

TÜRKİYE IN 2025: STRUCTURAL CONTINUITIES BENEATH APPARENT TRANSFORMATION

This is the summary of the online public event held on 11 December 2025.

You can access the video [here](#).

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On the 11th of December 2025, Contemporary Turkish Studies hosted an online public panel that examined developments in Türkiye in the past year through broader historical, economic, and institutional patterns to determine the extent of change and its implications going forward. The discussion teased out historical continuities amidst seeming change by focusing on political party structures, patterns of political mobilisation, economic institutions, and relations with the West. The event was titled “Türkiye in 2025: structural continuities beneath apparent transformation.”

The speakers were **Buğra Süssler**, associate professor in International Relations at the University College London (UCL) and the head of Türkiye and the World programme at LSE IDEAS; **Esra Çuhadar**, associate professor at Bilkent University, Ankara and head of research at Ottawa Dialogue; **Pelin Ayan Musil**, associate professor of political science at CEVRO University and Anglo-American University in Prague; **Işık Özel**, associate professor of Political Science at the Department of Social Sciences at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid (UC3M).

Prof **Yaprak Gürsoy**, Chair of Contemporary Turkish Studies at LSE, moderated the event. In her introduction, Prof Yaprak Gürsoy welcomed the speakers and introduced them to the audience.

In her opening remarks, **Yaprak Gürsoy** noted that 2025 has been widely framed as a critical year in Türkiye. She highlighted mass mobilisation after the arrest of Istanbul mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, the PKK's decision to lay down arms, the work of the new National Solidarity, Peace and Democracy Commission in parliament, Erdoğan's visit to Washington, and Ankara's role in negotiations in relation to the Gaza war, all against the backdrop of a severe cost-of-living crisis.

Gürsoy stressed that such “turning points” are not new: the past decade has included the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2016 coup attempt, and the 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, each of which has been cast as a watershed moment. The aim of the panel was therefore to assess to what extent 2025 marks real change or reinforces entrenched patterns in Turkish political culture, institutions, and economic structures, and what this might imply for the future.

Türkiye's foreign policy and relations with the West

Continuity, not rupture

Buğra Süsler argued that, despite several notable diplomatic developments in 2025, Türkiye's broader foreign policy trajectory vis-à-vis the West is one of continuity rather than significant change. Cooperation remains largely issue-specific and transactional. These forms of engagement have not translated into firm integration into long-term frameworks or inclusion in European strategic debates.

He noted that analysts often describe the relationship in terms of weakening normative bonds since transactional cooperation also requires trust. Today, trust in Türkiye is limited, partly due to Ankara's relationship with Russia and ongoing concerns about democratic backsliding and the rule of law, which increase uncertainty about domestic governance and foreign policy direction.

Europe, SAFE and defence architecture

Süsler used the debate over Türkiye's possible participation in the EU's SAFE defence-procurement mechanism to illustrate the structural limits to Ankara's integration into the emerging European defence architecture. While Ankara sought to join and some member states, notably Germany, supported Turkish participation, Türkiye failed to secure an arrangement in the initial planning window.

He highlighted those political objections within the EU, including reported veto threats from Greece and Cyprus and France's reluctance, which played an important role. Although limited involvement through bilateral projects may still be possible, deeper structural obstacles to integration into Europe's evolving security frameworks remain, and Türkiye's EU accession process is de facto frozen, with most interaction occurring outside the membership track.

Relations with the US and NATO; Türkiye's role in peacekeeping

Turning to relations with the United States, Süssler described a pattern of selective cooperation and episodic diplomatic openings overshadowed by unresolved disputes. Erdoğan's 2025 visit to Washington signalled a desire to relaunch dialogue on defence, but the S-400 purchase and Türkiye's exclusion from the F-35 programme continue to block a broader reset.

He also underlined diverging approaches to the Israel–Hamas war. Erdoğan has positioned Türkiye as a major critic of Israel's campaign in Gaza, and Ankara has declared readiness to participate in an international stabilisation force under the UN Security Council resolution. Yet reports of Israeli objections cast doubt on the realistic scope of a Turkish role in ceasefire implementation and peacebuilding.

Within NATO, Süssler pointed to renewed efforts to strengthen capabilities, especially on the eastern flank. Here, the Black Sea has become a focal point for security and connectivity, with Türkiye playing a key role through the enforcement of the Montreux Convention and new initiatives such as the mine-countermeasures task force launched with Bulgaria and Romania in 2024.

Energy dependence and mediator strategy

Energy relations with Russia remain an area of continuity. Türkiye still depends heavily on Russian natural gas and nuclear cooperation, and despite official rhetoric about diversification, Ankara recently extended a contract with Gazprom for another year.

