

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

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POLITICAL ISSUES

Kurdish Issue

PM Erdoğan: Democratic initiative to continue

Wednesday, 13 January 2010 14:43

Today's Zaman

The government's democratic initiative, launched late last summer, which seeks to address the Kurdish question by expanding the rights of Kurds, will continue and will include other minorities and groups, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan has said.

Wednesday, 13 January 2010 14:43

Speaking at his Justice and Development Party's (AK Party) parliamentary group meeting yesterday, Prime Minister Erdoğan said the country's Kurds were not the only group facing problems. In reference to clashes last week in Manisa's Selendi district, where the neighborhood's Roma were driven out of their homes by locals, Erdoğan said: "If my Kurdish brothers have problems, so do my Roma brothers."

I will see to them as well. We will solve these.” The prime minister vowed to address problems facing every community in Turkey. He also criticized the opposition, which reacted negatively to meetings between the government and the chief of general staff. Erdoğan said, “Those who doomed Turkey to darkness for years are now afraid of democracy.”

“There are attempts to form fake debates in Ankara; there are attempts to pull Turkey into useless arguments that will not bring about any good to the country or the nation. For God’s sake, what good will you bring to the country by turning the judiciary into an object of discussion? What will you gain by bringing accusations against judges and prosecutors, by preventing them from carrying out their jobs? What will you gain by depicting state organs as though they were in conflict? The main opposition party was unnerved when we met with the Turkish Armed Forces [TSK] three to five times in the past 10 days. Why are you so unnerved? The prime minister can meet with the chief of general staff as many times as he wants. What is it to you? They say, ‘This does not happen in real democracies.’ You do not know what democracy is [addressing the main opposition party]. No, this is what really happens in democracies. Why are they annoyed? Because they were not used to such things in the past. But they will get used to them.”

He also recalled the main opposition Republican People’s Party’s (CHP) support for suspects standing trial for membership in Ergenekon, a clandestine gang charged with plotting to overthrow the government. “They talk to gangs and the mafia through their lawyers, and we talk to our General Staff, our armed forces. This is the difference between us. How will the people who are defending shady incidents and dark scenarios shape Turkey’s future? [addressing the opposition] What are your plans for this country?”

He said Turkey was democratizing and being freed from its shackles. “Why and who can be unnerved by this? Who can be unnerved by raising the standards of democracy and why?” he asked. Erdoğan also accused the opposition of fear mongering. “They tried to imprison Turkey in a tunnel of fear. They accused the AK Party of hiding its real motives. They attempted to associate us with incidents that have nothing to do with us. When they failed to achieve what they wanted through such methods, they went as far as to implement their own shady policies. They instilled fear in the masses. They attempted to silence the will of the nation.”

Erdoğan also criticized his opponents claims that his government is a “civilian dictatorship” or a “one-man dictatorship.” He said it was the opposition that relied on one-person mechanisms. “In our party, everything is done through our consultation mechanisms. No political party comes close to this,” he said. Erdoğan also noted that the AK Party always tried to reach the widest possible consensus within the party before taking any steps.

He also recalled that the government had undertaken reforms that no other party ever had the courage to pursue, asserting that the country is now much more democratic than seven years ago, when the AK Party came to power.

“Who started Turkey’s accession negotiations with the EU? We did. Has anyone been able to talk about the problems of our Alevi citizens? No one could, but we had the courage.” He said the last of several workshops in which Alevi problems have been discussed was slated for the end of this month. After this, Erdoğan said, the government will decide on an Alevi package. The prime minister said the country’s Roma had similar demands, adding that these too will be addressed.

He also criticized both the CHP and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) for using the global economic crisis to instill pessimism in the country. “Nobody has the right to do this. As I always say, expectations are extremely important for the economy, high spirits and good morale. They

are holding on to the rope of the global crisis, spreading pessimism by using three or five other countries as examples. They created a crisis in this country themselves.”

In response to criticism from MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli on the government’s recent increase of pension benefits, Erdoğan said: “What face do you have to say the increase is not enough? Mr. Bahçeli is supposedly protesting the pension raise. If you were so adept at this yourself, then why did you flee after only serving in government for three-and-a-half years?”

Government accelerates democratization, observers skeptical

Thursday, 14 January 2010 09:18

Today's Zaman

The government, within the framework of the democratization initiative, is today bringing a bill on the establishment of an undersecretariat of public order and security to Parliament's General Assembly, but pro-Kurdish observers underline that starting d

“When there are conflicts regarding security and freedom, the government prefers the security axis,” said Öztürk Türkdoğan, chairman of the Human Rights Association (İHD). The government has launched an initiative to solve the Kurdish question, with Interior Minister Beşir Atalay its coordinator but has been under fire since it has yet to take any major concrete steps towards democratization.

“Turkey tried to solve this problem from a security perspective, but it was not helpful at all,” said Türkdoğan.

Sezgin Tanrikulu, former chairman of the Diyarbakır Bar Association, underlined that there are no obstacles before the government for any kind of security operation and that it is hard to understand what the aim of creating an undersecretariat of security and public order is.

“Do they want to appoint a martial law governor to Ankara?” he asked.

During the 1990s martial law was implemented in mostly Kurdish-populated areas, and regional governors with extraordinary powers were appointed. Martial law was abolished after the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) came to power.

The undersecretariat will ensure coordination among the different institutions including the General Staff, the police forces and the National Intelligence Organization (MİT) dealing with terrorism. It will also develop strategies for fighting terrorism.

Government sources underline that with this undersecretariat, which will operate under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior, the fight against terrorism will become more civilian. Atalay frequently emphasized that the basic aim of the initiative is more freedom and democracy for everyone and the elimination of terror. “We want to create an atmosphere in which all views can be expressed without violence and terror and also eradicate all areas that are open to abuse and would lead to separation and polarization. When violence talks, ideas are silenced. We want to change that,” he had said several times.

As part of the democratization process the government also announced that several independent bodies would be established to promote and ensure human rights, including a law to establish an independent body to work to eliminate discrimination.

This draft is expected to be sent to Parliament soon, but there is no timetable yet regarding other steps such changing the structure of the Prime Ministry’s Human Rights Directorate to make it more independent and the approval of United Nations protocols on the prevention of torture.

Another independent body that will be set up to monitor all complaints about security forces, especially related to violations of human rights, is still expected.

Emin Aktar, the chairman of the Diyarbakır Bar Association, said all the expected changes regarding the establishment of these independent bodies are related to democratization and promises Turkey gave the EU but not directly linked with a solution to the Kurdish problem. “The government had promised to change place names to their original Kurdish and also mentioned removing the obstacles before using Kurdish in political campaigning. These have yet to be fulfilled,” Aktar underlined.

He stated that the government withdrew a bill that would not charge children who argue or fight with law enforcement during demonstrations as adults. These children are known as the “stone-throwing children” and are tried as adults due to the Law on Counterterrorism and the Turkish Penal Code (TCK). The draft, which envisages trying these children in juvenile courts, has been withdrawn from the Justice Commission and according to government sources could appear on the agenda next month.

Public hesitant over gov't plan for Kurdish question, survey reveals

Friday, 15 January 2010 21:25

Today's Zaman

The results of a recent opinion poll have shown that the Turkish public is hesitant about ongoing government efforts for settlement of the decades-old Kurdish question through a massive initiative package, with only 38.7 percent of respondents lending support.

