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Deepening Ties Amid Turbulence: The Türkiye–Ukraine Free Trade Agreement

The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Türkiye and Ukraine, signed on 3 February 2022, officially entered into force on 1 October 2026 despite the devastating conditions brought about by the war and a four-year ratification process. The negotiations, which had been ongoing since 2007, were placed on a legal basis after being approved by the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye on 2 August 2024 and by Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, on 14 July 2026, and were subsequently approved by President Zelenskyy on 31 July 2026. The primary short-term objective of the agreement is to increase the volume of bilateral trade to \$10 billion. One interesting aspect of the agreement is its implementation schedule. While the agreement entered into force for Ukraine on 1 October, the implementation date set for Türkiye is 1 January 2027. This three-month difference can be considered to have been introduced in order to alleviate, to some extent, Ukraine's foreign currency needs, which have been severely felt

during wartime, and to facilitate the access of grain products, which are harvested in the summer and constitute a vital part of exports, to foreign markets. In order to systematise the implementation of these customs exemptions, documents such as the EUR.1 Movement Certificate (code 0954) have been made mandatory, while preferential tariff codes 429 and 430, which reduce customs duties to zero or significantly decrease them on exports to Türkiye, have begun to be used. The reflection of this situation on the ground is shaped not only by the needs mentioned above but also by the quality of trade between the two countries rather than its quantity. A large part of Ukraine's exports to Türkiye consists of grain and raw materials, whereas the majority of Türkiye's exports to Ukraine consists of textiles, machinery, and other processed products. This trade balance allows the raw materials brought to Türkiye to be transformed into processed products and offered to domestic and foreign markets, while on the Ukrainian side, it creates the risk of leaving producers, who are already facing major difficulties in terms of energy, capital, and security, in the position of raw-material suppliers. Indeed, the fact that there are other products for which customs duties will be abolished after the transition periods of 3–7 years for Türkiye and 2–10 years for Ukraine can be regarded as an indication of the degree of importance both sides attach to producers in



sensitive sectors within their respective countries. Perhaps the most important aspect of the agreement for Ukraine is the introduction of diagonal cumulation under the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean (PEM) Preferential Rules of Origin, meaning that Ukrainians will be able to export final products manufactured using materials imported from Türkiye and other countries to the EU market under much more favourable conditions. While this dynamic will help Ukraine align with the EU, of which it is potentially a future member, it will also indirectly open up market opportunities for Turkish investors. Turkish companies with the capacity to manage risks in a geography where crises frequently occur have made investments of approximately \$300 million in Ukraine since the beginning of the war. This commercial presence has positioned Türkiye as a potential partner capable of cooperating with the EU during the post-war reconstruction period. Rather than being merely a market expansion, this development can also be regarded as a form of strategic diversification against Russia in the region. On the other hand, Türkiye's avoidance of direct confrontation with Russia and its decision not to implement Ukraine's demands for sanctions can be considered part of its strategy to preserve its own room for manoeuvre. In conclusion, the Türkiye-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement (FTA) goes beyond developing bilateral trade relations and presents a profile

with the potential to contribute to regional stability and reconstruction while providing predictability and sustainability.



Russia's Retaliation Against Hungary

The Péter Magyar era, which began with Viktor Orbán's defeat in the prime ministerial election last April, continues at full pace, while it is observed that, unlike during the Orbán era, Magyar has maintained a more limited relationship with Russia. The Magyar administration has aimed to strengthen internal security and institutional integrity by removing personnel who had infiltrated state institutions and had the potential to transmit information to Russia from the public bureaucracy. One of the main reasons behind this objective is that, although various investigations were conducted into Russia's spheres of influence in Hungary during the Viktor Orbán era, no general decision was taken regarding Russian activities in order to preserve stability in the country. In addition to these developments, which indicate a change in Hungarian foreign policy, at the beginning of last September, Hungarian Foreign Minister Anita Orbán requested that



