel focused on the themes of the “Women, Peace and Security” agenda and gender

equality within the framework of Türkiye–EU relations. In her presentation, IKV Junior Researcher Bal first addressed gender equality with examples from the EU framework. She then evaluated the situation of gender equality in Türkiye based on the European Commission’s 2025 Türkiye Report. Another speaker at the meeting was Prof. Zeynep Alemdar.

## GALATASARAY UNIVERSITY STUDENT GROUP VISITED IKV



Students from the International Law and Diplomacy Club of Galatasaray University visited IKV and the İstanbul EU Information Centre on 4 March 2026. During the visit, IKV Secretary General Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas and IKV Deputy Secretary General

M. Gökhan Kilit provided information on the history of IKV, its role in Türkiye–EU relations and the activities carried out by the Foundation. Following the presentations, the students’ questions regarding the activities of the Foundation and Türkiye–EU relations were

answered. Mehmet Poyrazlı, Coordinator of the İstanbul EU Information Centre and Press Counsellor at IKV, also touched upon the activities carried out within the scope of the EU Information Centre project and provided information about the IKV internship programme.

## GROUP OF STUDENTS FROM BEYKOZ UNIVERSITY VISITED IKV



Students from the Political Science Club of Beykoz University, accompanied by Beykoz University faculty member Prof. Aylin Ünver Noi, visited IKV and the İstanbul EU Information Centre on 27 March 2026. During the visit, IKV Secretary General Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas and IKV Deputy Secretary General M. Gökhan Kilit delivered a presentation on the history of IKV and its role in Türkiye–EU relations.

Following the presentation, IKV Research Director Çișel İleri provided

information on the Foundation’s publications and activities, while IKV Media Advisor and İstanbul EU Information Centre Coordinator Mehmet Poyrazlı introduced the internship programme and the activities of the EU Information Centre. The visit concluded with a Q&A session, during which students’ questions regarding the Foundation’s work and Türkiye–EU relations were addressed.

## TWO TURKISH PRODUCTS GOT EU RECOGNITION

Two iconic Turkish products have been granted EU PGI status, marking another milestone in Türkiye's growing recognition for its unique regional specialities.



March was an important and exciting month for Turkish products as two of them got EU recognition. European Commission announced that the EU approved "Adana Şalgamı" and "Kayseri Pastırması" as Protected Geographical Indication. On 12 March, Adana Şalgamı received geographical indication status. Being 45<sup>th</sup> recognised product, Adana Şalgamı is a traditional Turkish fermented drink made from purple carrots, turnips, and bulgur, known for its deep, tangy flavour, and is often served cold alongside grilled meats for a refreshing, slightly spicy kick.

On 25 March, "Kayseri Pastırması" received EU recognition with being the 46<sup>th</sup> EU recognised product. Pastırma is a traditional Turkish cured beef coated with a rich, spiced paste called çemen, which gives it its distinctive aroma and flavour. It is typically sliced thin and enjoyed on its own or in dishes, offering a bold, savoury taste.

TOBB President M. Rifat Hisarcıklıoğlu congratulated everyone involved in this who contributed to these achievements. Furthermore, registration progress for recognition on 46 geographical indications and 2 traditional product names continues.

## MINISTER KURUM REVEALED TÜRKİYE'S PRIORITIES FOR THE COP31



Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change Minister Murat Kurum outlined Türkiye's priorities for COP31, which will take place in November 2026, describing an approach focused on implementation and measurable outcomes. Speaking at a press conference in İstanbul, Minister Kurum said the COP31 presidency would pursue a framework that does not exclude energy security, recognises the right to development, supports a just transition, and prioritises action on the ground.

Minister Kurum listed five priorities for the COP31 action agenda: accelerating clean energy transition; expanding zero waste and methane reduction; advancing climate resilient cities; creating an implementation mechanism to close the gap between global targets and national plans; and supporting green industrialisation, including structural transformation of heavy industry in line with

long-term net-zero goals. Minister Kurum also said Türkiye is preparing regulations to restrict non-recyclable single-use plastics, aiming to replace them with recyclable or biodegradable alternatives, with implementation expected from late summer.

Minister Kurum framed COP31 not only as a forum for new pledges but also as a process in which commitments translate into practical implementation. He described the presidency's working method as resting on three principles: dialogue to build trust and inclusivity, consensus to encourage shared ownership, and action to ensure decisions lead to credible, measurable results.

The meeting was also attended by the International Energy Agency Executive Director Fatih Birol as they discussed cooperation on energy transition and the circular economy, adding that the agency is ready to work closely with the COP31 presidency.

