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Crossing the borders with two exhibitions in Istanbul

Two exhibitions in Istanbul, present a view of the globalisation of crisis. Even though none of the artists are part of the most recent immigration route from war-torn Syria to the West, their take on identity politics, culture and geography paves the way to overcome the fragmentary nature of the current state of globalism.



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The BBC series *Years and Years*, one of the prominent dystopian features of the recent period in television, inverts the course of forced migration to strengthen its bleak take on current world affairs. To avert the risk of giving any spoilers, it should suffice to mention that the series features a Western character who finds himself trapped in dire situations usually identified with Eastern immigrants. Either aiming to play to the Western audience's Orientalist fears or make them confront their own privileged status, this story is an indicator of how the view towards globalism has changed drastically in the last decades. First hailed as a precursor to a world without borders in the 1990s, globalism proved to the contrary in reality, with sanctions being ramped up to prevent the flow of immigrants from the underprivileged parts of the world to privileged countries, thus fortifying borders more than ever.

Two exhibitions in Istanbul, Palestinian artist Basma Alsharif's *And Therefore A Philistine* programmed by Farah Aksoy at SALT Galata, and the collaborative project *Up above was fog, down below there was a cloud of dust* curated by Golnar Tabibzadeh and

Merve Ünsal at Depo Istanbul, present a view of the globalisation of crisis and put forth nomadism as a possible strategy to face its shortcomings. Even though none of the artists are part of the most recent immigration route—from war-torn Syria to the West—that inspired the series *Years and Years*, these artists' take on identity politics, culture and geography paves the way to overcome the fragmentary nature of the current state of globalism.

Basma Alsharif, born in Kuwait and raised in France and U.S., is based in Cairo at present, and her exhibition presents the ways in which she comes to terms with her status as a member of the Palestinian diaspora. The title of one of her installations, *Trompe l'Oeil*, which transfers the artist's living room in California to SALT Galata's first floor, explicitly speaks for the whole exhibition with its allusions to the construction of reality. The work, composed of furniture pieces, wall murals and a video, provides the viewer with glimpses of the artist's daily life activities, as well as the historical context with regards to her diasporic existence as a Palestinian living abroad. While the video presents the artist engaged in her daily life—cooking, caressing her partner, working on archival images—the murals depicting her living room feature details, through which the viewer is encouraged to confront the colonial past of the Middle East, embodied in three photographs hung on the wall and taken from the archive of T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia), a crucial figure in the history of West's interference in the region. The introductory text of the exhibition specifically draws attention to Alsharif's use of these images without permission, a detail echoing the artist's search for a narrative outside the *officially* acknowledged accounts of the events that led to the dispersion of Palestinians around the world.

However, delving into and countering official history is only one of the strategies that Alsharif employs in *And Therefore A Philistine*: the scope of the exhibition extends further to play with the medium of storytelling to reflect on the diaspora's relation with notions such as home, borders, mobility and geography. It is revealing how signifiers of time and culture are brought out throughout the exhibition, just to be subverted or distorted later. *A Philistine*, the installation inspired by and featuring the novella of the same title by the artist, depicts an imaginary journey on the train routes of Haifa-Tripoli-Beirut and the Palestine Railways. Yet the artist complicates her work's reference to the literary genre of travelogue, by inverting the temporal flow—the story begins in present day Lebanon and ends in New Kingdom Egypt (16th-11th century)—and deforms the related archival material to obstruct their claim to representation. The film *Ouroboros*, an homage to the Gaza Strip, features intertitles indicating the times of the day, such as "morning", "dawn", "evening" and "dusk" without adhering to their temporal order. Inspired by Nietzsche's concept of "eternal return," the film renders a circular notion to the timely flow of events, an approach that also informs its representation of space: the journey depicted in the film is devoid of time and space unity. A house in the suburbs of a U.S. city, a backwoods area, a mansion in Europe and Palestine are linked together in such a way that transforms the diaspora's longing for a home into a type of permanent being, rather than representing their desire to go back in a linear fashion. Hence, Alsharif puts forth the ambiguities of belonging to a diaspora to search for a form of existence outside the borders, cultural

constraints and so on.

Up above was fog, down below there was a cloud of dust, which is being exhibited at Depo, also posits ambiguity as its driving force. The exhibition features works by 15 artists from Iran and Turkey who came together in October 2019 for a collaborative project curated by visual artists Golnar Tabibzadeh and Merve Ünsal under the coordination of Aysun Aracı. The concepts of collaboration and participation take an unprecedented turn in the exhibition as the artists have been encouraged to take the fragile state of their respective geographies into account. The borders pertaining to the notions of body and land are subverted throughout the exhibition, providing the concepts such as agency of the artist, economic instability and national constraints with a slippery ground. Aiming to draw attention to the volatile nature of intellectual and cultural labor, Setareh Shahbazi appoints a different artist, Reyhaneh Mehrad, to participate in the exhibition. The economic instability within the region, which renders the methods such as funding compulsory for artistic production, is also echoed in the setting Şafak Çatalbaş chooses for her video *Blue Bird of Happiness*: the performer is completely wrapped in a blue suit, recalling the image compositing technique of blue screen (or the chroma key) used mainly in cinema and television to insert image within another image, and is sitting cross-legged in a mall, a prominent symbol for economic globalization. The artist almost creates a human shaped void in the middle of the people shopping, dining or just strolling in the mall. The same posture of a sitting figure emerges in Sarminaz Barseghian's installation *To Re-member* via cut-out icons that evoke connotations of rigidly-drawn generic figures that one can find in textbooks. These figures gradually lose their contours and evolve into amalgams of limbs that mingle into geography, as if suggesting a transitory relationship between humans and their surroundings. Thus, spatial constructs are rendered meaningless through these artists' efforts to foster a new type of communication between themselves, and globalization's attempts to fixate and describe are once again confronted.

