November 2026

country report

Foreign Office Türkiye

KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

Türkiye on the Road to COP31: From Host to Shaper of International Climate Diplomacy

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COP31 in Antalya offers Türkiye an opportunity to further strengthen its role as a significant actor in international climate diplomacy. As host of a conference deliberately positioned as a "COP of Implementation," Türkiye is placing emphasis on investment, climate finance, and concrete implementation projects rather than the negotiation of new targets. Turkish climate policy closely links climate action with economic development and energy security. Key priorities of the Presidency include electrification, climate finance, the circular economy, and resilient cities. These priorities also create new opportunities for cooperation with Germany and the European Union, particularly in the fields of industrial transformation, sustainable finance, and the green transition.

I. Introduction

The hosting of COP31[1] (Conference of the Parties) in Antalya from 9 to 20 November 2026 marks an important moment for Türkiye and its role in international climate diplomacy. While previous UN climate conferences were often focused on negotiating new political commitments and targets, questions of implementation have increasingly moved to the forefront. Against the backdrop of a growing gap between climate pledges and their actual realization, the Turkish Presidency is placing particular emphasis on investment, infrastructure, and financing, deliberately positioning COP31 as a "COP of Implementation." In addition, COP31 features an institutional particularity, as Türkiye is hosting the conference jointly with Australia.

For Türkiye, the conference is far more than a climate policy event. It provides an opportunity to bring the country's foreign policy weight into international climate diplomacy and to position itself as an advocate of an approach that seeks to reconcile climate action with economic development and energy security. The selection of Antalya as the host city is also significant from a diplomatic perspective. The region's advanced tourism and event infrastructure, combined with its international orientation, creates favorable conditions for using COP31 as an instrument of Turkish public diplomacy and for enhancing the country's international visibility. At the same time, Antalya has established itself as a recognized venue for international dialogue formats and a platform for global foreign policy debates through the annual Antalya Diplomacy Forum, which regularly brings together high-ranking heads of state and government, ministers, and diplomats from around the world. With an expected attendance of around 120 heads of state and government, more than 400 ministers, and approximately 100,000 guests and delegates from 197 countries, COP31 ranks among the most significant diplomatic gatherings worldwide and will turn Antalya into a central hub of global climate and environmental policymaking for the duration of the conference. Following the NATO Summit in Ankara in July 2026, COP31 is already the second major international event to be hosted by Türkiye in the same year.

II. Türkiye as a Significant Actor in International Climate Diplomacy

Over recent years, Türkiye has strengthened its position in foreign policy, particularly through its mediation efforts in regional conflicts, and has established itself as a diplomatic actor across different geopolitical arenas. These experiences

are now intended to be brought into the sphere of international climate diplomacy. The Turkish government seeks to position itself as a bridge-builder between industrialized, emerging, and developing countries, playing a mediating role especially on issues such as climate finance, technology transfer, and the equitable sharing of responsibilities.

In doing so, Türkiye does not position itself clearly as either an industrialized country or a traditional developing country. Instead, it presents itself as a country that combines characteristics of both groups and therefore claims a unique role in international climate negotiations. This intermediary position is intended to enhance its credibility as a facilitator between different negotiating blocs and interests.[2] This intermediary position enables Türkiye to reconcile the often competing priorities of economic development and climate policy objectives while seeking to balance the interests of different groups of states. At the same time, the country's geographical location at the crossroads of Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa provides it with a unique strategic advantage. The Turkish Presidency intends to leverage this position to foster new partnerships and build broad-based coalitions. The COP31 Presidency also reflects a broader transformation within international climate diplomacy. Whereas climate governance was long dominated by Western industrialized countries, middle powers such as Türkiye are increasingly gaining influence and assuming important roles as bridge-builders between different country groupings, thereby contributing to consensus-building.

This ambition is particularly evident in relation to Africa, Central Asia, and especially climate-vulnerable island states. "As Türkiye, we aim to host a Conference of the Parties that places particular emphasis on vulnerable regions such as Africa and the Pacific, leaves no country behind, and upholds the principles of fairness and justice"[3], emphasized Murat Kurum, Minister of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change and designated COP31 President. It remains to be seen how Türkiye will translate its self-defined bridging role into practice vis-à-vis the major actors in international climate politics. In particular, it will be interesting to observe how the Turkish Presidency navigates and mediates among the differing expectations of the European Union (EU), China, and the countries of the Global South.