## TÜRKİYE'S BAYKAR AND ITALY'S LEONARDO AIM TO PRODUCE EUROPEAN-MADE DRONES

Baykar and Leonardo are enhancing their defence partnership to produce European-made drones, with plans to deliver their first medium sized unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in April. Production will take place at the Ronchi dei Legionari facility, and additional sites will be prepared for future manufacturing.



Leonardo CEO Roberto Cingolani stated that the drones will be certified in Italy to meet high demand, noting a "massive market awaiting European-made drones." While Baykar manufactures the aerial platform, Leonardo will integrate the intelligence systems and sector

specific technologies for the medium sized UAVs, aiming to close Europe's domestic drone production gap. Cingolani also mentioned that the UAVs might play a role in the "Michelangelo Dome," which is expected to be tested in Ukraine by the end of the year.

## TÜRKİYE TO BAN SINGLE USE PLASTICS

Türkiye is on the way to ban single use plastics as a draft regulation for restricting the placing on the market of single use plastic products was presented by the Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change on 11 March 2026. It is also stated that the draft regulation has been prepared with the aim of aligning with the EU Single Use Plastics Directive. Once the draft regulation is approved, provisions will be introduced regarding labelling requirements for such products as well as awareness raising measures to promote reusable alternatives.



While the products to be subjected to a market restriction include plastic cutlery, plastic food containers, beverage cups made entirely of plastic, beverage stirrers, cotton bud sticks and straws, the consumption of products such as beverage cups and food containers partially made of plastic, cargo bags, wet wipes and moist cleaning tissues are foreseen to be reduced. Additionally, packaging of products such as tobacco products, wet wipes

and moist cleaning tissues, sanitary pads and tampons as well as beverage cups will be required to inform consumers, through clear, visible, and indelible markings on product packaging, that certain products contain plastic and may have negative environmental impacts if improperly disposed. In addition to these markings, the regulation aims to ensure that consumers become aware of the environmental impacts of the products they purchase and act responsibly.

## TÜRKİYE STRENGTHENS ITS LEADERSHIP IN EUROPE'S CERAMICS SECTOR

Türkiye's ceramics industry, which relies on domestically sourced raw materials, has become the third largest producer in Europe and the ninth largest in the world. Exporting to 148 countries, the sector has reached an export volume of 1.4 billion dollars, securing a strong position in the global ceramics league.

As one of the high value added sectors driving Türkiye's export led growth, the ceramics industry was established in the 1950s and expanded into global markets in the 1980s. Today, it provides employment for 68,000 people directly. Türkiye's strongest segments in the sector include ceramic tiles and surface covering materials, where it has built a significant competitive edge.

North America and the EU, which has markets known for their high quality and standards, remain the primary destinations for Türkiye's ceramic exports. In 2024, Germany ranked as the top export market with 152 million dollars, followed by the US with 130



million dollars, and the UK in third place with 105 million dollars.

Türkiye's position in Europe's ceramics industry, combined with the sector's energy intensive nature, has also brought increasing attention to the EU's green transition regulations. The ceramics industry is expected to be included in the scope of the CBAM by 2030, making compliance a key priority. At the same time, Türkiye's Climate Law and national ETS initiatives aim to reduce the carbon costs faced by exporters, supporting the sector's long-term competitiveness in global markets.

## HIGH-LEVEL EXCHANGES

## PRESIDENT ERDOĞAN PRESENTS ATATÜRK INTERNATIONAL PEACE AWARD TO UN SECRETARY GENERAL GUTERRES



President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan hosted UN Secretary General António Guterres at the Presidential Complex in Ankara, with Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and Chief Presidential Advisor Akif Çağatay Kılıç also attending the meeting. Following their discussions, President Erdoğan presented Secretary General Guterres with the Atatürk International Peace Award.

In his remarks, President Erdoğan stated that Ankara is actively leading profound diplomatic efforts to prevent the escalation of Iran-centred violence, adding that diplomacy and dialogue remain the most secure paths to a just and lasting

peace. He affirmed that Türkiye will continue its diplomatic endeavours regarding the US-Israel-Iran process. President Erdoğan expressed his pleasure in hosting Secretary General Guterres, praising him for fulfilling his duties with neutrality and great wisdom since 2017. He highlighted Secretary General Guterres' successful contributions to the protection of refugees, the promotion of global justice, and his shuttle diplomacy during the Russia-Ukraine war.