10 Russian diplomats who had engaged in activities described as “unacceptable for diplomats” leave the country. This step indicates that, under Péter Magyar’s leadership, the traditional approach to governance is undergoing a transformation and that the new administration may be moving towards a Europe-centred foreign policy line. Indeed, this orientation is also consistent with the congratulatory messages issued by European leaders such as President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, and French President Emmanuel Macron following Magyar’s arrival in office, as well as their attitudes towards the new administration. The new administration under Magyar’s leadership aims, on the one hand, to develop a national and Europe-oriented institutional structure while, on the other hand, maintaining its relations with other actors through a balanced approach to diplomacy. In this context, Péter Magyar emphasised in his Russia-related statement that the security decisions taken should not be interpreted as meaning that diplomatic ties between the two countries had been severed. Indeed, on 1 October 2026, Russia’s demand that a group of Hungarian personnel working at the Hungarian Embassy in Moscow and the Hungarian Consulates General in St. Petersburg and Kazan leave the country constitutes a direct retaliation against Budapest’s steps. This decision, taken by

Moscow on the basis of the principle of reciprocity, is regarded as a symmetrical diplomatic measure implemented in response to Hungary’s decision to expel Russian diplomats. In conclusion, the current developments indicate that diplomatic relations between Hungary and Russia have entered a new phase of tension based on reciprocity. This process demonstrates that the official diplomatic channels between the two countries remain open, but that bilateral relations are gradually becoming strained and shifting towards a more distant framework in which security and intelligence sensitivities have come to the forefront.



The Houthi Threat in Yemen: The Balance Between Diplomacy and War

Since its outbreak in 2014, the civil war in Yemen—involving various political actors and groups backed by different countries—has been far from being merely an internal Yemeni issue and has taken on a regional character. With the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, located on Yemen’s border, has once again demonstrated its importance as a



critical alternative in the arena of international maritime trade. The Houthis, one of the main parties to the conflict, have established control over northern Yemen and the Sana'a region, thereby becoming a key decision-maker in areas near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. This group is a military and armed actor supported by Iran. In response, Saudi Arabia supports the Yemeni government and stands on the opposing side. Although both sides receive economic, political, and military support from opposing powers during the war, the conflict does not fully fit the definition of a "proxy war" because their respective interests and the ideals they represent take precedence. Bab el-Mandeb plays a significant role in reducing the costs of international maritime transport and trade along the route from the Indian Ocean to the Gulf of Aden, through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, and into the Mediterranean Sea. With passage through the Strait of Hormuz becoming impossible, the use of this unsafe route by oil tankers is leading to increases in insurance and freight rates, as well as delays in trade. In short, potential attacks by the Houthis against Saudi Arabian and U.S. ships passing through the strait are affecting the region's potential for active use. Following Saudi Arabia's threat on October 2 to launch an attack against the Houthis, Iran's decision to step up its security measures in the region is giving rise to increased offensive capabilities and attacks based on mutual. On

October 2, 2026, Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar suggested that Iran engage in political dialogue rather than military intervention. As military preparations continue in Saudi Arabia in anticipation of a possible conflict, these diplomatic efforts have come to the fore, creating a contrast in the countries' political agendas. The members of the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan will hold an emergency meeting in Riyadh next week to discuss this proposal. The United States, the other major power opposing the Houthis, is not only responsible for ensuring and sustaining the conflict in order to maintain its status as the world's hegemonic economic power, but also for securing a safe trade route and keeping the continuity of international trade under control. For this reason, adopting a realist perspective on the international stage, the U.S. is striving not only to wage a purely military conflict but also to create opportunities for diplomatic negotiations and agreements with the Houthis. Oman has assumed the role of a diplomatic "gray zone" in this regard, taking on the responsibility of facilitating these negotiations. Rather than positioning itself as a party to the conflict given its status as a small state Oman has adopted a more liberal approach to its existence as a state and assumed the role of a diplomatic and mediation hub, offering insight into the evolving roles of states. The fact that the United States is concluding this agreement



directly with the Houthis rather than through Iran serves as evidence that the Houthis are more than just a puppet of Iran, and that the United States seeks to carry out these agreements without altering the situation in the Strait of Hormuz and while keeping it out of the equation.