Süssler emphasised Türkiye's strategy of positioning itself as a mediator in conflicts, most visibly in the Russia–Ukraine war through the grain deal and prisoner exchanges. This “bridge-building” role fits Ankara's balancing act between Russia and the West and is embedded in the “Century of Türkiye” narrative, while NATO and EU ties nonetheless remain central pillars of foreign policy. Süssler concluded that Türkiye has the potential to contribute significantly to European security, but structural problems mean that continuity and selective engagement, rather than transformation, define relations with the West.

The new peace process as an answer to the Kurdish question

A process with a long history

Esra Çuhadar placed the current peace process in comparative perspective, drawing on her research on 40 peace processes worldwide. The present process began around October 2024, when the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli publicly signalled support for a new initiative. While not the first attempt, Çuhadar argued that this is the one that has gone furthest and has become one of the fastest-moving issues on the national agenda, breaking a series of taboos along the way.

She reminded the audience that Türkiye has seen earlier attempts, including the 2013–2015 process, which failed and left a “bitter taste” among both political elites and public opinion.

Public support and the confidence gap

Çuhadar discussed expectations from public opinion polls, using survey data showing that 60–70 per cent of respondents support a peace process and want an end to violence, reflecting a collective sentiment of “we’ve had enough”. However, only about 30–35 per cent express confidence that the process will succeed, revealing a substantial confidence gap between the desire for peace and expectations of success.

She noted that there is also a gap between political elites’ perceptions and those of the public. While there is broad agreement on the need to end the armed conflict and achieve “negative peace,” views diverge over the desired end state and the reforms that should accompany disarmament.

The parliamentary commission and DDR

One of the key institutional innovations is the establishment in July 2025 of a special parliamentary commission, with 51 MPs from all parties except the Good Party (İYİ), including the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP), and the governing coalition, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and MHP. Çuhadar described this as the first commission of its kind and central to designing the legal framework for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of PKK members.

The commission is working on questions such as who will return, under what conditions and what will happen to ex-combatants upon their return. Different political parties are submitting proposals, which will be negotiated to produce a law. Çuhadar highlighted a major divide between parties: AKP and MHP seek to limit the process mainly to DDR and security measures, while the opposition and left-leaning parties, such as CHP and the Workers’ Party (TİP), insist that DDR must be coupled with a comprehensive democratisation agenda.

Conflict management versus conflict transformation

Drawing on peace-process theory, Çuhadar framed this divide as one between conflict-management and conflict-transformation approaches. The former prioritises ending and managing violence; the latter stresses addressing underlying root causes through political and institutional change.

At the societal level, hearings in the commission show consensus on ending violence but divergent views on transitional justice, governance reforms, the scope of democratisation and reparations for victims. She noted that everyone agrees on the need for further democratisation, but there is no agreement on its content or extent.

Vulnerabilities and the Syria dimension

Çuhadar pointed to several vulnerabilities in the process. One is the sequencing debate: whether to prioritise security and disarmament first, as AKP and MHP argue, or to advance disarmament and democratisation in parallel. An additional concern is identity-based cultural and language rights, local

government reform, and restrictions on political competition through the appointment of trustees to municipalities.

Finally, she highlighted differing views on how developments in Syria should be linked to the process. Some actors argue that PKK disarmament should be tied to the disarmament of armed groups in northern Syria, including the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF); others insist that the two tracks must be disentangled to avoid overburdening the process.

The opposition, the Republican People's Party (CHP) and party dynamics

Party change: structure and environment

Pelin Ayan Musil examined whether CHP is transforming into a movement party in response to the arrest of Ekrem Imamoğlu on 19 March 2025. She argued that while there are visible changes since March, these are constrained by the party's "genetic" structure, producing an uneven, conflict-ridden process.

Drawing on the party-change literature, she distinguished between endogenous development, external adaptation and genetic structure as explanations for change. In Türkiye's unstable and frequently interrupted democracy, endogenous development is less useful; instead, party evolution is mainly shaped by external shocks and organisational legacies.

CHP's organisational fabric

Ayan Musil traced CHP's post-1990s trajectory. Reborn after the 1980 coup, in 1992, after the ban on political parties was removed, CHP emerged as an elite-driven party with decisions concentrated in headquarters and candidate selection controlled from the top under a highly centralised party law. Local branches have tended to be weak following the military coup and dominated by local notables, with everyday activity focused on ceremonial visits rather than civic activism, far from the participatory practices that are characteristic of movement parties.

She noted that CHP contains multiple ideological strands but consistently presents itself as Atatürk's party. Its reaction to social movements such as the Gezi protests in 2013 reflected its institutional fabric: it offered rhetorical and symbolic support, lodged parliamentary initiatives and condemned state violence, but did not systematically adopt extra-parliamentary repertoires, such as people's assemblies, sit-ins, or blockades.