● Topics

[art](#) / [Basma Alsharif](#) / [culture](#) / [Depo](#) / [exhibition](#) / [Golnar Tabibzadeh](#) / [identity](#) / [Istanbul](#) / [Merve Ünsal](#) / [Palestine](#) / [SALT](#) / [West](#)

Who is Erman Ata Uncu?

Erman Ata Uncu is an art writer and researcher. Born in Istanbul, he graduated from Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University's sociology department and completed his master's degree in Film Studies in the University of Amsterdam. He worked as an in-house editor and correspondent in Turkish daily, Radikal between the years 2004 and 2014 and has contributed to art publications such as Istanbul Art News, Art Unlimited, Milliyet Sanat on a regular basis.

The most frequently asked question about Turkey nowadays

Murat Yetkin writes: Kavala is the most Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) about Turkey nowadays. Osman Kavala's case seems to have become the symbolic case regarding the judiciary practices in Turkey in the eyes of the Western world.

Columns



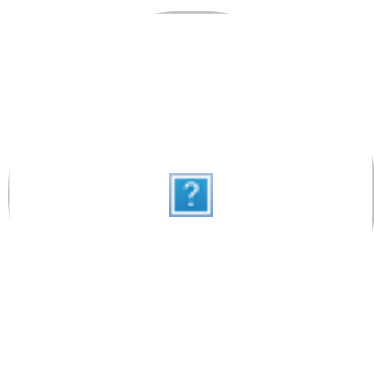
Ece Temelkuran

A table for the ephemeral



Nevşin Mengü

What happened in Gezi did not stay in Gezi



Erman Ata Uncu

Crossing the borders with two exhibitions in Istanbul



Nicholas Danforth

A quasi-historical blend of documentary and dramatic reenactment

Politics

● Politics

Turkish court acquits dismissed HDP mayor Ahmet Türk

A Mardin court has acquitted veteran Kurdish politician Ahmet Türk and Necla Yıldırım of charges that had previously led to their dismissal respectively as Mardin mayor and Mazıdağı district mayor. The investigations against Türk and Yıldırım were launched after they attended a funeral ceremony of a YPG member in 2015.

● Turkey-Russia

Russia and Turkey are close, but will disagree: Lavrov

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has praised the good ties between Moscow and Ankara, adding that the countries will sometimes disagree. "We have a very good relationship with Turkey. It does not mean that we must agree on all the issues," he said. "I strongly believe that in the relations between any two countries there cannot be a complete consensus on any problem," Lavrov added.

● Science & Tech

UK aims to establish FTA with Turkey before 2020 ends

The United Kingdom will prioritize signing a free trade agreement with Turkey by the end of 2020, Ambassador to Turkey Dominick Chilcott said at the fourth UK Technology Conference held in Istanbul on Feb. 17. London will use its newfound "freedom to maneuver" in trade to create free trade policies and free ports around

the country, and will impose new tariffs to promote free trade.

● Politics

HDP keeps two-term limit, prepares to name 20 new executives

The HDP decided during a Central Executive Board (MYK) meeting on Feb. 13 not to amend an internal regulation that limits the party executives to two consecutive terms in their positions. Accordingly, 20 current MYK members will not be able to run for a seat in the upcoming party congress set to take place on Feb. 23.

● Politics

Former PM Davutoğlu's Future Party polling at 4 percent

The newly-formed Future Party (FP), established by former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, is currently polling at 3.9 percent, according to surveys conducted by the party. Only 15 percent of people polled said that they had heard of the party. According to party sources, the low figures are likely due to the fact that the party has received practically no coverage from mainstream newspapers and television channels.

● Domestic

Istanbul prosecutor seeks up to 15 years in jail for journalist Deniz Yücel

An Istanbul prosecutor has presented his final sentencing opinion regarding the case of Deniz Yücel, demanding a prison sentence of up to 15 years and three months in jail for the journalist. Yücel was jailed in Turkey from February 2017 to February 2018. After his release, he returned back to Germany.

● Syria

Syrian gov't recognizes Armenian genocide

Syria's parliament has backed a resolution

condemning the mass killings of Armenians by the Ottoman Turks in 1915 as genocide, in a move that came amid increased tensions between Ankara and Damascus in Idlib. In the past, Syria allowed the recognition of the genocide inside the country, but the government did not officially recognize it due to ties with Ankara.

● Politics

Erdoğan describes social media as a 'garbage dump'

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has described social media as a "garbage dump," saying that it became a rampant environment in terms of increasing and varying cyber-bullying. "We will never surrender to this virtual world that people's rights are violated and that they are harassed, deceived, lynched, insulted," Erdoğan said, as he urged ministries to conclude their efforts on the issue rapidly.