A full 53.8 percent of respondents said they do not support the initiative at all, while 7.4 percent said they did not have an opinion on it. The poll was conducted by Professor Özer Sencar, Dr. Sıtkı Yıldız and Dr. Ünal Bilir of the Ankara-based MetroPOLL Strategic and Social Research Center. The poll focused primarily on recent political developments in Turkey.

According to the survey, the staunch opponents of the Kurdish initiative were supporters of the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). A majority of followers of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) lend strong support to the initiative.

The AK Party government announced its intention to settle the Kurdish question through peaceful methods during the summer. The expectation is that the democratic initiative will grant the country's Kurds increased cultural and linguistic rights.

Turkey's Kurdish question has existed since the first years of the republic, but it turned violent in 1984 after the establishment of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). More than 40,000 civilians and security forces have been killed in clashes so far.

One of the questions in the survey was on the ability of the government to manage the initiative process. More than a third of participants said the government was successful in managing the process, while almost 60 percent said the government was unsuccessful. Among the reasons cited by respondents for the failure to manage the initiative well were a lack of preparation on the part of the government, the AK Party's failure to fully inform the public of its intentions, the position of the PKK as interlocutor in the process and public fears that the initiative would lead to divisions in society.

Respondents were also asked their opinion on the closure of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) in December by the Constitutional Court, on charges of separatism. The DTP was often the focus of harsh criticism due to its close links to the terrorist PKK. Almost 70 percent of respondents said the top court was right to disband the party. Slightly more than 25 percent said the opposite, while 5.3 percent said they had no idea.

Nineteen deputies of the now-defunct party joined the BDP after the closure of their party. Two others were banned from politics for five years.

However, those polled were divided into two camps over the closure of political parties in Turkey. Asked whether a political party should be banned even if they fail to distance themselves from acts of violence and terror, 48.9 percent replied yes while 45.7 replied no.

AK Party still well ahead of its rivals

Pollsters also questioned the public over their voting behavior. If parliamentary elections were to be held today, 32.3 percent of those polled said they would vote for the AK Party, a figure very close to the one in a similar poll in November of last year. The figure is, however, much lower than in the July 22, 2007 poll, in which the ruling party won around 47 percent of the vote. This figure is likely to increase by at least 4 or 5 percent at the ballot box for the AK Party, through the split of the vote of those who are undecided, which the survey shows to be around 20 percent. Among the undecided, many said they will not go to the ballot box or will cast a blank vote.

The CHP would receive only 16.2 percent of the votes cast, and the MHP would garner 14.4 percent, indicating an approximately 6 percent decrease for the CHP and 4 percent decrease for the MHP in public support when compared to the results of the MetroPOLL survey in November. According to pollsters, the main reasons behind such a decrease are a series of gaffes by politicians, the most remarkable of which came from CHP Deputy Chairman Onur Öymen on Nov. 10, praising the bloody move of the state against the Dersim Rebellion. Öymen implied that a 1937 rebellion of Alevis in the eastern province of Tunceli, then known as Dersim, was a terrorist revolt. His remarks offended the Alevi community, who are traditional supporters of the CHP.

One of the most surprising findings of the survey was growing support for Mustafa Sarıgül, mayor of İstanbul's Şişli district, who is expected to transform his Turkey Movement for Change (THD) into a political party in April. A total of 5.8 percent of respondents said they would vote for Sarıgül in the elections.

Public supports protests by workers, pharmacists

Concerning a question over a series of protests by workers who were laid off in the privatization of Tekel, Turkey's alcohol and tobacco monopoly, 60.6 percent said they support the protests.

More than 36 percent said they do not support the protests, and 2.9 declined to comment.

Asked about protests by Turkey's pharmacists, who shut their pharmacies for one day in December in protest of a government plan that would serve to reduce their profits, 56.4 percent of respondents said the pharmacists were right to protest the government's move. More than 37 percent, however, said they did not think the pharmacists were justified in their protest.

Ambivalence persists on KCK operations

When asked about the handcuffing of 35 suspects, including some DTP mayors, by security forces while they were on their way to give testimony to public prosecutors as part of a probe into the Kurdish Communities Union (KCK), allegedly the urban arm of the PKK, 24.8 said the handcuffing incident was against human rights. A total of 66.6 percent, however, gave full support to the handcuffing, saying it was for security measures.

The handcuffing of Kurdish mayors caused a wave of indignation among the country's Kurdish population as many found it uncalled for.

More than half of respondents, however, said the incident would have a negative impact on the government's Kurdish initiative. Slightly more than 30 percent said it would have a positive impact on the initiative.

According to the poll, optimism about Turkey's future was not high. In response to the question "In which direction overall do you think Turkey is headed?" 65.8 percent said Turkey would change for the worse, while 29.9 percent said for the better.

The poll was conducted from Jan. 3-8 by telephone among a random national sampling of 1,614 adults residing in cities, towns and villages. The margin of error for the overall poll was 2.5 percentage points, with a 95 confidence level.

Women's rights marred by violence in the Southeast

Friday, January 15, 2010

TIME TURK

Domestic violence is the biggest obstacle to developing women's rights in the predominantly Kurdish Southeast. A local organization in Van became a driving-force for women to stand up for their rights

The Kurdish ethnic struggle in the Southeast has hampered efforts to diminish domestic violence and improve women's rights, according to the head of a leading local organization.

The Kurdish ethnic struggle came before women's struggle in the predominantly Kurdish city of Van, said Zozan Özgökçe, founder of Van Women's Association, or VAKAD.

"When there is no conflict, women can give priority to their own life but when there is a conflict their priority is absolutely the ethnic conflict. The ethnic struggle has dominated the lives of women because their men and children have struggled against the state," said Özgökçe. The fight against the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, has been ongoing for nearly two decades and claimed the lives of thousands.

She said the state policy ignoring the presence of Kurds caused many difficulties for women and their right to have direct ties with the regional authority.

The feeling of mistrust in the Kurdish community has often left the victims of incest helpless because they could not seek help from state authorities, according to Özgökçe.

"It is difficult for women to issue a complaint particularly when they are subjected to sexual abuse or domestic violence. The applications of women have decreased each time the conflict in the region refueled," she said.

The association has mainly worked to prevent domestic violence against women, said Özgökçe. Established in 2004, the association has helped over 6,000 women so far. An information center, a family court and a shelter were established to help women who suffer from domestic violence.

That the association is a driving-force for changes that are expected to remove gender-based discrimination is something that Özgökçe strongly believes.

"Today, women and girls have more rights than they had yesterday. Something is changing in the city. State agencies are becoming increasingly involved in women's issues," she said.

The association is working not only in Van, but also in other nearby cities in the region, she said.

"We are also working in other southeastern cities including Muş, Bitlis, Hakkari and Yüksekova. There is a human rights program once a week in these cities. Even, the health workers have benefited from this program."

The association has set up two shelters to protect women suffering from domestic violence. But they are not enough to accommodate every victim, said Özgökçe.

"We have also provided social, medical and psychological support in our information center for women. We do not provide financing but we are helping them to find a job to work," she said.

Another project that VAKAD undertook is a joint-project on the prevention of suicide, levels of which have increased in recent years.

“We have worked together with Heinrich Böll Stiftung and Frederic Ebert Stiftung as well as Women’s World Day of Prayer-German Committee in a campaign that aims to increase awareness among 4,000 women in Van,” she said. Referring to how the association cooperates with international non-governmental organization, particularly those based in Germany.

The association still has many things to do, said Özgökçe, referring to the many obstacles facing the women of Van.