Emphasising the significant role of Ramadan in bringing blessings to humanity and opening the door to global peace, stability, and prosperity, the

President Erdoğan stated:

"We continue to keep at the centre of our foreign policy the principle of 'Peace at home, peace in the world', inherited from the founder of our Republic, Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, by blending it with a proactive, bold, and entrepreneurial approach."

Finally, President Erdoğan thanked Secretary General Guterres for his support of the Zero Waste Project which has been initiated under the leadership of First Lady Emine Erdoğan and announced that Türkiye is ready to implement the UN House Project, which aims to consolidate the UN's regional offices under a single roof.

## MINISTER FIDAN'S DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS FOCUS ON DE-ESCALATION IN IRAN WAR

As regional escalation linked to the war in the Middle East continued to shape regional security and global economic conditions, Minister of Foreign Affairs Hakan Fidan engaged in a series of diplomatic contacts to support de-escalation and a return to negotiations. Turkish officials have emphasised that prolonging the conflict increases risks not only for neighbouring countries but also for the international order, while Türkiye has engaged a range of counterparts to coordinate positions and exchange assessments.

In a phone call with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on 17 March 2026, Minister Fidan discussed possible steps to end the war and reopen channels for talks between the parties. During the conversation,

Minister Fidan underlined that an extended conflict would deepen regional volatility and amplify wider international consequences. The two Ministers also reviewed developments in the Russia-Ukraine war, with Minister Fidan reiterating Türkiye's readiness to host a future round of negotiations. Energy security was also part of the agenda, amid concerns about instability affecting supply routes and markets.

Minister Fidan also held separate calls with Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares and Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan on 13 March 2026 to discuss the wider impact of the war in the Middle East. The talks covered regional repercussions and international responses, as well as expressions of solidarity from both counterparts regarding ballistic

munitions fired toward Türkiye. The calls took place as regional tensions persisted, with cross-border risks and the potential spillover of military activity remaining a concern.

In another round of contacts focused more directly on diplomatic off-ramps, Minister Fidan spoke with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty, as well as with EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas and US officials. Turkish diplomatic sources stated that the discussions centred on steps to end the war, with Türkiye engaging both regional actors and key international stakeholders. These conversations took place amid broader concerns over regional escalation and its economic effects.



## TÜRKİYE AND EU HOLD HIGH-LEVEL VIRTUAL MEETING ON IRAN



Turkish and EU officials held an online meeting to address the escalating regional conflicts in light

of the latest developments in Iran and the rising tensions in the Middle East. Vice President Cevdet Yılmaz,

EU Council President António Costa, and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen attended the meeting, alongside representatives from other regional countries impacted by the tensions.

Sharing his assessments on his NSosyal account following the meeting, Vice President Cevdet Yılmaz stated that the consultations centred on the humanitarian and geopolitical consequences of the conflicts, which carry the risk of spilling over into the wider region. Emphasising that Türkiye's primary objective is the swift termination

of these conflicts to safeguard regional stability, peace, and global economic prosperity, Vice President Yılmaz stated that they condemn attacks targeting third countries and will resolutely pursue multilateral diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis.

These diplomatic engagements are taking place against the backdrop of a deepening security crisis. It is reported that over 1,200 people, including the Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and high-ranking military officials, lost their lives in the attacks

launched by the US and Israel against Iran on 28 February 2026. In response to these developments, retaliatory strikes conducted by Iran against US military bases and diplomatic facilities in the region have reportedly resulted in US military casualties so far.

By keeping multilateral channels open, Türkiye maintains its resolute stance in favour of dialogue among the parties and the de-escalation of tensions, aiming to prevent the current crisis from spreading across the region and further destabilising the Middle East.

**CULTURE AND ART AGENDA**

## ARA GÜLER'S "MASTERING THE IMAGE" EXHIBITION OPENS IN FRANCE



The exhibition "Mastering the Image" by Ara Güler, a renowned Turkish photojournalist often called the "Eye of Istanbul," has opened in France, introducing his work to a new international audience. Held at Galerie de l'Etrave within the Théâtre Maurice Novarina, the exhibition is part of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of Maison des Arts du Léman. It features 55 black and white photographs, mainly focusing on Istanbul and other parts of Türkiye, highlighting Güler's strong storytelling and technical skill.