● Diplomacy

Iraqi Kurdistan sentences two to death over killing of Turkish diplomat

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has sentenced two people to death over the killing of Turkish diplomat Osman Köse. "The court handed sentences to six people. Two were sentenced to death, one was sentenced to a year behind bars and the remaining three were given two years in prison each," lawyer Birzo Said told Rudaw.

● US

Pentagon denies deal reached between Turkey, US on Idlib

The Pentagon has denied that a deal was reached between Turkey and the U.S. regarding Idlib. "No such agreement was made," Voice of America's Pentagon correspondent Carla Babb said on Feb. 12, citing Alyssa Farah, the chief Pentagon spokeswoman. Babb also said that reports of a closed door meeting between Turkish Defense Minister Akar and his U.S. counterpart Esper is false.

Kremlin expects Ankara to ensure Russians' safety in Turkey

Moscow expects Ankara to ensure the safety of all Russians who work in Turkey, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. "We have no doubt that the Turkish authorities will take the necessary measures to ensure the safety of the Russian envoy and all embassy staff members," Peskov said. Turkish officials have reportedly increased security at the Russian Embassy in Ankara in the wake of threats addressed to Ambassador Alexey Yerkhov.

● Domestic

41 killed in two avalanches in Turkey's east

A total of 41 people have been killed and 75 others injured in two avalanches in the Bahçesaray district of the eastern province of Van. The first avalanche occurred due to bad weather conditions and struck a minibus late on Feb. 4. Rescue workers had been searching for survivors when the second avalanche took place early on Feb. 5, trapping them under snow.

● Politics

Turkey's ruling AKP membership slides further

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's ruling AKP has lost over 15,000 members within 50 days, compounding its difficulties after two founding members broke ranks to set up rival parties. As of Feb. 4, the membership of the party stands at 10.19 million members.

● Syria

Russia warns Turkey on nationalist leader's 'provocative' remarks on Syria

Russian Foreign Ministry has warned Turkey to refrain from provocative statements on Idlib, days after MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli directed accusations toward Moscow. "We believe that in the context of the tense situation in the northwest of Syria, it is worth exercising restraint and in particular refraining from provocative comments that do not contribute to a constructive dialogue between our countries," the ministry said.

● Turkey-US

Kalın, Jeffrey focus on finding solution to Idlib crisis

Turkish Presidential Spokesperson İbrahim Kalın and U.S. Special Envoy for Syria James Jeffrey highlighted during their meeting on Feb. 12 that Idlib deal must be upheld and the Syrian regime attacks need to stop as soon possible for a political solution process to be initiated in the war-torn country, according to a statement released by the Turkish presidency.

● Censorship

Free Web Turkey platform established to combat internet censorship

The Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA), in conjunction with the Social Information and Communication Association (TBİD) and the Alternative Information Association (AltBilişim) and other organizations have established the Free Web Turkey platform in an effort to combat and create awareness regarding online censorship in the country.

● World

Greek EU lawmaker sanctioned over tearing up Turkish flag

Greek far-right MEP Lagos has been suspended from joining the European Parliament's activities for four days and deprived of seven days of daily allowance after tearing up a paper copy of the Turkish flag during a session in January.

● Diplomacy

Ankara condemns European Parliament for hosting Kurds sought by Turkey

Ankara has condemned the European Parliament for hosting an event attended by Kurds sought by Turkey with a red warrant over PKK membership, saying that it "ignores the principle of fighting terrorist organizations without discrimination." "We invite EU institutions and EU member states to stand firm against terrorist organizations and no longer take terrorists under its wing," the Foreign Ministry said.

● Politics

Turkish opposition CHP re-elects Kaftancıoğlu as its Istanbul chair

Canan Kaftancıoğlu has been re-elected as the Istanbul provincial chair of the main opposition CHP. Kaftancıoğlu was the only person who put forward her candidacy for the position, which was criticized by some party delegates, who found the process as "undemocratic."

● Politics

Poll shows İmamoğlu as only candidate who could beat Erdoğan in election

Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu from main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) was revealed to be the only potential candidate who could win against President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in a potential presidential election, a survey by Bahçeşehir University's Social Research Center revealed.

● Diplomacy

Erdoğan accuses US of threatening him, intel chief

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has accused the United States of threatening him and National Intelligence Agency (MİT) chief Hakan Fidan. "Unfortunately, the U.S. threatens me and my

intelligence chief, as well as some financial institutions in Turkey," Erdoğan told members of his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) on Feb. 5.

● Politics

Demirtaş's HDP membership 'dropped over ban from politics'

The party membership of former HDP co-chair Selahattin Demirtaş was dropped over his ongoing ban from politics, daily *Birgün* reported. Demirtaş, who has been in jail for over three years, is no longer a member of the HDP due to a case that he was charged with "making propaganda of a terrorist organization." The judgement was later reversed, but his party membership had already been dropped by then, the daily said.

● Diplomacy

US halts secretive drone program with Turkey over Syria incursion

The U.S. has halted a secretive military intelligence cooperation program with Turkey that for years helped Ankara target the PKK, four U.S. officials told Reuters, adding that the U.S. late last year stopped flying the intelligence collection missions that targeted the PKK, which both the U.S. and Turkey classify as terrorists. "This makes the anti-PKK campaign more difficult and more costly for Turkey," an official said.