“We are working like a missionary to help women. We are trying to empower women to take a place in every field of life.”

This, however, is not an easy endeavor. “The discrimination stemming from what social roles expect from women is too entrenched. Thus, the efforts by foundations for women are not enough to change the existing framework,” she said.

Özgökçe has been targeted with anger and hate from the local community and was subjected to death threats early in her pro-woman efforts.

“The threats were particularly coming from tribal members or the fathers and husbands of women. There have been some people who raided the association’s premises and threatened to kill me,” she said.

People have also accused her of weakening the structure and values of the traditional family.

“Many people called me wicked just because I criticized the notion of honor. Some have called me a fundamentalist feminist, while others have said I am the enemy of all men,” she said.

“Every resident of Van knows that women have been oppressed for years. Many believe that women’s rights should be improved. The same people do not want to improve rights for their wives, or daughters,” she said.

The judiciary system fails to deter honor killings because the existing law reduces the sentences of murder when it comes to domestic reasons, she said.

“The Turkish penal code has sentenced a murderer to life in prison, but the sentence was reduced if the killer uses honor to defend himself,” she said.

Turkish interior minister outlines Kurdish initiative

Friday, January 15, 2010

ISTANBUL – Hürriyet Daily News

Turkey’s interior minister on Friday outlined the steps that the government has taken in its initiative to solve the Kurdish issue, saying the government will continue to take steps to end terror and to protect citizens’ rights.

Beşir Atalay said the Turkish government had two goals: to end terror and to expand democracy “to better preserve our fundamental rights.”

“If these things happen,” he said, “it’s obvious we will live in a more peaceful, stable world. ... No one in their right mind or with any sense of a moral compass would stand against these goals.”

Atalay emphasized that the government’s first goal was to end terror, referring to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK, which has been fighting the Turkish military in the country’s Southeast since the 1980s.

“As you know, terror against Turkey has been supported by our neighbors and sometimes even Europe,” he said. “Today’s Turkey is not the same Turkey as before. It’s a strong country. And

Turkey has and will continue to use that power to repel international support for terror within Turkey's borders.”

Short-term steps

Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, has taken concrete steps toward solving the country's Kurdish issue, Atalay said, by clearing the path for other languages to be spoken. First, he said, the government allowed people in prison to speak in a language other than Turkish with their visitors.

Then, the government started broadcasting a different dialect and language with TRT 6, the state-run Kurdish-language channel, he said. “We changed the law that affects that,” he added.

“In universities, we have taken steps to make sure they can open up different departments for different dialects and languages,” he said.

Middle-term steps

Human rights are the focus of the government's plans in the midterm to ease concerns related to the Kurdish issue.

“We've taken steps to make human rights on the individual level more reachable,” he said, highlighting four major future changes:

1. Forming a new, independent Human Rights Court of Turkey
2. Ratifying a part of the torture convention
3. Amending the law so that children who throw stones during protests will no longer be prosecuted under counter-terrorism laws
4. Instituting a mechanism to report complaints about security forces.

Atalay said the new institutions would be independent, would ensure better protections for fundamental human rights and would work only by individual petitions.

“The steps that we're taking to ensure more democracy and more rights are for everyone, regardless of ethnic origin, political leanings or gender,” he said. “These are fundamental rights and freedoms, and they apply to every citizen.”

OTHER POLITICAL ISSUES

Private sector, state and NGO co-launch preschool model

Friday, January 15, 2010

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

Thousands of children, mothers and teachers will be educated this year under branches of the preschool education model “Me Too,” co-launched by Fortis Bank, the Education Ministry and the Mother Child Education Foundation, or AÇEV.

Since 2003, preschool education has increasingly made its way to the top ranks of Turkey's education agenda. The country has become more aware that education before age 7, which is the age to start compulsory primary school, has great benefits for a child's overall development.

“In recent years, education experts and psychologists have proved that the ages from 0 to 6 are the most critical in a child's development,” Ayla Göksel, CEO of AÇEV, said at a press conference in Istanbul on Wednesday.

Göksel explained that the things children learn in those early years build the crucial foundations for the future of their education. She said that was because it is a time when the core habits and knowledge they obtain become imprinted in their memories and are thereof difficult to lose.

The preschool education model launched as a part of the Me Too project will, in its first stages, be implemented across seven districts in Istanbul that have high population density and poor

social-economic standards. These districts are Bağcılar, Esenler, Esenyurt, Gaziosmanpaşa, Küçükçekmece, Sultangazi and Ümraniye.

The model has four parts. The first is preschool education training for mothers. The mothers will be given the opportunity to partake in seminars with education experts who will give them education programs and guidelines for educating their children at home.

“Mothers play the most important role in a child’s early development, especially in Turkey where 95 percent of women stay home to look after their children after giving birth,” Göksel said, noting that 2,000 mothers and children will benefit from this training, which includes 20 to 30 minutes of teaching per day over the course of the year.

The second part of the model is a support portal for preschool education teachers. This is an online portal where teachers across the country will be able to interact and share different teaching techniques on early childhood education.

Volunteer employees from Fortis Bank will participate in the third stage of the model by acting as teaching assistants at nurseries and preschool classrooms. According to Yvan De Cock, CEO of Fortis Bank Turkey, there are already 70 volunteers from the bank that are participating in this project.

“Fortis believes that change can only happen through involvement,” Cock said, also speaking at the press conference Wednesday.

Cock highlighted that preschool educational will reap significant rewards to the development of a country both economically and socially.

“At Fortis, we believe in increasing economic value for individuals as well as companies. We have come together as members of the private sector, the state and nongovernmental organizations to put forward a realistic education model that will contribute to a brighter future for generations to come,” Cock added.

The final section of the project is to support the Education Ministry’s “Seven is too late” campaign, which aims to raise awareness about the importance of early childhood education and give children up to the age of 6 education opportunities.

According to Remzi Inanli, the Education Ministry’s preschool education manager, young children are increasingly picking up bad habits and being wrongly informed about things through television and video games. “Seven is too Late is giving children a preschool education everyday and aims to reach children in provinces across Turkey beyond the large cities within three tiers.”

Military agents provoked Edirne events, probe finds

Monday, 11 January 2010 09:54

Today's Zaman

An investigation into events in the city of Edirne on Jan. 3, where supporters of the far-left Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C) protested the arrest of five DHKP/C members, has revealed that members of various military departments’ i
Identification checks of individuals who were detained as suspects have revealed that many military intelligence agents and retired noncommissioned officers were among the rioters, acting as provocateurs and agitators.

Tensions ran high in Edirne last Sunday when a group of DHKP/C members organized a demonstration to protest the arrests of five of their friends by the police. Thousands of locals who believed that the demonstration was in support of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) gathered in the provincial capital. After the crowd was informed that three buses carrying

DHKP/C supporters coming from İstanbul to protest the arrests were entering the city, they moved to the tollbooths at the entrance of the city and closed the road to traffic. Nearly 150 people in the buses and the crowd clashed there, and some were injured. Police intervened to prevent further violence.

According to eyewitnesses, people from outside of the city arrived in Edirne on the day of the events. Ahead of the DHKP/C supporters' arrival in town, these individuals spread rumors that "PKK terrorists are going to raid Edirne." They chanted both religious and secular slogans to attract supporters from all segments of society.

Following Sunday's riots, DHKP/C supporters decided to stay in protest in the district of Babaeski. However, this group seems to be fading away after nearly a week. Some have returned to İstanbul, saying they have school exams, and some were taken away by their families, who saw their children protesting on television. Some members of the group still continue to wait at a roadside restaurant in the hope of entering Edirne.