The opening event brought together cultural figures and officials, reflecting the

importance of the exhibition. Güler's work stands out for its human-centred approach, capturing everyday life with simplicity and depth while demonstrating his mastery of composition. In addition to the photographs, visitors can explore Güler's literary side through his 1955 short story "We Will Live After Babylon," which reflects themes of hope and resilience. The exhibition also includes previously unseen photographs discovered by the Ara Güler Archive and Research Centre. Running until 30 May, the exhibition marks the first time Güler's works are shown in Thonon-les-Bains and is open to the public free of charge.

## TURKISH DIRECTORS ÇATAK AND ALPER WERE AWARDED IN BERLINALE



The 76<sup>th</sup> Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale) marked a significant moment for Turkish cinema, as two prominent directors received the festival's most prestigious awards. Ilker Çatak was awarded the Golden Bear for Best Film with *Yellow Letters*, while Emin Alper received the Silver Bear Grand Jury Prize for *Salvation*.

Çatak's *Yellow Letters* presents a politically charged narrative centred on a couple of artists facing professional and social exclusion, reflecting broader themes of repression and democratic fragility. The film's recognition at the *Berlinale* signals not only its artistic strength but also its relevance within a European context increasingly attentive to questions of political freedom and institutional resilience.

Similarly, Alper's *Salvation* offers a layered exploration of power struggles

and ideological tensions within a rural setting, resonating with wider debates on governance, identity and societal fragmentation. His acceptance speech, which extended solidarity to communities affected by conflict and political pressure across different regions, underscored the inherently political dimension of the festival itself.

The dual recognition of Çatak and Alper therefore represents more than an individual achievement. It highlights the capacity of Turkish cinema to engage with universal themes while maintaining a distinct narrative voice. At a time when cultural platforms are becoming spaces for both artistic innovation and political reflection, *Berlinale* 2026 has reaffirmed the role of cinema as a medium through which complex societal issues are articulated and contested.

## MOSAIC WITH INSCRIPTION FOUND AT TÜRKİYE'S 3,000-YEAR-OLD ANCIENT CITY EXCAVATION

As part of the Culture and Tourism Ministry's Heritage for the Future Project, a significant archaeological discovery was made during excavations led by Associate Professor Ertuğ Ergüner, a faculty member at Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University's Faculty of Tourism. A mosaic measuring approximately 15 square metres, believed to date back to between the fourth and sixth centuries AD, was found in the ancient city of Syedra, which boasts a history of nearly 3,000 years.

Unearthed in the entrance area of one of the largest residential buildings in the ancient city, the mosaic draws attention with its geometric and floral motifs. While the centre of the artifact features an expression meaning "use it with joy" or "use it with good fortune". The truly intriguing detail appears in



an inscription written inside a circular border at the entrance. According to Associate Professor Ergüner, the phrase in this section, formed by combining the words "jealousy" and "burst", corresponds to the contemporary saying "let the jealous burst", much like today's "haters gonna hate". Encountering such a metaphorical message at the entrance of a structure built around 1,500 years ago is considered a surprising discovery.

## LEADING TURKISH HISTORIAN İLBER ORTAYLI PASSES AWAY AGED 78

Renowned historian and author Prof. İlber Ortaylı, who held a unique place in Türkiye's intellectual life not only for his academic achievements but also for the deep love and respect he earned from the public, has passed away. Born in Austria in 1947, İlber Ortaylı came from a Crimean Tatar family. His family moved to Istanbul when he was two years old. He studied history at Ankara University and later continued his education at the University of Chicago and the University of Vienna. After completing his doctoral thesis on Ottoman local administration, he taught at prestigious institutions such as Oxford, Cambridge, and Princeton. In addition, he served as the head of the Topkapı Palace Museum for many years.

Beyond being an accomplished historian, Ortaylı was also a gifted storyteller. He played a leading role in transforming historiography in Türkiye from a purely academic discipline



into a subject of public conversation. Through seminars in conference halls, appearances on television programmes, and informal talks in cafés, he helped raise public awareness of history and inspired younger generations to take an interest in the field. Prof. Ortaylı, the distinguished historian, academic, and writer, passed away in hospital where he had been receiving treatment. Following a ceremony held at Galatasaray University, he was laid to rest in the courtyard of the Fatih Mosque.

## YAREN THE STORK HAS A LONG LASTING FRIENDSHIP OF 15 YEARS WITH TURKISH FISHERMAN YILMAZ

Türkiye's only village represented in the European Stork Villages Network, Eskikaraağaç in the Karacabey district of Bursa, has become famous for the heart warming friendship between fisherman Adem Yılmaz and a stork named Yaren. As the duo's story has been being followed with great interest by millions, Yaren who perches on Yılmaz's boat during each migration has returned to the village for the 15<sup>th</sup> time this year.

