



CATS Network Roundup

A roundup of news and analysis on Turkey



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Dear Readers,

Welcome to the CATS Network Roundup of news, developments, and assessments concerning relevant issues about Turkish domestic politics and foreign policy.

In this issue, **we examine how Northern Cyprus is being used as a stage for power struggles and cultural clashes**, from the 'presidential palace' to the headscarf debate. We also explain why the **2025 election in Northern Cyprus will be of crucial importance**, not only for Cyprus but also for international diplomacy.

If you have any questions or suggestions, please e-mail us at cats@swp-berlin.org.

On the Spot



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For decades, the policies on Cyprus of successive Turkish governments earned them the support of their constituency. Whether the focus of the debate was on **protecting Turkish Cypriots from their Greek neighbours or emphasising the island's strategic importance for Turkey's security and military strategy**, Cyprus was Milli Dava, the national cause par excellence. The more resolutely the governments in Turkey pursued their Cyprus course, the stronger the applause from the Turkish media.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan cannot be accused of making concessions on Cyprus. On the contrary, he has hardened the Turkish position on the matter. He is **demanding international recognition of the Turkish breakaway statelet, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), which so far is only recognised by Ankara**. With his new strategy of a two-state solution for the island, **Erdoğan is challenging not only the Republic of Cyprus, but also the United Nations (UN) and the European Union**. And yet, Cyprus is suddenly part of Turkey's domestic political dispute.

On 3 May 2025, **Erdoğan flew to Northern Cyprus to open a new palace for the president of the TRNC**. Already in 2021, Erdoğan had announced the construction of the building, and in those days, he labelled it a "symbol of the statehood" of the TRNC. At the opening, he praised the palace, which the Turkish government financed and built, as reflecting "the determination of the Turkish Cypriot people". The tender was held in Turkey – it was non-transparent and favoured Turkish companies with close ties to the government. **Turkey's opposition press mockingly named the building "Erdoğan's fourth palace" and denounced it as another act of self-promotion by the Turkish president**. In their eyes, it only mirrors Erdoğan's desire to impose his own type of authoritarian governance – the dismantling of democracy, religious conservatism, lack of transparency, and corruption – on the Turkish Cypriots as well.

This domestic political climate in Turkey explains why, just one month earlier in April 2025, another event in Northern Cyprus caused a stir in Turkey. **The right-hand man of Turkish Cypriot Halil Falyalı, a billionaire operator of illegal betting websites, fled the island and surrendered to the Dutch authorities**. He claimed that he possessed video footage that seriously incriminates family members of the current Turkish foreign minister and a former prime minister for the Justice and Development Party (AKP). His former chief, Halil Falyalı, had been killed in machine-gun fire in Northern Cyprus already in February 2022. Falyalı had close ties to the Turkish Cypriot National Unity Party (UBP), the party of the Turkish Cypriot president, who is fighting alongside Erdoğan for a two-state solution on the island. **Nothing of what the right-hand man Cemil Önal claimed is proven. But in Turkey, the leader of the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), took the allegations at face value**. A member of the CHP executive committee and former Turkish ambassador to Washington accused the AKP of turning Northern Cyprus into a den of criminals and a centre of corruption and money laundering. On 1 May 2025, unknown assailants shot dead the informant Önal in exile. The circumstances surrounding the murder remain unclear.

At the opening of the presidential palace, Erdoğan also commented on the current culture war in Northern Cyprus, where **Turkish Cypriots are protesting a new regulation that permits girls to attend school wearing headscarves**. For the protesters, the ruling is just another step towards imposing the conservative morality that the AKP government wants to enforce in Turkey on the more secular society in Northern Cyprus. "Those who want to take away our girls' headscarves will have to deal with us," Erdoğan said. Immediately he was accused of polarising society in Northern Cyprus, much in the same way as he has done in Turkey.

The opposition is criticising the AKP for pursuing only its own ideological interests in Northern Cyprus and even profiting from illegal deals. They say that the government has forgotten the Turkish Cypriots and Turkey's strategic interests. This is the perspective that gained traction in early April. At the first EU-Central Asian Summit in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, the **governments of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan committed themselves to respecting the two UN resolutions that condemn the establishment of the TRNC, and that call on UN members to refrain from recognising it**. This was a serious setback for the Turkish government: "Erdoğan is selling Cyprus," railed the opposition leader Özgür Özel. It is probably still too early to expect a sober assessment of Turkey's Cyprus policy from opposition sources. (*Günter Seufert*)

Three Questions for...



Erol Kaymak is Professor of International Relations at the Eastern Mediterranean University. Dr Kaymak has authored or contributed to numerous reports on Cyprus published by organisations such as the Centre for Applied Turkey Studies (CATS), the United Nations in Cyprus (UNFICYP), the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), CIVICUS, Interpeace and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES). He serves as co-coordinator for the Cyprus Chapter of the Greek Turkish Forum.