Moments of mobilisation and the 2025 juncture

Historically, CHP came closest to being a movement party in the 1970s under Bülent Ecevit. Ayan Musil cited the 2007 republican rallies, the 2017 "March for Justice", and the 2019 Istanbul mayoral

campaign as moments with potential that displayed movement-like features without overcoming structural constraints.

Despite being a party of elections, no particular national election (2015, 2018, 2023) during Türkiye's democratic backsliding has had the effect that the 19th of March 2025 had on CHP.

The arrest of Imamoğlu in March 2025 represents a new critical juncture, combining a perceived existential threat to fair elections with renewed hope embodied in a popular opposition leader. She suggested that this helps explain why mass mobilisation has emerged now rather than around the 2023 elections, when faith in the ballot box may still have seemed sufficient.

Internal struggles and dual trajectories

Despite this favourable external environment, the shift towards a movement party has been far from smooth, as it clashes with the CHP's entrenched organisational model. Ayan Musil described an internal struggle between movement-oriented actors who prioritise mobilisation and those who remain anchored in the party's elitist, hierarchical traditions.

She pointed to evidence of this duality: on one side, there have been more than 70 rallies to "protect the will of the nation"; on the other, several CHP mayors have defected to AKP, often those whose careers depended heavily on central nomination and who face incentives to align with the governing party's patronage networks. These conflicting trajectories, she argued, show how the genetic structure and external context are pulling the party in different directions.

Political economy, volatility and credibility

Volatility as a structural feature

Işık Özel analysed continuities and changes in Türkiye's political economy, focusing on volatility, inflation and institutional credibility. She described volatility as a "sticky" structural feature of the Turkish economy, filled with cycles. This is true especially since capital-account liberalisation in 1989, which was "a premature liberalisation" exposing the country to short-term financial flows and external shocks.

Except for a brief period in the 2000s, volatility has remained high and has been amplified by political and institutional uncertainty, as well as by concentrated executive discretion. In 2025, global risks such as trade wars, rising geopolitical tensions and increasing global protectionism have intersected with domestic political instability, making the environment especially challenging.

Inflation, expectations and credibility

Özel emphasised the role of confidence in relation to inflation and expectations. While inflation was relatively under control through much of the 2000s, it began to rise from 2016 onwards. During the unorthodox monetary policies of 2021–2023, official annual inflation approached 70 per cent.

She highlighted the widening gap between the Central Bank's medium-term forecasts and realised inflation, which has eroded its credibility in the eyes of investors and consumers. Furthermore, since 2020, the independent Inflation Research Group (ENAG) has published its own estimates. In December 2023, ENAG put annual inflation at almost twice the official 65 per cent figure, deepening perceptions of under-reporting and adding another layer of confusion around the discrepancy between projected and actual inflation rates.

Weak credibility and political risk feed into higher inflation expectations, greater dollarisation, and higher risk premia on Turkish assets. This, in turn, encourages further reliance on short-term capital inflows and forces recurrent Central Bank intervention in foreign-exchange markets, all within the context of a widening trade deficit.

Trade structure and external constraints

On trade, Özel noted that Türkiye remains deeply integrated into global markets. One modestly positive trend is that the share of exports going to the EU has declined from around 55 per cent to about 40–41 per cent over the past decade, reducing single-market dependence. However, the EU remains Türkiye's largest partner. Germany is Türkiye's biggest export destination and China its leading import partner. However, continued exposure to the EU makes Türkiye vulnerable to "hidden" protectionist measures such as the EU's carbon border adjustment mechanism, which will impose additional costs on emissions-intensive exports.

Policy shifts and current stance

Following a policy pivot in 2023 away from unorthodox monetary policy, the Central Bank adopted a more orthodox stance, raising interest rates, deploying macro-prudential tools, intervening in foreign exchange markets and promoting "liratisation" to discourage dollarisation. As of November 2025, official inflation stands at around 31–32 per cent – still high, but down from 2023 levels.

On the day of this panel, the Central Bank lowered its policy rate from 39.5 to 38 per cent, partly in line with international trends of rate reductions by the ECB and the US Federal Reserve. Özel underlined that Türkiye is competing with other economies that offer very high local-currency yields to attract capital, and that the sustainability of the current anti-inflation strategy will depend on managing the interaction between domestic politics, institutional credibility and external financing needs.

Audience Q&A focused on discussions around the depth of change versus continuity in 2025, the design and sequencing of the peace process, CHP's prospects of becoming a movement-style party, Türkiye's credibility as an international mediator, and the sustainability of current economic policies under structural constraints.