Montenegro's EU Integration Process: The Transformation of Diplomacy Through the Visa Decision on Turkey

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen visited Montenegro on October 1, 2026, to meet with Montenegrin Prime Minister Milojko Spajić. During this meeting, Montenegro's goal of joining the European Union—for which it is currently preparing—was emphasized. With the completion of negotiations by the end of 2026, the country is scheduled to join the Union in 2028. The country had announced that, in accordance with a decision made as part of its EU harmonization process and a new regulation adopted on July 23, 2026, it would begin implementing a visa requirement for citizens of Türkiye, Russia, Belarus, China, and Saudi

Arabia upon entry into the country starting November 1, 2026. When evaluated in the context of international relations, this step taken by Montenegro will diplomatically limit Türkiye's influence, particularly in the Balkans. This is because Türkiye has played a strong, partner-like role in the Balkans—particularly since the collapse of the communist regimes there—striving to consolidate and protect its influence in the region through a policy centered on ethnic kinship. This decision is not a political measure taken against Türkiye; rather, it reflects how EU conditionality affects a candidate country's foreign policy, its relations with other countries, and its own border management. In the name of the harmonization process, the country is striving to align its visa and immigration policies with the rules of the European Union, a supranational entity. Tourism flows between Türkiye and Montenegro will also be affected by this decision; while Türkiye will continue its commercial investments, it remains debatable whether it will be able to maintain its influence in terms of partnership and cooperation. Although the visa requirement may not directly halt trade, it is possible that it will impose a bureaucratic burden on the mobility of key businesspeople, company employees, investors, and tourists. From Türkiye's perspective, this process will mark a period during which it must review its own foreign policies alongside new policies that will reshape its relations with



Montenegro within the framework of the European Union.



Highlights from the 81st Session of the UN General Assembly

The 81st session of the UN General Assembly opened on September 8, 2026. The general debates began on September 22 under the main theme of “Rebuilding Trust, Managing Transformation.” French President Emmanuel Macron stated that remaining silent on the Gaza issue undermines the credibility of the international community. Macron’s speech was announced as his final address to the UN General Assembly as president. He also co-chaired a meeting on the State of Palestine alongside Canada, the United Kingdom, and Saudi Arabia. At France’s request, the United Nations Security Council held a high-level briefing on September 23 on artificial intelligence and international security. However, the U.S. took a different approach on this issue. In his speech, Trump argued that artificial intelligence should be supported rather than restricted. He also spoke about his initiatives to streamline UN bureaucracy.

Trump began his speech by discussing the achievements he claimed to have made since taking office. Referring to eight conflicts in which he claimed to have brought about peace, Trump noted that nearly all the leaders of the countries in question had thanked him. He also claimed to have put an end to Iran’s years-long terrorist activities. He called on United Nations member states to economically isolate Iran. He said that if an agreement to end the war with Iran was not reached, he could “destroy the Islamic Republic.” The year 2026 had made headlines with reports that Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro had been kidnapped by the U.S. Trump, meanwhile, stated that if the oil resources of the U.S. and Venezuela were combined, they could meet 60 percent of the world’s oil needs. On September 24, a notable development occurred in the General Assembly when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu took the podium. Approximately 70 delegations left the hall or left their seats empty. Netanyahu described the decision to attack Iran as “one of the easiest decisions,” while labeling the delegates who left the hall as “cowards.” Azerbaijan, however, was among the countries that remained in the hall during Netanyahu’s speech. This stance also made headlines in Turkey. Given Azerbaijan’s long-standing energy and defense cooperation with Israel, this diplomatic stance can be evaluated within the framework of the strategic relations between the two countries.