We won't allow assassinations or coups, Anti-coup NGO says

Monday, 11 January 2010 09:18

Today's Zaman

The 70 Million Steps Against Coups coalition has protested the Cage Operation Action Plan, which is said to have targeted non-Muslims and children, as well as other Ergenekon-related activities, in front of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate.

During the gathering that took place in İstanbul's Balat district on Saturday, Yıldız Önen, who spoke on behalf of coalition members, said an assassination plot against Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew was distressing.

Noting that coup plotters who target, ostracize and aim to kill non-Muslims and minorities and cause division and animosity between different groups have been caught red-handed, Önen said: "From now on we will not allow assassination teams and coups." Members of the NGO, carrying banners that read "All peoples are brothers" in Turkish and Greek, called on the "cosmic" room documents -- where confidential military documents are believed to be kept in archives -- to be revealed and those guilty to be prosecuted. The coalition also announced that a demonstration will take place on Jan. 23 in Taksim's Tünel area simultaneously with demonstrations in both İzmir and Ankara.

While protesting these events, 70 Million Steps Against Coups coalition spokesperson Önen said they wish that they could say coups will not take place in this day and age. He also stated that they wish that they could believe that the coup diaries, Ergenekon, the Cage Operation Action Plan and the assassination attempt against Arınç are not real and that those following Judge [Kadir] Kayan -- who conducted research into the cosmic room -- are ordinary citizens; however, this is not possible. "Yes, we would really like to say all this -- only if this were not a country that managed to have three bloody coups, one post-modern coup and one e-coup in 50 years," stated Önen.

Explaining that the events which have unfolded recently in Turkey are no laughing matter, Önen said: "We would like to announce that nobody can touch the patriarchate or Bartholomew," as she called on freedom for the oppressed, religious minorities, languages and political views. Önen continued her speech, saying: "May our Greek brothers' minds be at ease: You are here, we are here and brotherhood between our communities is here. Coup plotters, gangs and those who are pro-Ergenekon have been caught red-handed; we will not allow these gangs to be set

free. We will fight until the counter-guerilla is dispersed.”

The Cage Operation Action Plan, the assassination attempt against Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç and the threats against Judge Kayan have raised eyebrows and led to protests in various segments of Turkish society.

Former generals' homes raided in Ergenekon discretionary fund probe

Thursday, 14 January 2010 09:17

Today's Zaman

Counterterrorism teams raided 10 locations in İstanbul and one in Ankara on Tuesday evening as part of an investigation into the financial resources of the clandestine coup-planning organization Ergenekon.

One of the places searched was Ergenekon suspect retired Gen. Levent Ersöz's room at the İstanbul University Faculty of Medicine Hospital. Ersöz and several other generals are accused of misrouting discretionary funds allocated for the gendarmerie to their own personal bank accounts. Squads from the İstanbul Police Department's counterterrorism unit arrived at the İstanbul University Faculty of Medicine Hospital and searched Gen. Ersöz's room in the infectious diseases ward. The search lasted three hours.

Although the items seized have not been revealed, reporters note the officers left with black nylon bags containing what appeared to be documents. Also on Tuesday night, there were searches in Üsküdar's Selimiye neighborhood. Police sources said the homes of Ersöz's mother-in-law and an office of his brother's ex-wife were searched during this time. There was also a search in the Ankara house of the retired general, where his wife, Muzaffer Ersöz, currently resides. Ersöz's lawyer Ali Rıza Dizdar said of the searches: “Those from the police department carried out their duties with the necessary conduct. Records of everything seized have been signed by myself. Records kept during the search were faxed to my office immediately.”

On Monday, Fikret Seçen, one of the prosecutors conducting the investigation into Ergenekon, heard testimony from Ersöz, who was asked questions about allegations that money from the Gendarmerie General Command's discretionary fund was transferred to private accounts when retired Gen. Şener Eruygur, who is also an Ergenekon suspect, was in charge of the command. According to the allegations, during the two years Eruygur headed the Gendarmerie General Command, TL 7.5 million out of the TL 13 million in the gendarmerie discretionary fund was transferred to the bank accounts of five individuals. The current location of this money is unknown.

Yesterday Dizdar distributed photos of the search of his client's hospital room and a recording of Ersöz being questioned by a prosecutor at the Beşiktaş Courthouse. According to the recording, Ersöz's interrogation lasted 15 minutes. Prosecutors Seçen and Mehmet Murat Yönder asked Ersöz questions about technical equipment purchases from the discretionary fund. During the questioning, Ersöz confirmed allegations that all documents regarding purchases made from the discretionary fund were destroyed by the Gendarmerie General Command. Ersöz also said the destruction procedure was based on earlier precedents, adding that everything was put into the records and Eruygur and gendarmerie officers Recep C., Adnan S., Atilla U. and Hakkı K. signed off on the records.

Ergenekon suspects Eruygur, retired Gen. Hurşit Tolon, retired Col. Atilla Uğur and retired Gen. Hakkı Kılınç also testified yesterday as part of the probe into the discretionary fund. Meanwhile, reporters on the scene said three individuals who appeared to be military officers on active duty

were also led into the courthouse from the back door as retired Col. Uğur entered the building to testify to prosecutors.

Investigation details

Sources said the investigators found 39 bank accounts belonging to Eruygur at a bank's Ankara Bakanlıklar branch. TL 13 million was transferred to these accounts, while TL 7.5 million was transferred into five accounts belonging to other individuals.

Meanwhile, recent reports have confirmed that former Chief of Gen. Staff Hilmi Özkök, who earlier testified as a witness in the investigation, and former force commanders who are accused of having prepared four coup plans titled Sarıkız, Ayışığı, Yakamoz and Eldiven, were also questioned about the fate of the discretionary fund money.

Experts from the Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BDDK) and auditors from the Finance Ministry have been investigating the suspicious accounts. Their findings were submitted to the Prime Ministry Auditing Board.

The five individuals who were allegedly the recipients of the discretionary fund cash have been identified as Mehmet Sanibal, Recep Cömert, Şükrü Muhammer Öner, Şükrü Kıyak and Mustafa Cem Beyazıt. Sanibal, a senior representative of Rem Foreign Trade Inc. whose employee Hakan Şanlı had been detained as part of Ergenekon as the company is accused of manufacturing illegal wiretapping equipment for Ergenekon, allegedly received TL 5.3 million. This money was taken out from the bank as cash. Cömert, the alleged recipient of TL 1.1 million, was a senior sergeant known for his proximity to Eruygur. The money in this account has also been withdrawn. Öner allegedly received TL 900,000 from the discretionary fund, which has also been taken out in cash. Öner works on behalf of a foreign company, sources close to the investigation said. Kıyak allegedly received TL 180,000. He is an executive with Sama Defense Services Inc., owned by Hakan Şanlı, and Amaç Petroleum Products, co-owned by Hasan Atilla Uğur. Beyazıt has allegedly received TL 45,000 from the fund.

Suicide attempt by Ersöz's daughter

Also on Tuesday, Ersöz's daughter Fulya Ersöz was rushed to the İstanbul University Hospital after reportedly slashing her wrists in an attempt to end her life. She showed reporters her wrists with blood still seeping from the cuts, saying: "Look, I committed suicide because of you. I have done this so many times."

