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The Year of the Family – Turkey's hopes for solving demographic issues

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On 13 January, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan unveiled a programme aimed at increasing fertility rates in Turkey. This initiative is part of the 2025 Year of the Family and aligns with the government's family support policy. The backbone of the programme is universally-paid welfare benefits, including a one-time payment of 5,000 lira (over €130) for the first child and a monthly allowance of 1,500 lira (approximately €40) for the second. Women who have a third and fourth child will receive monthly support of 6,500 and 11,500 lira (approximately €170 and €307), respectively. These benefits will be available to mothers of children born after 1 January 2025 and will be paid until the child reaches the age of five. Eligibility for the programme requires Turkish citizenship and permanent residence in the country. The president also announced preferential loans for newlyweds, support for women in the labour market, and the promotion of a "traditional family model".

The unprecedented increase in spending on family support policies is an attempt to counter declining birth rates and, in the longer term, a demographic crisis. In 2023, Turkey recorded a historically low number of births – 958,000 – while the fertility rate fell to an all-time low of 1.51 births per woman.

Commentary

- **Deteriorating demographic indicators are a growing concern for the government, as they threaten its vision of economic development.** Turkey's society is ageing, and UN projections indicate that the country's population will begin to shrink rapidly in the 2040s (see '*Turkey: a looming demographic crisis*'). The slowdown can be attributed to a prolonged economic crisis, rising living costs, and ongoing civilisational changes. Turkey is a highly urbanised country (77%), and Turkish youth are spending more years in education and marrying later. The average household size is decreasing, while the proportion of single-person households is rising. Until now, Turkey's young and rapidly growing population has been one of its key competitive advantages. The government believed that the country's demographic potential – currently at 85 million – would be a decisive factor in its future regional standing.

- **Conservative values and the traditional family model hold a key place in the programme launched by Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).** Until now, the government has sought to stimulate fertility rates primarily through information campaigns, pro-family rhetoric, and invoking such values as national pride and state power. President Erdoğan has repeatedly urged women to have “at least three children” – a stance that has often sparked controversy, particularly among the more liberal segments of Turkish society. The ruling camp attributes the decline in births in part to cultural and ideological factors – during the presentation of the Year of the Family programme, the president linked it to the influence of Western popular culture and the LGBT+ movement. The defence of ‘family values’ could also serve as a pretext for further tightening policies against opposition NGOs.

- **The Year of the Family programme is one of the first systemic attempts to address the issue of declining birth rates.** However, it is unlikely to be a long-term success, given the relatively low financial support it envisages for mothers (for comparison, the minimum wage stands at 20,000 lira, equivalent to €535) and the short duration of the benefits. The benefits could quickly lose value due to persistently high inflation (officially 44.38% year-on-year in December last year) and the lack of automatic indexation. Furthermore, the demographic shifts Turkey is experiencing – such as urbanisation and extended education – are typical of highly developed countries, yet the government’s policy, which remains focused on ideological issues, appears to overlook this reality. If the fertility rate does not improve, Turkey is likely to face a range of dilemmas. Ankara will have to consider socially unpopular measures such as pension system reform or the opening up country further to immigration. The government will also need to adjust its economic plans to account for changes in the working-age population. Additionally, concerns about labour market challenges could make the authorities reluctant to pursue the mass repatriation of Syrian refugees, who currently number around three million.