● Diplomacy

US court denies Turkey's request to dismiss protesters' suit over DC attack

A U.S. federal court has denied a request made by Turkey to dismiss a civil suit by protesters who were violently beaten while staging a demonstration against Turkish President Erdoğan in Washington D.C. in 2017, *The Hills* has reported. "Defendant Turkey points to no indication that an attack by the protesters was imminent," US District Judge Kollar-Kotelly

wrote in her judgement.

● Diplomacy

EU 'to sanction two Turkish nationals over gas drilling'

European Union diplomats reportedly agreed to impose travel bans on two Turkish nationals and freeze their assets. The decision to target the two individuals was reached at a meeting of EU diplomats in Brussels on Feb. 4, Bloomberg cited unnamed sources as saying. The move is in retaliation for Ankara's gas prospecting in disputed waters near Cyprus.

● Politics

Main opposition CHP announces boycott of CNN Türk

Main opposition CHP has officially announced its decision to boycott CNN Türk due to its biased coverage against the party. CHP deputy chair Özkan said CNN Türk has been "functioning as if it is the advertising agency" of the ruling AKP, calling on the TV channel to adopt "independent and objective" principles of journalism.

● Politics

Erdoğan's approval rate drops to lowest since October 2018

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's approval rate has dropped to the lowest it's been since October 2018, revealed "Turkey's Pulse 2020" survey by Metropoll research company. His approval rate rose as high as 48 percent during Ankara's Operation Peace Spring into Northern Syria in October 2019.

● Domestic

Iranian rapper Tataloo released from detention in Turkey

Iranian rapper Amir Tataloo, who was detained on Jan. 28 in Istanbul, has been released from police custody, Radio Free Europe reported. Turkish police told the BBC that Tataloo was

detained for “visa violations,” while also confirming that a red alert had been issued for the rapper on drug-related issues.

● Sport

Cizrespor back on field after talks with governor

Cizrespor, a football team representing the southeastern province of Şırnak’s Cizre district, has reversed its decision to quit the Turkish league. The club announced its original decision last week in protest of ongoing discrimination against the club. After Şırnak Gov. Pehlivan held talks with the club's executives and promised to support them, Cizrespor footballers hit the field again on Feb. 15.

● Human Rights

Diyarbakır Prison inmates say Elif Şafak’s book withheld from them

Renowned Turkish novelist Elif Şafak's book "The Gaze" has been withheld from inmates at the women's prison in Diyarbakır. The prison management gave the copies of the book to the inmates who wished to read it, but then only a week later, they collected them back citing no reason, said HDP deputy Ebru Günay during a meeting of the Parliamentary Human Rights Commission.

● Domestic

Top court warns lower courts to abide by its rulings

The Constitutional Court said that a lower court's refusal to implement its decision on the release of Mehmet Altan has violated the journalist's “right to personal liberty and security.” Accordingly, it ordered that Altan should be paid 30,000 Turkish Liras (\$5,025) in compensation. The top court also warned lower courts to abide by its rulings.

● World

US city appoints first Turkish-

American police chief

İbrahim "Mike" Baycora has become the first Turkish-American police chief in the history of the United States. He was sworn in with his left hand on a copy of the Quran as the police chief of the city of Paterson in New Jersey.

● **Politics**

Erdoğan pardons man convicted of taking part in burning 35 people alive

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has pardoned Ahmet Turan Kılıç, who was sentenced to aggravated life imprisonment over the Sivas Massacre, which took place when a mob set the Madımak Hotel in the Central Anatolian province of Sivas on fire on July 2, 1993, killing 33 intellectuals and two hotel personnel. Erdoğan lifted the 86-year-old man's sentence due to the health problems that he has been suffering from.

● **Diplomacy**

US court grants Halkbank reprieve in Iran sanctions case

A federal appeals court granted a temporary halt in the U.S. prosecution of Turkish lender Halkbank over sanctions violation charges while it weighs other requests by the bank. Prosecutors have deemed the bank a fugitive from justice, asking a judge to hold it in contempt and impose fines until it begins answering the charges. Shares of Halkbank surged 7.27 percent when markets opened on Feb. 4 following the decision.

● **Ukraine**

Turkey to provide financial aid to Ukrainian army

Turkey will provide financial aid to the Ukrainian army, Ukraine's ambassador to Turkey, Andrey Sibiga, has said, adding that a deal is set to be signed between President Erdoğan and Ukrainian President Zelensky during the former's visit to

Kiev. "According to the deal that will be signed during this trip, the Turkish side will provide financial aid worth 200 million liras for the needs of the Ukrainian army," Sibiga said.

● Diplomacy

Couple denied French citizenship over political commitment to Turkey

Murat Büyük, who has been living in France for the past 43 years, was denied citizenship last month after French authorities said that his loyalty to France can't be guaranteed. Shortly after, Büyük's wife Şerife Büyük's application was also denied. "Since you are his wife, you have a common living space, you can't deny his political commitment that you support indirectly," the letter sent to Şerife Büyük read.