Attorneys protest coups, demand more freedoms

Friday, 15 January 2010 20:59

Today's Zaman

A group composed of 500 attorneys from several professional associations staged a protest yesterday in İstanbul to show their support for the rule of law, democracy and freedom of speech in the country and to condemn previous military interventions.

Ayhan Gültekin, who released a press statement on behalf of the group, underlined the inconsistency between the law and its implications. Mentioning the anti-democratic bans on headscarves in universities and the Kurdish language, he said, "Even though our Constitution promotes the principles of democracy, rule of law and a social state, we cannot speak our native language, we are not freely offered university education and we cannot express our opinions." He also addressed on the devastating effects of the military interventions that occurred on May 27, 1960, March 12, 1971, Sept. 12, 1980, Feb. 28, 1997 and April 27, 2007, which is also known as the e-coup. "We are still suffering from the effects of these military interventions and

shadowy gangs such as Ergenekon and Susurluk,” Gültekin added.

Although one of the principles of secularism stipulates religious freedom, there are efforts to restrict freedom of religion, he claimed.

“Basic human rights are violated. People are forced to leave their homes. Minors who throw stones at police officers are treated as if they are bloody terrorists,” he said, criticizing the attitudes of police who have detained children and had them tried in courts of law as adults for participating in protests in the Southeast.

Some well-known academics such as Hüsrev Hatemi and Kezban Hatemi signed the group’s press release. Sacit Kayasu, a former prosecutor who was removed from his post when he prepared an indictment against the perpetrators of the Sept. 12 coup, supported the attorneys by attending the protest.

Furthermore, a banner unfurled by the group read “The rule of law cannot be put in a cage,” in reference to the recently exposed Cage plan, a military plot allegedly devised to assassinate non-Muslim figures and detonate explosives in a museum in order to scare the public and cause it to turn against the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party).

Turkey concerned over string of provocative events

Tuesday, 12 January 2010 11:54

Today's Zaman

Analysts have voiced concerns over recent clashes among opposing groups in various Turkish cities as the incidents are thought to have been caused by unidentified groups aiming at provocation.

Turkey's agenda has been full of weighty issues such as an ongoing investigation into a clandestine organization known as Ergenekon, the government's efforts to settle the Kurdish issue and a probe into a recently uncovered assassination plot against Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç, but new clashes, in which the participants are mostly provoked by unidentified groups, have been reported in various cities across the country almost every day.

Bugün daily columnist Ahmet Taşgetiren warns against provocations during the current process Turkey is going through as it tries to settle the Kurdish issue with a democratic initiative. “The initiative has increased the sensitivities of different groups in Turkey. All sides should focus on a possible resolution to the issue, and instigating [national] feelings should be avoided,” he told Today’s Zaman.

All eyes were turned to the northwestern province of Edirne on Jan. 3 where tensions ran high in the city when a group from the far-left Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C) organized a demonstration to protest the arrests of five of their friends. Believing that the demonstration was in support of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), thousands of locals gathered in the city center. After the crowd was told that three buses carrying DHKP/C members coming from İstanbul to protest the arrests were entering the city, they moved toward the tollbooths at the entrance of the city and closed the road to traffic. Nearly 150 people from the buses and the crowd started to fight, and some people were injured. The Edirne Public Prosecutor’s Office has launched an investigation into the incidents over suspicion that the combatants had been provoked by outside forces and has discovered that Edirne locals were goaded into action by unidentified groups, who told them: “PKK supporters will be arriving in Edirne. They will attack us. We should get ready. Let’s round up some people and find sticks.” Alpaslan Cankaloğlu, the Edirne head of the nationalist youth group Alperen Ocakları, said

following the Edirne incidents that some groups tried to provoke Alperen Ocakları by exploiting their national feelings. “We have not been deceived and we won’t be,” he told Today’s Zaman. Provocations feared to continue

Political analyst Mümtaz’er Türköne says paramilitary forces affiliated with the Special Forces Command were behind the recent incidents in Edirne as he links the incidents to a search carried out by investigators at the command’s top-secret document archive, known as the “cosmic rooms,” as part of a probe into an alleged plot to assassinate Arınç. “There are around 100,000 paramilitary organizations guided by the Special Forces Command in Turkey. We see that these groups were on the stage in Edirne as the Edirne Police’s findings also show that. Everyone should be prepared for provocations likely to be carried out by these groups in the following days. Such provocations are likely to happen in such processes as axing Ergenekon, the “cosmic room” search and the uncovering of gangs within the Turkish Armed Forces [TSK],” Türk’öne recently told the Star daily.

Türk Ocakları Chairman Nuri Gürgür also told the Star daily that it would not be surprising if incidents similar to those in Edirne erupt in other provinces. “There could be massive clashes. We find recent developments worrisome,” he said. The tension has not eased in Edirne yet as some labor unions such as the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers’ Unions (DİSK) and the Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions (KESK) have announced that they would hold demonstrations in protest of the recent clash, which is feared to trigger friction.

Mehmet Altan from the Star daily, however, stresses another point as the cause of the increasing clashes between opposing groups. “These all stem from the fact that Turkey is not state ruled by law and we have almost no respect for fundamental rights and freedoms,” he says. Noting that these incidents could be caused by outside groups with certain aims, he says these recent incidents have once again shown that Turkey is not an efficient state of law.

Meanwhile, Republican People’s Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal used the Edirne incidents to criticize the democratic initiative saying the reason behind the clash was the government’s move. “Turkey is unfortunately being brought towards such ethnic discrimination and clashes. The point which the initiative has brought out is crystal clear. This picture is one of worrisome outcome of democratic initiative ,” Baykal said commenting on the tension in Edirne.

Another demonstration was held in the southeastern province of Kars by a leftist group called the Kars Youth Initiative on Sunday, which resulted in the apprehension of 13 group members, including four women, by the police as they ignored the police’s call to stop chanting slogans. The group chanted slogans such as: “Fascist attacks, arrests, lynching cannot wear nationalist youth down” and “Release detainees.”

Atatürk University in the eastern province of Erzurum has also recently been the scene of incidents that erupted when some students wore the puşi, a traditional scarf mostly worn by Kurds. Around 10 clashes reportedly broke out at different faculties of the university over the puşi last week. While a group of students were reportedly wearing puşis others were trying to provoke students by promoting the outlawed PKK, the Cihan news agency reported.

Roman Catholics demand official recognition in Turkey

Tuesday, 12 January 2010 11:55

Today’s Zaman

Roman Catholics have joined an array of sects seeking recognition in Turkey in order to have access to rights and protections afforded to minorities, particularly in the fields of education, charitable organizations and property ownership.

Pope Benedict XVI said last week, “The Catholic Church in Turkey is waiting for civil juridical recognition,” noting that this would help the Turkish Catholic community “to enjoy full religious freedom and to make an even greater contribution to society,” while receiving Kenan Gürsoy, the new ambassador of Turkey to the Holy See.

Turkish authorities say that the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, the main agreement regulating minorities in Turkey, recognized only Jews, Armenians and Greek Orthodox communities as minorities, meaning Roman Catholics, Syrians and Protestants were left out.

Ankara University Professor Baskın Oran, however, says that there are actually no limitations in the Treaty of Lausanne on which communities should be recognized as religious minorities.

“It considers all non-Muslim groups religious minorities. When the negotiations were going on for Lausanne, they did not discuss all these issues openly,” he told Today’s Zaman.