Early indications of how Türkiye intends to fulfil this bridging function can already be observed in the preparations for COP31. Most notably, the Turkish Presidency has sought to integrate China into the conference's implementation agenda. Ahead of COP31, Environment Minister Murat Kurum held discussions with representatives of the Silk Road Fund, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and major Chinese energy and infrastructure companies on issues related to climate finance, green industrialization, and resilient urban development.[4] At the same time, the Turkish Presidency has adopted a differentiated approach toward the United States. Murat Kurum argued that a more reserved stance by the U.S. administration does not necessarily have to impede progress on climate goals.[5] Instead, Türkiye is deliberately focusing on cooperation with U.S. companies, investors, and financial actors, thereby seeking to partially circumvent potential political obstacles at the governmental level. This approach underlines the character of COP31 as a "COP of Implementation," which seeks not only to advance intergovernmental negotiations but also to involve businesses, development banks, and investors more directly in the implementation of climate objectives.

Beyond climate policy, COP31 also serves Türkiye as an instrument of foreign policy positioning. By presenting its COP31 vision during the United Nations General Assembly and the New York Climate Week 2026, the Turkish government sought to enhance the country's international visibility and establish Türkiye as a proactive and agenda-setting actor in global climate diplomacy.[6]

III. Turkish Climate Policy: Climate Action as a Tool of Economic and Strategic Transformation

Turkish climate policy is not merely an environmental issue but a cross-cutting policy field. Questions of industrial competitiveness, investment policy, energy security, infrastructure development, and societal resilience are increasingly linked to climate policy objectives. The ratification of the Paris Agreement in 2021 and the adoption of the goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2053 underscore the growing importance of climate policy within Türkiye. At the same time, critics argue that the country still lacks a binding timeline for phasing out coal and that the objective of climate neutrality by 2053 is not fully compatible with its current energy trajectory.

A defining characteristic of Türkiye's approach is the close linkage between climate policy and economic development. From the government's perspective, the green transition should not come at the expense of economic growth, employment, or industrial competitiveness. Instead, climate action is viewed as a means of attracting investment, promoting new technologies, and strengthening the long-term competitiveness of the Turkish economy. This approach has gained additional relevance as climate policy has become increasingly intertwined with international trade and regulatory frameworks. Issues such as supply chain transparency, carbon accounting, product standards, and the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) have a direct impact on the competitiveness of Turkish businesses and add a distinct economic and industrial policy dimension to the green transition.

Closely linked to this logic is Türkiye's energy policy, which aims to diversify the country's energy supply and enhance its long-term resilience.[7] Over the past years, Türkiye has significantly expanded its wind and solar energy capacities. The development of renewable energy sources is not viewed solely as a contribution to climate protection but also as a key component of a broader transformation strategy. At the same time, the country is investing in the expansion of its electricity grid and broader energy infrastructure while seeking to strengthen its role as a regional energy hub connecting Europe, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. Nuclear energy also forms part of this diversification strategy. The Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant, which is expected to become operational under the management of Russia's state-owned corporation Rosatom, is projected to meet approximately ten percent of Türkiye's electricity demand. Overall, Turkish climate policy follows a pragmatic approach in which climate protection, economic development, and strategic modernization are not regarded as competing objectives but as mutually reinforcing goals.

IV. Strategic Objectives of the COP31 Presidency

The guiding principles of the Turkish Presidency are "Dialogue, Consensus, and Action". Dialogue reflects the ambition to incorporate as many interests and perspectives as possible into the process. Consensus is intended to bring together the differing priorities of industrialized, emerging, and developing countries. Action refers to COP31's self-image as an implementation-focused summit, where political commitments are translated into concrete projects, investments, and measurable outcomes.

This emphasis is rooted in the increasingly discussed implementation gap between international climate objectives and their actual realization. In the view of the Turkish Presidency, international climate policy already possesses sufficient targets and ambitions. The principal challenge lies in financing climate action, embedding it institutionally, and ensuring effective implementation. Accordingly, the priorities of COP31 are designed to generate tangible progress in areas where international cooperation can deliver immediate and practical benefits.[8]

A central element of the Turkish agenda is the Zero Waste Initiative, launched in 2017 under the patronage of Emine Erdoğan and now internationally recognized. The initiative aims to promote the reintegration of resources into the economic cycle, while advancing recycling, waste prevention, and resource efficiency. In this context, Türkiye advocates halving the growth of

global waste generation by 2035. The international recognition of this initiative is reflected, among other developments, in the establishment of the International Day of Zero Waste by the United Nations.