● World

Sadrists take control of Turkish Restaurant building occupied by protesters

Supporters of Moqtada al-Sadr took control of the Turkish Restaurant building, as the political leader urged his supporters known as "blue hats" on Feb. 2 to work with authorities to ensure schools and businesses can operate normally again. The Turkish Restaurant, a tall building occupied by demonstrators since October, was mostly empty after Sadrists drew out demonstrators and the blue hats stood guard outside it.

● Domestic

Marmara town to demolish 24 schools due to quake risk

The Governor's Office in the Marmara town of Bursa will demolish 24 school buildings after inspectors determined that they would be risky in the event of an earthquake. Students from 15 of the schools will be transferred to the closest school in their district.

● Politics

Vienna bus drivers from Turkey laid off for nationalist hand sign

Four bus drivers in Vienna were laid off after getting caught signing the nationalist gesture "Grey Wolf" on surveillance footage. The sign, often associated with the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), was banned by Austrian legislature in 2018 as part of an effort to "combat extremism."

● Domestic

Istanbul police detain 16 in operation against Russian mafia

Istanbul police have detained 16 people in an operation carried out against members of a Russian criminal organization after determining that they arrived in the city to murder another gang leader. During the raids, the leader of the Russian group, Andri Malyi, two Ukrainians, one Russian, four Georgians and eight Azerbaijanis were detained. Police seized one Kalashnikov rifle, 11 pistols and plenty of bullets in the operation.

● Politics

Demanding PKK leader's release 'freedom of expression,' Constitutional Court rules

Turkey's Constitutional Court has ruled that sentencing two people for demanding the release of jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and initiating a campaign for this was a violation of their right to freedom of expression. A Diyarbakır court in 2015 sentenced two people each to 10 months in jail on terrorism charges for distributing campaign forms with Öcalan's picture on them.

● Culture

Foundation led by Erdoğan's daughter buys Muhammad Ali estate in Chicago

A foundation led by President Recep Tayyip

Erdoğan's daughter Esra Albayrak has bought the estate of iconic boxer Muhammad Ali in Chicago, Illinois.

● Diplomacy

Turkish parliament slams Trump's Middle East plan

The Turkish parliament on Jan. 29 issued a joint declaration condemning the Middle East plan presented by U.S. President Trump a day earlier. The plan "is against U.N. decisions and the perspective of the two-state solution," the declaration read. President Erdoğan also lambasted the plan as "absolutely unacceptable," saying it is "legitimizing Israel's occupation."

● Human Rights

Turkey tops ECHR list in freedom of expression violations in 2019

Turkey was the subject of the highest number of judgments regarding violations of freedom of expression in 2019, the European Court of Human Rights' annual activity report revealed on Jan. 29. Among the total 68 judgements in which the court has found a violation of freedom of expression under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, 35 were filed by citizens of Turkey.

● World

Barzani expresses concern for Syrian Kurds' future in meeting with Russians

Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leader Masoud Barzani has told Mikhail Bogdanov, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister and President Vladimir Putin's Special Representative for the Middle East and Africa, that he is concerned about the future of Syrian Kurds. "President Barzani presented his opinion and suggestions for resolving the question of the Kurdish people in Syria," a statement released from Barzani's office read.

● Earthquake

Geologist: Istanbul earthquake magnitude will be at least 7.2

Following the deadly earthquake in the province of Elazığ that killed 41 people last month, geologist and earthquake expert Dr. Naci Görür wrote in a series of tweets that the expected major Istanbul earthquake will be at least a 7.2 on the Richter scale, with an epicenter in the Kumburgaz area of the western suburb of Büyükçekmece.

● Domestic

Police detain 14 in anti-ISIS operations in Turkey

Police detained 14 ISIS suspects in anti-terror operations conducted in the capital Ankara and the southern province of Adana on Jan. 29. Those detained in Ankara are suspected of ISIS membership and communicating with the conflict zones abroad, while those in Adana are of Syrian origin.

● Diplomacy

Belgium supreme court: PKK-linked probe outside our jurisdiction

Belgium's Court of Cassation, the highest appeal level in the country, on Jan. 28 ratified a ruling of a lower court that acquitted 36 individuals and two companies accused of activities involving the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The case concerns a landmark decision of the Court of Appeals in March 2019 which said that the PKK's armed struggle is "Turkey's domestic dispute" and Belgian anti-terror laws cannot be imposed on the suspects.

● Domestic

Egyptian actor mistaken for Syrian refugee gets violently beaten in Istanbul

An Egyptian actor who works as a stunt double

in Turkish shows was violently beaten in Istanbul when a man mistook him for a Syrian refugee. The man was yelling profanities about Syrians even after the attack was over, which is how Mancy realized what had happened. The actor was on a bus with his sister, sister-in-law and niece who also got hit by the attacker and the actor was treated for a broken nose and a broken arm.

● Domestic

27 Boğaziçi students given jail terms for protesting Turkey's Afrin operation

An Istanbul court has sentenced 27 Boğaziçi students each to 10 months in jail on charges of "spreading terror propaganda" for staging a protest on the campus opposing Turkey's Afrin operation. The court postponed the execution of the sentence for 20 students.