Oran added that non-recognized communities are facing many problems at different levels, including education, property rights and places of worship. The Holy See’s envoy to Ankara, Apostolic Nuncio Antonio Lucibello, recalled that although diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Ankara were established 50 years ago, the Catholic community was not given an official status.

“The Catholic community needs an official status to be able to organize its affairs, including charities,” Lucibello told Today’s Zaman.

The pope, in his statement, also pointed to the charities of the Catholic community and said that Catholics in Turkey appreciate freedom of worship and are also pleased to be able to contribute to the well-being of their fellow citizens, especially through involvement in charitable activities and health care.

“They are rightly proud of the assistance provided for the poor by the La Paix and Saint Georges hospitals in İstanbul. In order that these worthy endeavors may flourish, I am sure your government [the Turkish government] will continue to do what it can to see that they receive whatever support may be needed,” the pope said.

Benedict recalled his visit to Turkey in 2006 and added that Turkey is a secular democratic state that straddles the boundary between Europe and Asia and can make a significant contribution to the effort to bring peace and stability to the Middle East.

“The Holy See appreciates the numerous initiatives that Turkey has already taken in this regard and is eager to support further efforts to put an end to long-standing conflicts in the region. As history has so often shown, territorial disputes and ethnic rivalries can only be satisfactorily resolved when the legitimate aspirations of each party are duly taken into account, past injustices acknowledged and, when possible, repaired,” the pope said.

Some Catholic institutions, like Missio, a German Catholic organization promoting interreligious dialogue, frequently emphasize the problems caused by the non-recognition of minorities and lobby for Catholic recognition in Turkey in the European Union. The pope, during his visit to Turkey, said that he supports Turkey’s EU bid, but in 2004, before Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was elected pope, he stated that Turkey’s membership in EU would be a grave mistake for both sides.

Report: Sabancı murder probe starts from scratch

Tuesday, 12 January 2010 11:57

The investigation into the murder of Öz-demir Sabancı, a second-generation member of one of Turkey's most powerful business empires and owner of the country's second-largest industrial and financial conglomerate, will start from scratch 14 years after the

In 1996, Sabancı was killed by gunmen on the 25th floor of the Sabancı Holding building in İstanbul. Many mysteries surrounding his death -- including how the attackers could have gained access to the high-security building, let alone bring in machine guns -- remain unsolved. 3 members of the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C), Fehriye Erdal, İsmail Akkol and Mustafa Duyar, were arrested in the case.

Erdal managed to escape to Belgium, where she has been sentenced to prison for terrorism-related charges but remains at large. Akkol is also on the run. Duyar, who turned himself in that same year, was killed in prison in 1999.

A prosecutor is now reopening the case after finding a five-page letter from Erdal to former DHKP/C leader Dursun Karataş, who died of cancer a Netherlands hospital in 2008. The new investigation is being conducted in complete secrecy, according to a report that appeared in the Sabah newspaper yesterday. Even the Sabancı family has not been informed about these developments, Sabah reported.

According to the report, Specially Authorized Public Prosecutor Bilal Bayraktar is taking up the case once again, after locating some DHKP/C documents including Erdal's letter in Belgium. In recent months, investigators gained access to documents archived by the DHKP/C. Forensic examination established that the letter, which includes important details about the Sabancı assassination, was indeed penned by Erdal.

According to Sabah's report, the letter, addressing Karataş, has the character of a "report on the assassination" and was written shortly after the murder. Although Erdal denied being involved in the murder in her defense statement at a Belgium court, she confesses in her letter to taking part in the murder. The letter also includes detailed information on how intelligence was collected ahead of the assassination, how Duyar and Akkol were able to enter the building and how and to where they escaped after the murder; where they stayed while they were hiding and how the two of them were able to flee the country.

A team of seven investigators is conducting the new probe, Sabah said. The police chief leading the team was identified only by his initials, S.B. Prosecutor Bayraktar and his team have also re-examined the crime scene after 14 years, visiting the rooms where Sabancı -- along with Haluk Görgün, a group general manager, and Nilgün Hasefe, a personal assistant -- was shot to death. Belgian Prosecutor Anne Fransen, who was conducting the investigation in Belgium, where Erdal fled, has also restarted the probe in her country, where the documents were found by Belgian authorities and kept from her in the first place.

Bayraktar has also shared the DHKP/C documents with Zekeriya Öz, the prosecutor investigating Ergenekon, a clandestine gang whose suspected members currently stand trial on charges of attempting to foment chaos for the ultimate purpose of triggering an overthrow of the government. There have been suggestions that Ergenekon and DHKP/C acted together in the murder, as there strong evidence emerged during the Ergenekon investigation to support that there was a link between the two groups.

The DHKP/C's archived documents on various operations were discovered in 2008 in Knokke, Belgium. The Belgian police have turned all the documents over to Turkish authorities. The secret archive includes information on the murders of former Prime Minister Nihat Erim, former

Undersecretary of the National Intelligence Organization (MİT) Adnan Ersöz, former Deputy Undersecretary of MİT Hiram Abbas, retired Gen. Hulusi Sayın, retired Gen. İsmail Selen, Adana Gendarmerie Commander Gen. Temel Cingöz and former minister Gün Sazak.

MHP leader Bahçeli calls for early elections

Wednesday, 13 January 2010 14:52

Today's Zaman

Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli has reiterated his call for early general elections, claiming that the current government has lost its dynamism and is no longer able to rule the country.

He has also stated that a significant part of society wants early elections. "The one who gives the authority for political parties to govern the country is the nation. Therefore, it is also the nation who can take back this authority. This is the rule of democracy. Only unsuccessful despotic administrators resist the nation's will," the MHP leader said during his party's group meeting on Tuesday.

Bahçeli said all signs clearly show that the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) is no longer able to run the government, adding that there is public pressure for the AK Party to hold early elections. The MHP leader also claimed that the AK Party is losing its power day by day and advised Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to declare early elections to stop his party's downfall.

Speaking about the Kurdish initiative, the government's attempt to end the decades-old Kurdish question, Bahçeli noted that the initiative has opened the way for social polarization and tension. He accused the government of opening the issue of ethnicity to discussion.

Tortured child comes from family of 'wealthy beggars'

Wednesday, 13 January 2010 14:47

Today's Zaman

A 5-year-old beaten nearly to death in İstanbul on Sunday by other children for begging in "their zone" comes from a village where up to 80 percent of the population earn their living by begging, and is related to owners of gas stations, businesses and fl

Shocking details have continued to emerge in the case of 5-year-old Bedrettin K., who was forced by his family to beg in the streets and sell tissues and was on Sunday beaten nearly to death by other children for selling in "their zone." One set of revelations involves the boy's family background, while the other involves the action taken -- and not taken -- by the authorities before he was found clinging to life near a bus stop.

İstanbul Mayor Kadir Topbaş paid a visit to the hospital where Bedrettin is still being treated and closely monitored in the neurosurgery intensive care unit. Speaking to the press after his visit, he urged citizens not to buy from or give money to children begging, noting that this would only encourage the cycle and result in more children being made to work the streets. He also commented: "Bedrettin is a symbol. If you think about the trauma that this 5-year-old has gone through -- there are perhaps dozens, hundreds more Bedrettins out there being abused. ... The biggest responsibility falls upon the family [to prevent such happenings]."