Arriving in the village in the early hours of 24 February 2026, Yaren first landed on its nest and was later spotted on the roof of Adem Yılmaz's house. As in previous years, the stork then perched on Yılmaz's fishing boat as he set out onto the lake and fed on the fish he caught.



Yaren's mate, named Nazlı also returned and their reunion was captured by a livestreaming camera that records the nest 24/7. Yılmaz said that the six-month separation each year is very difficult for him and that every moment he spends with Yaren is precious and that he is very happy to spend the next six months together.

# WHEN ENERGY SHOCKS RETURN: EUROPE'S RESPONSE AND TÜRKİYE'S PLACE IN A VOLATILE LANDSCAPE

Geopolitical tensions disrupt energy and trade, forcing the EU to rethink crisis response and long-term risks, with Türkiye growing in prominence.

Laura BATALLA ADAM  
Analyst

Rising tensions linked to the ongoing conflict involving Iran have brought price volatility, supply risks and economic resilience back to the centre of EU policymaking. In Brussels, the focus is less on the conflict itself than on how these disruptions translate into economic pressure, policy trade-offs and strategic recalibration within the Union. At the same time, diverging positions across the Atlantic on how to respond to these tensions are adding another layer of uncertainty, reinforcing Europe's need to rely more heavily on its own economic and energy instruments.

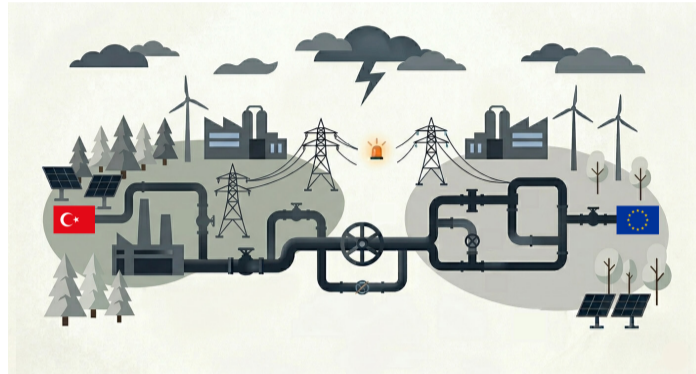
European leaders have acknowledged continued instability in global energy markets, stressing the need to strengthen resilience through diversification of supply, infrastructure investment and reduced strategic dependencies. This moment recalls earlier disruptions triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, when markets reacted sharply even before physical supply was affected. Yet the current environment is broader in scope: instability is not only influencing energy flows but also disrupting key transport routes, underlining how closely energy security and trade connectivity have become intertwined.

This points to a broader shift: for the EU, vulnerability is no longer confined to dependence on specific suppliers, but extends to the reliability of the routes through which energy and goods circulate.

## From Energy Dependence to Systemic Exposure

The EU enters this phase with a stronger policy framework than in 2022. Measures introduced after the Ukraine crisis, including diversification strategies and accelerated investment in renewables, have reduced reliance on individual suppliers. However, emerging developments suggest that exposure has not disappeared; it has evolved into a more complex form of structural vulnerability.

The disruption of flows through the Strait of Hormuz, a direct consequence of the conflict, has once again



highlighted how even geographically contained instability can trigger global price shocks and supply concerns.

Disruptions around key maritime chokepoints and air routes, combined with heightened geopolitical risk, are once again affecting global price formation. Even without a physical supply shock, uncertainty alone is sufficient to drive up costs and create ripple effects across European economies.

The March European Council conclusions reflect this shift in emphasis, linking energy security more explicitly to competitiveness, industrial stability and the resilience of cross-border infrastructure. This dynamic is now prompting renewed debate within the EU on the adequacy of existing tools. While previous responses focused on replacing lost supply, the current challenge is more complex: ensuring resilience in a system where multiple routes and regions can be affected simultaneously.

## Energy Prices and the Reopening of Internal Debates

As in 2022, rising energy costs are feeding directly into internal EU debates. The impact on industrial competitiveness and household affordability has brought renewed attention to policy instruments such as carbon pricing and state aid frameworks.

Rather than a simple trade-off between climate ambition and economic stability, the debate is increasingly about how to ease short term pressures without weakening long term decarbonisation efforts.

Ongoing policy debates suggest that this balance is becoming harder to maintain. Energy policy is no longer operating in isolation but is increasingly shaped by industrial strategy, fiscal constraints and geopolitical

considerations, resulting in a more complex and politically sensitive policy environment.