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Iranian President Mesud Pezeşkiyan, meanwhile, in his address to the General Assembly, positioned his country not as the aggressor, but as the party under attack. Stating that Iran was merely defending itself, Pezeşkiyan emphasized that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, scientists, and children had lost their lives in the attacks against his country. He also stated that Iran is not a terrorist state and that its innocent people have become the targets of these attacks. These statements served as a message in which the Tehran administration articulated its own perspective in response to the rhetoric of the U.S. and Israel, which characterize Iran as a security threat. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also reiterated the call “The world is bigger than five” at the 81st session of the UN General Assembly. Erdoğan noted that a system in which the will of more than 190 countries is subject to the decisions of just five countries is neither fair nor capable of establishing international trust. He called for the Security Council to be reformed in line with this principle and for the veto system to be abolished. He also emphasized that the reform efforts initiated during the tenure of current Secretary-General António Guterres must continue under the new Secretary-General.



Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz and the Baniyas

Route: Syria's Role as an Energy Corridor

Since the Iran War, disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz have caused interruptions in global energy flows and led countries dependent on Gulf routes to seek alternative supply and transportation routes. In this context, Iraq has begun importing gasoline through Baniyas Port on Syria's Mediterranean coast in order to meet its growing domestic energy demand. The gasoline, purchased by Qatar-based UCC Holding, is coordinated by the Syrian Petroleum Company and transported by road from Baniyas Port to Iraq through Al-Tanf in southeastern Syria. In this process, Syria generates transit revenue in return for providing port, storage, and overland transportation services. Under a renewable three-month agreement, approximately 200 tanker trucks are expected to be sent to Iraq each day. In this context, the launch of the first shipments indicates that the established route may go beyond being a temporary supply line. Indeed, this route had previously been used one-way to transport Iraqi petroleum products



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through Baniyas to international markets. However, the transportation of gasoline to Iraq in the opposite direction has transformed the route into a bidirectional energy corridor. Developments in the Middle East and the Strait of Hormuz have led to an approximately 30 percent decline in oil flows in the first quarter of 2026. This situation has created a serious energy security challenge for Iraq, disrupting both its crude oil exports and access to the refined products it needs to import. This bottleneck has pushed the Iraqi government toward alternative routes. As of April, Baniyas Port had also begun to be used for exporting crude oil and fuel oil originating from Iraq to international markets. The use of the same route in both directions, serving as both an export and import hub, indicates that Iraq has adopted a strategy of gaining access to the Mediterranean. This development demonstrates that the Iraqi government is not only developing short-term measures against problems that risk becoming chronic, but is also seeking to institutionalize alternative routes. In December 2024, interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa and his administration, which came to power after overthrowing Bashar al-Assad, began working to reintegrate Syria into regional economic and trade networks and to realize the IMF's projected growth rate of more than 10 percent for the Syrian economy. This development strengthens expectations that the country could become a

regional transit hub, while the revenue generated from transit fees could support the IMF's growth projections. This development, which is still very recent, appears to be a functional crisis-management mechanism in the short term. However, physical limitations in the parties' transportation capacities and regional risks may constrain the long-term sustainability of the current model. Therefore, the reopening of the Kirkuk–Baniyas oil pipeline increases the possibility that this route could become a permanent infrastructure. In the future, the use of this pipeline for the transportation of other petroleum products and non-energy cargo could further expand Syria's regional transit role. The key factors determining the sustainability of the process will be the development of the pipeline, the expansion of overland transportation, and the security of the route.



Project Meridian and the U.S. Preparations for the War of the Future

U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth announced six new initiatives for the future of the U.S. Armed Forces during his “State of the



Force” speech on September 30, 2026, at Marine Corps Base Quantico in Virginia. Among these, Project Meridian—established to study the future battlefield—and the Autonomous Warfare Command (AutoWarCom), which aims to accelerate the integration of autonomous and robotic systems into joint forces, stood out. The participation of Elon Musk, Anduril founder Palmer Luckey, and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich in Project Meridian’s efforts has once again brought to the forefront the role that private technology and defense companies play in shaping the U.S.’s future military capabilities. Rather than directly formulating a new military strategy or policy, Project Meridian aims to identify the areas that will gain importance on future battlefields and the capabilities the U.S. must develop to maintain technological and military superiority. The study, which the Pentagon’s technology management office will conduct in collaboration with private-sector representatives, is expected to last 120 days, with the results to be shared in a publicly available report. In this regard, the project assumes that the future battlefield will be shaped not only by the development of existing weapons systems but also by the evaluation of technologies that have not yet fully matured and new operational domains. The strategic significance of Project Meridian becomes clearer when considered alongside