● Health

Turkish police seize 7,000 bottles of bootleg alcohol in tourist resort

Police have seized some 7,000 bottles of bootleg alcohol from a hotel in Bodrum, the popular Aegean tourist destination. Two suspects were detained in the operation on Jan. 30. Also on the same day, gendarmerie units raided a house in the Mediterranean resort city of Antalya, where they also detained two people. Hikes on alcohol taxes have caused surges in bootleg alcohol production in Turkey.

● Domestic

Turkey's first professional boxer Garbis Zakaryan laid to rest in Istanbul

Turkey's first professional boxer Garbis Zakaryan, of Armenian descent, was laid to rest in Istanbul's Şişli Armenian Cemetery on Jan. 29. Main opposition CHP MP Tanrıkulu and HDP MP Paylan have criticized the authorities for not having yet named a public sports center after Zakaryan.

● Domestic

Hundreds of families in Elazığ living in tents in freezing cold after earthquake

Following the disastrous 6.8 Earthquake that struck the southeastern city of Elazığ last week and claimed the lives of 41 people while injuring 1600, thousands of residents are living in tents while at least hundreds are without heating, enduring freezing conditions amid a cold winter. While some tents have heating stoves, others lack them, causing families to endure freezing conditions in a park where the pond has frozen over.

● Diplomacy

Germany's Left Party alarmed by gov't refusal of response to Gülen inquiry

Germany's Left Party was refused a response to a parliamentary question about government ties to the Gülen organization, Ankara's primary suspect for the botched 2016 coup, causing alarm among the party's ranks. The German government refused to respond on the grounds that it would affect the operation of intelligence agencies.

● Diplomacy

U.S. commander meets with SDF leader Kobani, promises continued collaboration

General Frank McKenzie, commander of United States Central Command (CENTCOM), met with General Mazloum Kobani, commander of the Kurdish-led SDF, at a military base in eastern Syria on Jan. 25. Kobani reportedly asked McKenzie for reassurance that the U.S. would continue their support of SDF militants, which McKenzie returned with the promise of continued anti-ISIS efforts and collaboration in protecting oil wells.

● Politics

Turkey's center-right parties

‘to form alliance for elections’

Turkey's center-right parties are reportedly preparing to form an alliance to challenge the People's Alliance consisting of the ruling AKP and its nationalist ally MHP in the next elections. Contrary to the Nation Alliance of the last elections, the main opposition CHP won't be included in the alliance formed by these nationalist-conservative parties, Birgün reported on Jan. 23.

● Politics

Turkey's former PM accuses economy administration of manipulating inflation figures

Turkey's former Prime Minister Davutoğlu has accused economy administration of manipulating inflation figures. "Competent people need to be in charge of this administration. Think about a doctor who tells his patient that he is fine by changing his test results. The patient says 'I'm dying,' but the doctor says, 'Look at the figures, your test results are fine.' The economy administration in Turkey is doing exactly this," he said.

● Diplomacy

US company laying off its 424 staff at İncirlik air base

The staff of İncirlik military air base in Turkey's southern Adana province is being reduced by 424 employees. The U.S. company handling maintenance services on the air base cited "the U.S.' reducing its presence in Syria" as the reason of the staff reduction, according to an official of the Turkish Defense Workers' Trade Union.

● Human Rights

Turkish intel agency report in unsolved murders case 'consist of presuppositions'

The Ankara First Heavy Penal Court has released its justified decision on ruling for the acquittal of 19 suspects, including former Interior Minister Mehmet Ağar, in the case into 18 unsolved

murders that were committed in 1990s, deeming all reports by Turkish Intelligence Agency (MIT), parliament, ministries and commissions "insufficient" to convict the suspects.

● Economics

Boeing's responsibility 'buried' in safety report on fatal 2009 Turkish Airlines crash

The manufacturer Boeing had fault in the crash of a Boeing 737-NG from the Turkish Airlines fleet in 2009, The New York Times reported. The aircraft was an earlier version of the Boeing 737-Max, the grounded plane that killed 346 people in crashes in Indonesia and Malaysia. Expert reports that are unavailable to the public revealed "risky design choices and faulty safety assessments" on the part of Boeing.

● Diplomacy

59 German citizens jailed in Turkey

Currently, 59 German citizens are in Turkish prisons, and another 74 German citizens are barred from leaving Turkey pending investigation, German Foreign Ministry has announced. German Chancellor Merkel is expected to discuss this issue during her meeting with Turkish President Erdoğan in Istanbul on Jan. 24.

● Culture

Wikiferheng aims to establish comprehensive Kurdish dictionary with 1 million entries

Wikiferheng is an online Kurdish dictionary that currently consists of 800,000 words, idioms, aphorisms, and other entries. The editors say they aim to reach 1 million words and establish a dictionary that reflects the prominent position of Kurdish among the languages of the world.

● Politics

Finance minister's land

ownership on Kanal Istanbul route stirs debate

As the row over the AKP and the main opposition CHP over Kanal Istanbul continues, a report by daily Cumhuriyet said that Finance Minister Berat Albayrak purchased land on the route of the controversial canal a year after President Erdoğan announced the plans to build it. Albayrak's lawyer Ahmet Özel released a statement shortly after Cumhuriyet's report, saying that "it was an ordinary purchase."