## Trade Routes Under Pressure: Connectivity as a Strategic Variable

At the same time, pressure on energy systems is being mirrored in global trade routes, where disruptions are revealing similar structural vulnerabilities. Instability linked to the conflict has also affected key maritime routes in the Gulf and surrounding regions, reinforcing concerns about the reliability of established trade corridors. Disruptions in maritime corridors and the re-routing of air traffic illustrate how quickly geopolitical developments can affect the movement of goods.

EU leaders also underlined the importance of secure and diversified supply chains, pointing to the need to strengthen alternative transport corridors alongside traditional maritime routes. This has renewed interest in overland connections linking Europe to Asia. In particular, the so-called Middle Corridor, which connects Europe to Central Asia via the South Caucasus and the Caspian Sea, has gained attention as part of a broader effort to spread risk across multiple routes.

The growing relevance of this corridor reflects a structural shift. The Northern route through Russia has become less viable in the current geopolitical context, while southern routes remain exposed to instability in the Middle East. As a result, resilience is increasingly understood as the ability to rely on a combination of pathways rather than any single alternative.

At the same time, the Middle Corridor remains constrained in capacity and efficiency. It cannot replace existing routes but can complement them, particularly in periods of disruption. This underlines a more

pragmatic understanding of resilience: diversification reduces exposure but does not eliminate it.

## Türkiye's Role in an Emerging Connectivity and Energy Landscape

Within this evolving framework, Türkiye's role is becoming more clearly defined across both trade and energy dimensions. Located at the intersection of Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, it sits along several of the routes now being reconsidered in European discussions on connectivity.

Beyond transit, Türkiye has also positioned itself as a potential energy hub, with existing pipeline infrastructure linking the Caspian region, the Middle East and Europe, as well as ongoing discussions around gas trading platforms and pricing mechanisms. Existing infrastructure such as the Southern Gas Corridor, TANAP and TurkStream, alongside LNG capacity and storage expansion, reinforce its function as both a transit route and a balancing node within the wider European energy system.

In parallel, Türkiye's growing investment in renewable energy, including wind and solar capacity, is gradually reshaping its own energy mix and creating new areas for cooperation with European partners, especially in the context of green transition policies and cross-border electricity integration.

At the same time, this role should not be overstated. The EU's approach to resilience remains based on diversification rather than reliance on a single partner or corridor. Türkiye forms part of a wider network that includes LNG terminals, Mediterranean routes and other overland connections.

Its significance therefore lies in how it complements this broader system. As the EU expands its connectivity and energy agenda, Türkiye's infrastructure, market size and geographic position contribute to a more flexible and layered architecture designed to absorb shocks.

## From Crisis Response to Structural Adjustment

Taken together, these overlapping disruptions are gradually reshaping how the EU approaches economic security. Energy security, supply chain resilience and economic stability are increasingly treated as interconnected challenges rather than separate policy areas.

This more integrated perspective was reflected in the European

Council discussions, where energy, competitiveness and external economic relations were addressed in parallel, rather than through separate policy silos. The EU is moving toward a more coordinated framework, where economic policy is shaped by geopolitical considerations and vice versa.

At the same time, constraints remain. Fiscal limitations, internal divergences and regulatory commitments limit the scope for rapid or far-reaching change. The result is a process of incremental adjustment rather than transformation.

The recurrence of energy and trade disruptions suggests that instability is becoming a persistent feature of the global environment. For the EU, this reinforces the need to manage interdependence rather than attempt to eliminate it.

In this context, diversification of both suppliers and routes is likely to remain a central objective. Connectivity initiatives, including those involving Türkiye and the wider region, will continue to play a role in this strategy, even if their impact remains partial.

Recent European policy discussions, while not introducing major new instruments, point to a consolidation of this approach: strengthening resilience through diversification, coordination and gradual adaptation of existing tools. These dynamics are also likely to feed into broader international discussions on energy and climate policy, including those leading up to COP31, where energy security and transition pathways are increasingly treated as part of the same policy conversation.

At the same time, short-term pressures linked to energy prices and security concerns may complicate the pace and direction of the transition. Managing this tension will remain a central challenge.

What is becoming clearer is not a fundamental change in direction, but a more grounded recognition of how exposed the system has become. Energy, trade and geography are now tightly interlinked in practice. In this context, Türkiye-EU engagement is gradually adjusting, driven less by formal frameworks than by the shared need to keep flows stable and disruptions manageable. The question going forward is whether this practical alignment can evolve into more predictable and sustained forms of cooperation over time.