But doubtlessly, the social state also has a responsibility to protect children, the most defenseless of its citizens. Bedrettin is one of a family of five children, and when municipal street sweepers

found him -- unconscious, with cuts and bruises all over his body and a clothesline tied around his neck -- and the boy was taken to a hospital, the story made national news headlines. According to official statements, however, while this is the first time the boy has fallen into such dire straits, he has been begging and selling tissues on the street since he was 2 years old -- and the state knew about it. He had been taken from the streets a total of five times since 2006, once by police and four times by provincial social services, but each time was returned home, with his family only being fined. The boy was reportedly beaten from time to time by his father and two other male relatives for not begging.

In fact, all of the children in Bedrettin's family have been caught begging or selling in the streets at some point in time, but they have not been removed from their parents' custody; fines are all that have been imposed. The state minister for women and children, Selma Aliye Kavaf, said yesterday that the legal process had been initiated for the removal of Bedrettin and his siblings from their parents' custody and for their placement into state care. She also said legal proceedings had been launched vis-a-vis the children and the families of the children who beat and tortured Bedrettin. Noting the past record of Bedrettin's family, Kavaf said that in 2006 Bedrettin had been returned to his family only after his parents swore in court that he would not be out on the streets again and paid a fine.

Bedrettin's family from village infamous for rich beggars

But more disturbing still than the state's incompetence in protecting Bedrettin K. before he was subjected to such cruel treatment are the details emerging about his family background.

According to birth and residence records, Bedrettin K. and his family are from Turgutlar village in Adana's Kozan district -- infamous for producing beggars. The village has surfaced in news headlines for time to time ever since 2003, when a story broke that 99 people in the village with vast financial holdings nevertheless begged in the streets and forced their children to as well. In 2004, a division of the civil police (zabita) in Istanbul announced that according to their records, 80 percent of the beggars in Istanbul had come there from Turgutlu village, where local records confirm that 1,500 of the village's population of 2,000 were involved in begging.

Amongst the news pieces over the years is an interview with relatives of Bedrettin -- among them owners of gas stations, fancy cars and other businesses -- who told the press that they didn't beg because they needed the money, but because it was a habit, a tradition passed on from their parents and grandparents. "We're used to it; it's easy money. My grandchildren will beg, too," one relative said.

Today's Zaman spoke with residents in the neighborhood where Bedrettin lives in a small, run-down shanty home with several families and as many as 20 other children. The neighbors said that Bedrettin's family was very systematic about sending children out to beg. Neighbor Hanife D. said: "They had the latest cellular phones in their hands, and in the morning drove the children out to the places where they were to beg. Several families live together. They work in the winter and in the summer go back to their home provinces."

Another neighbor, Tülin K., said the family had enough money but forced their children to beg anyway. "We complained [to the authorities], but nobody took any notice," she said. Neighbors said the children in the home where Bedrettin lived would be so pleased when they came home at the end of each day, happy that they wouldn't have to beg anymore until the morning. The neighborhood registrar said that nobody was registered as living at the residence where Bedrettin and his family stay.

Demand must be curbed to stop kids working in streets

Wednesday, 13 January 2010 14:44

Today's Zaman

Analysts in Turkey agree that a combination of many factors keeps children working on the streets selling anything and everything from tissues to matches despite dozens of laws in place banning such practices.

The discovery of a 5-year-old who was tortured by another group of children for selling tissues in "their zone" carried the issue of working children to the national stage again. Bedrettin was found by a pair of street cleaners on Sunday morning, unconscious after being badly beaten, tortured and dumped near a bus stop.

He was taken to a hospital, but remains in critical condition. Bedrettin and the children who beat him up have since been put under state care. Bedreddin's parents reportedly had many run-ins with the law for making their children beg in the streets but custody was not taken away from them. Experts say everyone is guilty, including society at large, because they continue to buy from these children, effectively pushing them to work.

They agree that all necessary laws to find a solution for problems faced by these children have been passed but that many problems remain in implementation in addition to a lack of determined political will.

"Buying from children in the street bears a heavy cost on the children because it makes them dependent on the streets," said Yusuf Kulca, chairman of the Children for Hope Association. He underlined that regardless of what kind of policies the state follows and implements, so long as society buys tissues or similar items from these children, the policies will not be effective. "The streets are places where money is made, not for these children, but for their families and gangs that force the children to work in the streets. So, not buying from these children helps them significantly. Only then will it be possible to implement policies to save these children. Anything less means confining them to the streets," Kulca told Today's Zaman.

He added that there are no adequate statistics on these children, preventing the problem from being understood from its many varied angles and impeding finding solutions.

Professor Oğuz Polat, chairman of the Association for the Rehabilitation of Street Children, underlined that it is very difficult to estimate the number of these children because it is constantly increasing.

"In 2005 we were talking about 150,000 children, but now I think we have to consider half a million children. They frequently migrate from one city to another and organized crime gangs really benefit heavily by using these children," Polat told Today's Zaman.

He said different approaches are needed when addressing problems faced by the children, some of whom suffer sexual abuse while others are drug addicts or simply must work while attending school.

"All these categories need different approaches," he said, and added that a lack of coordination among institutions dealing with this problem negatively affects efforts to tackle the issue. "The social services, the police, universities and civil society are working independently, but this problem has to be addressed in an interdisciplinary way," Polat told Today's Zaman.

Öztürk Türdoğan, chairman of the Human Rights Association (İHD), said that, from the children's rights point of view, the state is responsible for the situation.

"If the children are in the streets, there are two options here: to support their poor families and make these children stay home and in school or to take these children away from their families

and put them under state care. These are the responsibilities of being a social state,” he told Today’s Zaman.

He added that there are mechanisms in Turkey to address this situation but that there is no strong political will to do so. “To implement sanctions against families, to collect those children from the streets and put them under state care, to provide them with counseling -- which they are entitled to anyway, is not very difficult, but to do all these things requires a strong political will,” he said.

Turkey to establish civilian border control, immigration agencies

Wednesday, 13 January 2010 14:45

Today's Zaman

The Interior Ministry has recently completed a bill establishing a Border Control Agency on which it has been working over the past four years. According to the draft, 70,000 officers from the gendarmerie and coast guard commands and the National Police D

The bill also introduces major changes to the structure of the Gendarmerie Command. Expert personnel from the gendarmerie will be shared between the interior and justice ministries.

Tougher border controls were included in the government’s 3rd National Program, which envisioned a new approach to border security, taking most of the responsibility for border control from the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) and handing it over to a professional, civilian administration. The draft was supposed to be enacted in 2006 but was delayed until 2010 in the face of objections from the military. The restructuring will cost 3.7 billion euros, 60 percent of which will be covered by the European Union, which has been urging Turkey to implement the project. In November 2009 the EU and the Interior Ministry started intense discussions to establish the Border Control Agency and an immigration department under the Interior Ministry. These talks have given final shape to the draft to restructure the Gendarmerie General Command and set up the Border Control Agency. A senior bureaucrat at the Interior Ministry who wishes to remain anonymous told Today’s Zaman that both of the changes will be implemented in 2010.

The TSK is responsible for border security, and it has until today resisted any change in the current border security policies, citing separatist terrorism, smugglers and other illegal border trespassing as concerns that have to be dealt with by the armed forces. Currently, the land forces, the gendarmerie and the coast guard are responsible for controlling the borders. In addition to the military, other agencies that would like to see the status quo maintained have opposed the bill, which will place border security in the hands of the police rather than the gendarmerie.

However, under the EU’s Schengen aquis, Turkey simply doesn’t have the luxury of dragging its feet on new border control legislation. The EU, which is covering more than half the costs of the project, has already contributed 685,000 euros. The EU has also been uneasy about the stalled status of the draft. To make the changes possible, the government is now working on a change to a provision of the Firearms Law that will enable the new civilian security force that will be established to ensure border security to purchase heavy arms. The military has opposed this, but the government is adamant in passing the change.