The central substantive pillar of the Presidency, however, is the objective of increasing the share of electricity in global final energy consumption from approximately 20 percent today to 35 percent by 2035. This so-called "35 by 35" target is intended to serve as a global point of reference for governments, businesses, and investors. The Presidency regards the electrification of transport, buildings, and industry as a key prerequisite for the decarbonization of the global economy. In support of this objective, it points to analyses by the International Energy Agency (IEA) and the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), which indicate that a substantially higher degree of electrification will be required to keep the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C target within reach.

Another major priority is climate finance. Ahead of COP31, the Turkish government presented its National Green Finance Strategy. Through common standards, improved climate-related data, institutional capacity-building, and financial instruments such as green bonds and sustainability-linked loans, the strategy seeks to facilitate the financing of climate-friendly projects. In doing so, Türkiye aims to establish itself as a regional hub for sustainable finance, although the realization of this ambition will continue to depend on external actors and broader international framework conditions.

From the Turkish perspective, the challenge lies less in a shortage of capital than in the insufficient linkage between available financing sources and investment-ready projects. Consequently, banks, investors, multilateral development banks, and private companies are expected to play a much more prominent role. At the heart of this approach is the Climate Implementation Bridge, one of the flagship initiatives of the Turkish COP31 Presidency. It is designed to connect national climate plans and adaptation strategies with bankable project portfolios, thereby directing capital more effectively toward transformation and adaptation measures. This effort is complemented by initiatives such as the Istanbul Climate Finance Summit, the Business Forum series, and the COP31 Business Forum, through which Türkiye seeks to involve businesses and financial actors more directly in implementing climate objectives.

A further priority of the Turkish COP31 agenda concerns resilient cities. The Turkish government argues that urban resilience not only plays a crucial role in climate adaptation but also represents one of the most cost-effective forms of climate investment. Against this backdrop, it has placed the reconstruction of the earthquake-affected province of Hatay at the center of its climate policy narrative. Türkiye deliberately presents Hatay as a model case demonstrating how disaster preparedness, climate adaptation, and sustainable development can be integrated. The reconstruction effort is intended not only to address the consequences of the 2023 earthquakes but also to promote the transition toward more resilient cities through energy-efficient construction, resource-efficient infrastructure, improved water management, and nature-based solutions. Significantly, Murat Kurum, who serves as COP31 President-designate, has consistently linked these issues throughout his ministerial tenure.

In addition, the Turkish Presidency attaches particular importance to youth and education. Through dedicated formats and the COP31 Youth Forum, younger generations are to be more actively involved in discussions on climate policy and sustainable development. This reflects the conviction that long-term climate action depends on public awareness, education, societal acceptance, and the active participation of young people.

Taken together, these priorities reflect a broader transformation in international climate governance. The success of a COP is increasingly measured not by the number of political declarations adopted, but by whether those commitments lead to concrete projects, investments, and verifiable outcomes. The Turkish Presidency therefore clearly views COP31 as a platform designed to accelerate the transition from ambition to implementation.[9]

V. Points of Convergence for Germany and Europe

Many of the priorities of the Turkish COP31 Presidency overlap with German and European interests. This is particularly true with regard to industrial decarbonization, sustainable finance, and the modernization of value chains in the context of the European Green Deal.

The transformation of Türkiye's export-oriented manufacturing sector is of particular relevance. The European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is increasing the pressure on energy-intensive industries to modernize while creating new opportunities for investment, technology transfer, and industrial cooperation. However, the significance of the EU for Turkish climate policy extends well beyond individual regulatory instruments. As Türkiye's most important trading and investment partner, the EU plays a decisive role in shaping the framework conditions of the country's green transition. Adapting to European climate and sustainability standards is therefore increasingly becoming a matter of economic competitiveness. Therefore, COP31 offers Türkiye an opportunity to position itself as a partner in Europe's decarbonization efforts and as a bridge between Europe's climate ambitions and the development and financing interests of many emerging and developing countries.