● Politics

Turkey ranks 110th in global democracy index

Turkey remains 110th in the Economist's latest global democracy index. The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) categorized Turkey as the only "hybrid regime" in western Europe -- the second lowest after "authoritarian regime."

● Diplomacy

S-400 deal 'doesn't include technology transfers to Turkey'

A military diplomatic source told TASS that the deal signed between Ankara and Moscow regarding the S-400 missile defense systems doesn't include technology transfers, even if it's partial. The source also said that more than 120 surface-to-air guided missile have been supplied by Russia to Turkey along with a regiment set of S-400 systems.

● Health

Number of unvaccinated children in Turkey surges in recent years

Due to anti-vaccination sentiment that has increased in Turkey in recent years, the number of those refusing to vaccinate their children has skyrocketed from 183 to 23,000 in only 7 years. The consequences for public health have also quickly revealed themselves, as the number of

those catching measles during the first 9 months of last year increased fivefold compared to the same period in 2018, reaching 2666.

● Domestic

Dysfunctions at Istanbul's new airport turn old one into VIP runway

As thousands of passengers suffered from delays and cancellations in flights during last week's storms at Istanbul's new airport, Atatürk Airport continued to function properly, with Russian President Vladimir Putin using it. Atatürk Airport started to be used for cargo planes following the transfer of flights to the new airport - a move the opposition continues to criticize due to continuing disrupts in flights at the new one.

● Society

Majority of population thinks Turkey should remain NATO ally

A majority of the Turkish population thinks that Turkey should remain a NATO, a survey by private polling company Metropoll revealed. The poll also asked participants how they think Turkey should position itself between the US and Russia, and half of the participants said Ankara should remain neutral.

● Domestic

94 women killed despite state protection in Turkey in last five years

Some 94 women have been killed while under state protection between 2015 and 2019, the Turkish Interior Ministry said. The ministry also said that over 1 million incidents of violence against women occurred between 2014 and 2019, leading to the death of 1,890 women.

Economics

● Economics

Turkey's top banking authority further lowers swap limit by 15 percent

Turkey's Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BDDK) ruled that Turkish banks are allowed to swap only 10 percent of their legal capital. In August 2018, The BDDK had already lowered the limit of swaps, futures, forwards and options with a foreign currency and a Turkish Lira leg to 25 percent of the banks' legal capital.

● Economics

Turkish bank accounts currently holding \$224.7 billion of foreign currency

The total amount of Turkish lira held in bank accounts in Turkey reached the 1.2 trillion TL mark, while accounts denominated for foreign currency held \$224.7 billion, according to recent Central Bank figures pertaining to the week ending on January 31. The amount of consumer credit stood at 460.5 billion TL, while the amount of installment commercial loans totaled 379.5 billion TL. More than a third of the consumer credit, 188.8 billion TL, pertained to mortgage and housing loans.

● Trade secret

Turkish ministry withholds info on olive oil imports from Syria, claiming trade secrecy

A parliamentary question presented to the Agriculture Ministry about olive and olive oil imports from Syria was denied a response on the grounds that the information was based on "trade secrets." Olive imports from the northwestern Syrian town of Afrin have been a topic of debate during the 2020 budget meetings due to concerns about the impact the imports would have on domestic markets.

● Economics

Turkey's foreign currency deposits near \$225 billion

Turkish Lira deposits in banks have increased by 0.08 percent in the last week of January,

reaching 1,259,898,662,000 liras, Turkey's Central Bank (TCMB) Weekly Money and Banking Statistics revealed. Meanwhile, foreign currency deposits have seen a increase of 0.18 percent, reaching \$224,700,000,000.

● Economics

Turkish Central Bank announces optimistic inflation rates for 2020 and 2021

Turkey's Central Bank Governor Murat Uysal announced the inflation rates for this year and 2021 as 8.2 percent and 5.4 respectively. Amid an embattled lira that sunk in value throughout the course of much of 2018, inflation hit 20.3 percent December of that year, while in 2019, inflation remained in the double digits, and was 11.8 percent by the end of the year.

● Economics

HSBC considering exit from Turkey, says report

HSBC is considering selling its Turkey business amid concerns about the country's volatile currency and economic outlook, sources familiar with the matter said, according to a news report released by Reuters on Jan. 29. The bank's retreat from Turkey, where it has operated since 1990, would be one of the biggest exits from a country it has made in recent years as it shrinks its once globe-spanning empire.

● Economics

Eurasia Tunnel fares increase by 56 percent

Taking the Eurasia Tunnel will now take a bigger bite out of drivers' wallet as the tolls have increased by 56 percent as of Feb. 1 for both passenger cars and minibuses. There has been a 119 percent hike in the tolls for the tunnel since it was opened to traffic on Dec. 22, 2016.

● Economics

McDonald's Turkey sold for 280 million liras

McDonald's Turkey's managing company Anatolian Restaurants Management was sold to Birleşik Holding ("United Holding") for a little over 280 million Turkish Liras, approximately \$46 million. Previously the property of one of Turkey's largest conglomerates Anadolu Group, the company stocks will change hand after the approval of the Turkish Competition Board.