How might the results of the 2025 election in Northern Cyprus influence the future of the two-state solution narrative, as well as international recognition of the Turkish Cypriot position?

Polling for the 2025 presidential election shows a competitive race. Incumbent Ersin Tatar retains strong backing from Ankara and a unified governing coalition, bolstering his two-state platform. However, a victory for opposition leader Tufan Erhürman (CTP) could lead to UN-backed federal talks. Ankara's influence, seen in policies such as headscarves in schools, has sparked significant secular pushback. Externally, the push for two-state recognition faces hurdles; even Turkic allies at Samarkand reaffirmed non-recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, a notable setback for Tatar's approach. Either way, the outcome of the election promises to be pivotal.

In what ways can the EU's new involvement in the Cyprus issue, as evidenced by the appointment of Johannes Hahn as Special Envoy, affect the broader dynamics of EU-Turkey relations?

The EU's decision to appoint Hahn signals a renewed and more visible engagement, complementing the efforts of the UN led by María Ángela Holguín Cuéllar. Hahn's role is likely symbolic, aiming to ensure that EU perspectives are central, especially since Cyprus remains a critical and often obstructive element in the broader EU-Turkey relationship.

Ankara may perceive this as an encroachment, given the Republic of Cyprus's (RoC) EU membership, but Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot leadership remain engaged with the UN process, even though it is limited to an agreement on Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) and a scheduled "informal" UN-hosted meeting in July. The EU may leverage this involvement to influence Turkey by addressing broader aspects of the relationship, such as accession talks, a customs union, and financial cooperation. Progress on Cyprus will inevitably continue to have a significant impact on the already strained EU-Turkey dialogue, potentially offering both new pressure points and, optimistically, avenues for conditional positive engagement, especially as transactional arrangements are more likely, given the stalemate on status issues.

What potential impact do US aid cuts have on Cyprus's stability and regional role, and how might the EU respond to them?

The premise of "US aid cuts" to Cyprus needs careful contextualisation. Although specific programmes may fluctuate, US-RoC relations have strengthened, particularly in terms of security cooperation. The RoC has emerged as a reliable regional partner, for instance by facilitating humanitarian corridors to Gaza. Peacebuilding initiatives on the island increasingly rely on EU funding. Reduced US engagement could prompt the EU to play a larger role to safeguard regional stability and its own interests. This may include investing in infrastructure such as the stalled EuroAsia/Great Sea Interconnector and digital networks, enhancing the RoC's resilience and European integration. The EU might also need to assume greater responsibility for regional security. The RoC's ongoing efforts to join the Schengen Area reflect a deeper EU alignment, but they require more EU support on issues such as irregular migration. Ironically, these steps can complicate reunification efforts, as Schengen may conflict with trade and crossings via the existing Green Line Regulation.

Interview by [Marcela Müggler](#)

Recommendations

[Erol Kaymak](#) reflects in this SWP Comment on the challenges highlighted by the 2024 European Parliament elections for Turkish Cypriot representation, urging greater inclusivity within EU institutions. Amid rising nationalism and divergent visions between the EU and Turkish Cypriot leadership for Cyprus's future, he calls for deeper EU engagement with both communities through confidence-building and economic integration. For a more in-depth analysis of the [reviving peace talks in Cyprus](#), see the following publication.

In this IPC–Mercator Analysis, [Esra Dilek](#) examines Turkey's shifting Eastern Mediterranean policy since 2017, highlighting how peacemaking in Cyprus is now entangled with energy geopolitics. She argues that Ankara's adoption of a two-state approach to Cyprus, assertive hydrocarbon exploration, and the reopening of Varosha have regionalised the conflict by tying it to exclusive economic zones (EEZ) disputes. Dilek maps key diplomatic junctures, shows how authoritarian trends and new alliances shape Turkey's position, and outlines future scenarios.

In this IAI Commentary, conflict resolution scholar [Maria Hadjipavlou](#) dissects why the United Nations' Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda remains absent from Cyprus' stalled peace negotiations. Hadjipavlou documents how decades of all-male delegations and bureaucratic inertia have sidelined gender expertise. She then outlines practical steps such as quotas, civil-society linkages, and a federal Ministry of Gender Equality to embed WPS principles in any revived talks.

Aposto's Spektrum (in Turkish) features [Alio Akis in conversation with CATS Network Partner Professor Serhat Güvenc](#) (Kadir Has University), tracing Cyprus's political history from antiquity to the present. While addressing key issues – including its strategic importance, the Cyprus Peace Operation, the concept of Enosis, and the 2004 Annan Plan – the discussion also examines Cyprus's evolving role within the broader context of Turkish foreign policy.

This Atlantic Council TurkeySource article by [Harry Tzimitras](#) examines the prospects for Turkey-Greece cooperation, emphasising that although historical grievances and recent tensions persist, a realistic and pragmatic approach could pave the way for sustained dialogue and mutual benefit, particularly in areas such as energy, trade, and regional stability.

Kind regards,

The CATS Team

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