Germany has actively supported preparations for COP31. This was particularly evident during the Petersberg Climate Dialogue 2026[10], which was jointly hosted by Germany, the Turkish COP31 Presidency, and Australia in its capacity as negotiating presidency. The meeting served to align political priorities on the road to Antalya and to explore potential areas of compromise ahead of the conference.

Another example of climate cooperation between Germany and Türkiye is their joint leadership of the Climate Club.[11] Established in 2022 under the framework of the G7, the initiative seeks to promote industrial decarbonization, support the development of green lead markets, and facilitate international exchanges on climate-friendly industrial policy. Since 2026, Germany and Türkiye have jointly chaired the Club as part of its rotating leadership structure. The shared chairmanship is intended to strengthen cooperation between industrialized, emerging, and developing economies and to foster the exchange of experiences on industrial transformation, circular economy approaches, and green growth markets.

At the same time, the Climate Club provides an institutional framework for German-Turkish cooperation on industrial decarbonization and climate-friendly economic transformation. Whether and to what extent the joint chairmanship will generate tangible momentum for COP31 remains unclear. While there are clear thematic synergies between the Climate Club's agenda and the priorities of the Turkish Presidency, no specific joint initiatives or negotiation outcomes directly attributable to the co-chairmanship have emerged thus far. Nevertheless, the shared leadership highlights the close climate-policy linkages between Germany and Türkiye and demonstrates the political commitment of both sides to deepening cooperation.

VI. Conclusion

COP31 in Antalya represents far more than the hosting of an international climate conference. For Türkiye, it offers an opportunity to move beyond the role of host and establish itself as an active shaper of international climate diplomacy. At the same time, the Presidency reflects a broader transformation in global climate governance, in which middle powers are gaining influence and increasingly acting as intermediaries between different interests, negotiating blocs, and groups of states.

For Germany and Europe, Antalya will therefore serve as an important test case for the future direction of international climate policy. If COP31 succeeds in narrowing the gap between political commitments, financing, and practical implementation, it could accelerate the transition from a predominantly negotiation-driven model

of climate diplomacy toward one that is more strongly focused on implementation, investment, and measurable outcomes. At the same time, the conference creates new opportunities for deepening German-Turkish and EU-Türkiye cooperation in the fields of industrial transformation, sustainable finance, energy transition, and climate resilience.

Ultimately, the significance of COP31 will not be determined solely by the agreements reached in Antalya, but by whether the conference succeeds in mobilizing the partnerships, investments, and political momentum required to deliver tangible progress on climate action. In this regard, the Turkish Presidency has the opportunity not only to strengthen Türkiye's international standing but also to make a substantive contribution to the evolving architecture of global climate governance.

[1] For the official COP31 website, see: COP31 Türkiye Antalya 2026 UN Climate Change Conference, accessed 6 October 2026.

[2] See Çağla Vural, From New York to Antalya: Türkiye's Implementation-Focused Bridge Approach at COP31, SETA, 02.10.2026, accessed 6 October 2026.

[3] Minister Kurum Announces Türkiye's Nationally Determined Contribution at COP30, Directorate of Climate Change, Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, accessed 6 October 2026.

[4] See Son Güncellenme, Bakan Kurum, Çin'de Türkiye'nin COP31 vizyonunu anlattı, Demirören Haber Ajansi, 14.05.2026, accessed 6 October 2026.

[5] See Bakan Kurum: (COP31) "Amerika bugün böyle düşünüyor yarın farklı düşünür hiç önemli değil", Habertürk, 11.09.2026, accessed 6 October 2026.

[6] See Türkiye'nin COP31 hazırlıkları ABD'de tanıtılıyor, TRT Haber, 21.09.2026, accessed 6 October 2026.

[7] For a more comprehensive analysis, see Markus Hildebrand, Machtfaktor Energie: Wie wichtig wird die Türkei für Deutschland und Europa?, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, accessed 1 October 2026.

[8] See Petersberger Klimadialog 2026, Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Klimaschutz, Naturschutz und nukleare Sicherheit, accessed 5 October 2026.

[9] See Murat Kurum, COP31 Presidency's 3rd letter to the Parties, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, August 2026, letzter Aufruf am 05.10.2026.

[10] See BBVA, COP31: From Commitments to Credible Delivery, 31.08.2026, accessed 5 October 2026.

[11] See Directorate of Climate Change, Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, Türkiye and Germany to Co-Chair the Climate Club, 26.12.2025, accessed 5 October 2026.

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