● Economics

Turkey to receive info on citizens' foreign assets as part of int'l deal

Turkey is set to receive information on its citizens' assets in foreign countries as part of the Multilateral Competent Authority Agreement (MCAA) that aims to prevent tax evasion in accordance with the Standard for Automatic Exchange of Financial Information in Tax Matters. The system came into force in Turkey on Jan. 1 after it was published in the Official Gazette.

● Economics

Turkey's family hunger threshold equals net minimum wage

The current hunger threshold for a family of four is 2219 TL, according to recent statistics compiled in a report by the Turk-İş labor union, nearly reaching the current net minimum wage, which was determined to be 2324 TL as of January 2020.

● Economics

Yapı Kredi, Akbank fined for insurance violations, shares slide

Turkey's Treasury and Finance Ministry has fined two top banks Yapı Kredi and Akbank 281.8 million Turkish Liras (\$47 million) in total for violating an insurance law. Shares of the banks slipped in response.

● Economics

Turkey's private sector debt tops 210 billion dollars

Turkey's private sector was in more than 210 billion dollars of foreign debt at the end of November 2019, revealed the Central Bank. While \$10.2 billion of the total is floating debt, almost \$200 billion of the total debt is in long-term loans. While 60.9 percent of the foreign loans were in dollars, the second largest slice was euro, making up 33.7 percent.

● Economics

Turkish banking industry's total assets decrease by over 21 billion liras

Total assets of the Turkish banking industry have decreased by over 21 billion liras in the beginning of the year, revealed weekly money and banking statistics by the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey (TCMB). The dip represents a decrease of about 0,8 percent of assets. Turkish Lira assets took majority of the hit with a 0,71 percent decline while foreign currencies dropped by a mere 0,32 percent.

● Economics

Residential sales down in Turkey

Housing sales have decreased by 1.9 percent in 2019, the Turkish Statistical Institute revealed. While 1,348,729 residences were sold in 2019, one third of these sales were mortgages. Istanbul was the city with the highest number of residences sold with 237,675 sales, followed by Ankara and İzmir. Residential sales to foreigners went up by 14.7 percent, reaching 45,483.

● Economics

Turkish central bank cuts interest rates again

Turkey's central bank cut its benchmark rate for the fifth time in six months, as its new governor

continued to ease policy. The bank cut its key rate to 11.25 percent from 12 percent.

● Economics

Nearly 7,000 foreigners get Turkish citizenship via purchasing real estate

According to data obtained from General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre, a total of 6,694 foreigners obtained certificates of conformity in order to become Turkish citizens via purchasing real estate. The lower limit for granting citizenship via real estate purchases was decreased to \$250,000 in September 2018 from one million dollars in 2017, prompting an increase in foreign investments.

Urban Beat

● Culture

Istanbul's Hagia Sophia 2019's most popular tourist destination in Turkey

Hagia Sophia was the most popular touristic site of 2019 with a total of 3,727,361 visitors, Turkey's Culture and Tourism Ministry said. Remodeled as a mosque under the Ottoman Empire, Hagia Sophia was converted into a museum in 1935. The second most visited touristic destination in 2019 was the Mevlana Museum in Rumi's birthplace, the central Anatolian province of Konya.

● Cost of living

Turkey among Europe's 'cheapest' countries to live in

Turkey was revealed to be Europe's second most affordable country to live in by CEOWORLD Magazine. According to a ranking that measures the cost of living, rent, groceries, eating out and purchasing power, Turkey is the 102nd cheapest of 132 countries worldwide.

● Domestic

Istanbul residents to start using mobile transportation app in March

Istanbul residents will soon start using a mobile application at public transportation turnstiles, the municipality said. While a pilot program will be available March, the application eventually aims to make the Istanbulkart subscription, Istanbul's transportation card, into a tool that can be used for multiple purposes.

● Urban Beat

Kadıköy stores offer free meals, services to students in need

The increasing prices of meals at public universities in Istanbul became a major item in the city following the suicide of a student who had posted on Twitter about not having enough money on her cafeteria card to eat. Istanbul's Kadıköy Volunteers Cafe was founded by a group of volunteers who reached an agreement with neighboring restaurants where students could purchase containers of food at reasonable prices.

● Society

Six Turkish cities among world's 'safest cities to live in'

Turkey has six cities in user-generated database Numbeo's safety index rankings for 2020. Student-populated Eskişehir ranked number eight on the list with a safety rating of "high." Bursa, Ankara, Izmir, Antalya and Istanbul were also on the list with safety rankings of "moderate" and higher.

● Domestic

Istanbul's fish sandwich boats to be closed after court ruling

Istanbul's last remaining three fish sandwich boats are soon to be shut down by authorities as the legal saga over the issue has come to an end. An Istanbul court has rejected appeals

made by the owners of the three boats to continue their operations in the historic neighborhood of Eminönü.

● Domestic

Istanbul running out of room to bury its dead

The Istanbul Municipality has announced that within 20 years there will be no space left in the city to bury the dead. "A solution needs to be found, and the best solution is to ensure that they are transported to Anatolia," the municipality's cemeteries bureau head Dr. Ayhan Koç said.

● Domestic

Greeting signs banned at Istanbul Airport

The Istanbul Airport's security commission has banned people from welcoming arrival passengers with pickup signs. Those who do not know the person they are waiting for are required to pay a certain fee and wait for their guests at the "meeting lounge."

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