

Türkiye-Cambodia Military Framework Agreement and the ASEAN balance

A defence pillar is added; trade remains short of the 1 billion dollar target

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Türkiye and Cambodia signed a Military Framework Agreement in Istanbul on 16 October. The agreement gives the bilateral relationship a legal basis for cooperation in defence. Which areas it will cover, and how quickly, will be shaped jointly by Türkiye's new status with ASEAN and the border dispute between Cambodia and Thailand.

In brief

- **The agreement:** Its articles have not been disclosed. It can enter into force only after the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye approves it by law.
- **Trade:** Bilateral trade reached about 400 million dollars in 2025. This equals two-fifths of the 1 billion dollar target set in 2018.
- **Distance to the target:** If annual growth of 18 per cent is sustained, the 1 billion dollar mark is crossed only in 2031.
- **Regional context:** The agreement was signed three months after Türkiye became an ASEAN Dialogue Partner, while the border dispute between Cambodia and Thailand remains on the agenda.

The signing and the context of the visit

The agreement was signed at the Dolmabahçe Working Office in Istanbul by Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan for Türkiye and by Deputy Minister of National Defence Prak Sovanna for Cambodia. The ceremony followed a meeting between President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet; the two leaders also held a joint press conference.

Erdoğan said Türkiye regards Cambodia as "an important partner" in Southeast Asia and welcomed Cambodia's interest in Turkish defence industry products. Hun Manet listed the agreement among the concrete steps taken in politics, defence and security, and said the visit would take cooperation to a "deeper, more practical and broader" level.

Cambodia's official news agency, Agence Kampuchea Presse, reported that trade, investment and private-sector partnerships were also discussed.

Scope of the agreement and the ratification process

The parties have not made the articles of the agreement public. Framework agreements set out general principles and leave specific areas of cooperation to later implementing arrangements. The content of this agreement will become clearer as those arrangements are concluded.

The text must complete the ratification process before it can enter into force. Article 90 of the Turkish Constitution makes the ratification of international agreements concluded on behalf of Türkiye subject, as a rule, to approval by the Grand National Assembly through a law. The explanatory memorandum of the ratification bill to be submitted to Parliament is expected to contain the first official details on the areas of cooperation.

What the trade figures show

The economic side of the relationship is advancing more slowly than the defence side. Erdoğan recalled that the decision to raise trade to 1 billion dollars was taken in 2018, during the visit to Türkiye of Hun Sen, then Prime Minister. According to figures Hun Manet presented at the business forum of the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK), bilateral trade reached about 400 million dollars in 2025, an increase of more than 18 per cent on the previous year. Agence Kampuchea Presse reported that Hun Manet described this rise as "strong momentum" towards the 1 billion dollar target.

The 2025 figure corresponds to about two-fifths of the target. Reaching the target requires annual trade to rise by about 600 million dollars from its 2025 level. The parties did not disclose which product groups drove the increase or how it was split between exports and imports; this breakdown is needed to judge whether the growth will last.

By Stratigma's calculation, if the 18 per cent growth rate is maintained every year, bilateral trade would reach the following levels:

- 2026: about 470 million dollars
- 2028: about 657 million dollars
- 2030: about 915 million dollars
- 2031: the 1 billion dollar mark is crossed, 13 years after the target was set.

A cooperation memorandum between DEİK and the Cambodia Chamber of Commerce was also signed at the business forum. The memorandum gives contacts between the two business communities an institutional channel. The gap between the target and the current level, however, cannot be closed in the short term.

ASEAN status and the Thailand dispute

The agreement was signed three months after a change in Türkiye's status with ASEAN. On 21 July 2026, by a decision taken at the 59th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Manila, Türkiye became an ASEAN Dialogue Partner. It thereby acquired the status held

by 11 dialogue partners, including the United States, China, Russia, India and the European Union.

ASEAN takes its decisions by consensus. The benefits expected from dialogue partnership therefore depend on relations with all member states, Thailand as well as Cambodia.

The border dispute between Cambodia and Thailand escalated into armed conflict in July 2025. Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul and Hun Manet signed the Kuala Lumpur Peace Accord, which provides for maintaining the ceasefire, on 26 October 2025 during the 47th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur. Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, as ASEAN chair, and US President Donald Trump witnessed the signing.

Erdoğan's statement of 16 October shows that the issue remains on the agenda. He said Türkiye hopes the dispute will be resolved "through dialogue and peaceful means on the basis of international law". He added that Türkiye, in cooperation with the Cambodian authorities, had delivered aid to more than 3,000 people affected by the clashes.

The balance in defence cooperation

These statements indicate that Türkiye has adopted a position that does not take sides in the dispute and rests on international law. The content of defence cooperation appears bound by the same balance. Areas such as training, personnel exchanges and institutional capacity are expected to raise fewer sensitivities in the regional balance. The procurement of systems that could be used along the border, by contrast, is likely to be followed more closely in Bangkok.

What to watch

- The submission of the agreement to the Grand National Assembly for approval, and how the explanatory memorandum of the bill defines the areas of cooperation.
- Whether Cambodia's interest in Turkish defence industry products turns into a procurement contract and, if so, which product groups it covers.
- The implementation of the Kuala Lumpur Peace Accord along the Cambodia-Thailand border.
- Bilateral trade in 2026. If the 18 per cent growth rate continues, trade should reach about 470 million dollars by the end of 2026.

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