AutoWarCom, which was also discussed in the same speech. Designed as a four-star combatant command, AutoWarCom’s primary objective is to accelerate the development and scaling of autonomous and robotic capabilities across the joint forces. According to Hegseth, the transformation taking place in autonomous and robotic systems affects not only military equipment but also doctrine, organization, and established assumptions about how war is conducted. This demonstrates that technological transformation is not limited to the procurement of new platforms but also requires a transformation of force structure and the understanding of warfare. On the other hand, the inclusion of executives from technology and defense companies—such as Musk and Luckey—that have commercial ties to the Pentagon in Project Meridian raises a different set of concerns. While the private sector’s technological capabilities can help accelerate military innovation, the expanding role of defense contractors in determining future military capabilities also sets the stage for debates over governance and conflicts of interest. When Project Meridian and AutoWarCom are considered together, it becomes clear that the U.S. is not approaching its preparations for future wars solely through the development of new weapons systems. Maintaining technological superiority is increasingly linked to how quickly new technologies can be integrated into doctrine,



organization, and force structure. For this reason, these initiatives can be viewed as a significant step toward establishing autonomy and robotic systems in a more institutionalized role within the U.S. approach to future warfare.



The US and China at the Same Table: Is the Trade War Coming to an End with the 30-to-30 Agreement, or Is the Nature of Competition Changing?

The 30-to-30 agreement between the United States and China was officially announced on September 26, 2026. Washington has outlined the details of a more favorable tariff framework covering \$30 billion worth of non-sensitive imported goods from each country. According to the lists released, the United States will primarily import non-sensitive goods from China, particularly household and everyday-use products such as microwave ovens, coffee makers, and irons. Among the products China will import is a broad range of agricultural, food, and medical equipment. In addition to these products, China's list also includes critical medical equipment such as

ultrasound diagnostic devices and pacemakers. It has been stated that future tariff reductions on these products will be determined and implemented by each country in accordance with its own procedures. Another notable aspect of the agreement concerns how European exporters may potentially be affected by these reductions. If American goods enter the Chinese market at lower tariff rates, European products on the same shelves may become less competitive in terms of price. The tariff reductions agreed upon by the two major economies may therefore narrow the market share of countries that are not represented at the negotiating table. With this trade agreement bringing the two major global powers together, the possibility of future strategic cooperation and debates over whether competition between them could come to an end have emerged. Given the current international political environment, it can be argued that competition cannot be completely eliminated through trade agreements, but can instead be temporarily slowed down. Rather than viewing the 30-to-30 agreement solely as a basis for reconciliation, it can be interpreted as providing the two major powers with space to sustain their respective growth and strengthen competition under relatively fair and cooperative conditions. An analysis of US-China relations indicates that the economy can no longer be considered separately from security. This is because the two countries do



not view each other merely as trading partners; they also carry strategic vulnerabilities for one another. The interdependence that emerges here may be described in economic terms as mutual dependence, but the underlying message can be expressed as: “We are dependent on each other to the extent that we can harm one another.” On September 29, US President Trump’s remarks that cooperation with China in artificial intelligence could put US companies at a disadvantage demonstrate how fragile this channel of cooperation remains. In this context, the possibility that the US-China trade war may come to an end can be considered. However, what is changing is primarily the form of competition, as a complete economic decoupling would be highly costly for both countries. At the same time, economic interdependence itself carries significant risks. One of the strongest strategic meanings of the 30-to-30 arrangement emerges here: “Reduce dependence in sectors you consider dangerous, while continuing trade in other areas.” The increasingly prominent role of a national security-oriented perspective in China’s economic policy may further deepen the US-China security dilemma in the future. Trade agreements such as the 30-to-30 arrangement, meanwhile, primarily serve to reduce the intensity of this competition.