The new bill on border security, called the Integrated Border Protection General Directorate Bill, also introduces changes to the law on the Gendarmerie Command that completely redefine the Gendarmerie Command’s duty and powers and drastically changes its structure. The government seeks to deploy members of the Border Control Agency by the year 2014.

The bill also introduces a new general directorate called the Border Protection General

Directorate, which will also have an immigration department that will concentrate on illegal immigration. This unit was also promised to the EU in the government's 3rd National Program. Turkey's Border Control Agency is modeled on the current border security system in France. An important portion of the Gendarmerie General Command's border security personnel will be moved to the new department in the Interior Ministry when the bill is enacted. The Interior Ministry has also completed work on restructuring the Gendarmerie Command, which will become part of the ministry. As part of efforts to modernize the Gendarmerie Command, the gendarmerie will relinquish prison security duties by 2014 and will be replaced by a team of 17,000 professional security guards. The Justice Ministry will utilize gendarmerie personnel and equipment during the restructuring process.

The task of ensuring security outside prison buildings will be transferred to the Justice Ministry, which has already started work on a new bill that will regulate how these security services are rendered.

With the new law, the gendarmerie will first pull out of urban areas and will reorganize as a military police department similar to the system currently in place in Italy and France. The Gendarmerie Command's new duties will be restricted to inter-city road security in rural areas, border control, the security of humanitarian aid convoys and railroads.

Diyarbakır Mayor Baydemir banned from traveling abroad

Thursday, 14 January 2010 09:23

Today's Zaman

A Diyarbakır court has banned Mayor Osman Baydemir from leaving the country in connection with the operation against the Kurdish Communities Union (KCK), an organization that allegedly functions as the urban arm of the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (Baydemir, who was called to give his testimony at the Special Prosecutor's Office in Diyarbakır yesterday, gave a deposition for five hours. He answered questions on the KCK as well as on a public announcement he made on Dec. 6 on behalf of 99 mayors and 10 provincial heads of the now defunct pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP). The announcement was critical of the prison conditions of jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan.

The Diyarbakır Public Prosecutor's Office initiated a series of operations in December in 11 provinces -- Ankara, İstanbul, İzmir, Diyarbakır, Siirt, Hakkari, Tunceli, Batman, Şanlıurfa, Şırnak and Van. More than 40 people were detained, seven of them mayors. Illegal demonstrations and protests were staged in cities throughout Turkey following the detentions by sympathizers of the PKK to express their outrage.

Baydemir said civilian politics would be harmed if elected people were sent to jail. "If we arrest mayors and send them to prison, I say frankly that we will not be able to establish peace," he was quoted by the Anatolia news agency as saying.

He added that arrested politicians should be released immediately. "Peace has one option and that is an honorable peace. Democracy has only one option and that is democracy with high standards. And people who would like to be in politics under a legal umbrella should be allowed to do so." He also said that the "KCK operation" was directed at suffocating Kurdish politics, not the KCK.

Majority applauds AK Party's foreign policy, poll finds

Thursday, 14 January 2010 09:20

A considerable portion of the Turkish nation backs the foreign policy pursued by the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government, the latest findings of a monthly opinion poll have shown.

The Ankara-based MetroPOLL Strategic and Social Research Center conducted a survey on people's perceptions of the "new face of Turkish foreign policy." The lead question of the survey was on people's opinion of the strategy followed by the government in foreign affairs, which is among the topics heatedly debated by the public. More than 56 percent of participants in the survey said they find the government's foreign policy "successful." Among these participants, 12.3 percent said they find Turkish foreign policy "very successful." Nearly 33 percent said they do not think the AK Party government is successful in foreign affairs, while 10 percent said they find the government's foreign policy "very unsuccessful."

The remaining 2.3 percent said they had no opinion.

Turkey's expanded presence in the foreign policy arena has long been visible to many, with some commentators suggesting that this signifies a shift in foreign policy orientation, with Ankara turning its back on the Western alliance and moving toward a closer and more institutionalized cooperation with the Islamic world instead. Ankara has consistently rejected such arguments, calling them reminiscent of a Cold War mentality.

In response to claims over a change of axis in foreign policy, both President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said Turkey was moving in all directions to help achieve peace in its region.

A seemingly high interest in the MetroPOLL survey has shown that the Turkish public closely follows developments related to foreign affairs, contrary to the widespread belief that developments in the international arena would not attract the public's attention.

Respondents were also asked about Turkey's bid to become a full member of the European Union. Nearly 50 percent said they would vote yes if Turkey held a referendum to gauge the nation's support for its EU bid. Almost 35 percent of those polled, however, do not support Turkey's aspiration to join the bloc. More than 14 percent said they are not sure whether to vote yes or no in such a referendum, and 1.3 percent said they had no idea.

The support for the country's hopes for full membership in the bloc has, however, decreased considerably when compared with previous polls. In a similar survey in 2008, for example, 62 percent said they would vote yes if a referendum was held on Turkey's EU bid.

Participants were also asked which minister they found most successful. More than 9 percent indicated Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu while 6.6 said it was Economy Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan and 6.5 said it was State Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç. A total of 5.6 percent said the most successful minister was Education Minister Nimet Çubukçu while 5.3 percent said it was Health Minister Recep Akdağ.

Most observers believe Davutoğlu has played a major role in the biggest transformation that Turkey's foreign policy has undergone since the founding of the republic. He was appointed as foreign minister on May 1 after serving for six years as Prime Minister Erdoğan's chief foreign policy adviser. Davutoğlu is rightly credited with re-establishing Turkey's role as a pivotal country in its region and has expanded cooperation with the US to the more advanced level of a model partnership whilst keeping relations with Europe on track despite growing opposition to Turkey in European countries.

Widely recognized as the man behind Turkey's new proactive stance since 2003, Davutoğlu quit his behind-the-scenes role in 2009 and became the active chief of Turkey's dynamic foreign policy. And over time, he proved the skeptics who feared the great theoretician could fail to adjust to the fast-changing reality of global politics very wrong.

Respondents are, however, not satisfied with the improvement in democracy in the country. According to 37.9 percent of those polled, Turkish democracy weakened in 2009. Only 24.5 percent believe it grew stronger last year, while 37.6 percent said it had not shown any change.

Nation backs strong ties with Iran

The respondents were also questioned about the improving relations between Turkey and its neighbor, Iran.

Asked whether Turkey should object to or support an embargo or attack against Iran due to its nuclear activities, 60.2 percent said Turkey should definitely stand against such a move. Only 26 percent said Turkey should back such an embargo or attack its neighbor while 13.8 said they had no idea.

In response to a question on whether they approve of statements by Prime Minister Erdoğan that support Iran's nuclear enrichment program, 48.8 percent said "yes" while 42.6 percent said "no." Many Western nations accuse Iran of seeking to develop nuclear arms through its uranium enrichment efforts, but Erdoğan has announced support for Iran on various occasions. According to the Turkish prime minister, limiting an ongoing nuclear debate to Iran's program is not fair. "We are completely against nuclear weapons in the Middle East. There is a country in the Middle East that possesses nuclear weapons: Israel. There is a difference, though; Israel is not a member of the IAEA, while Iran is," Erdoğan said in September.

However, a majority of respondents, namely 57.6 percent, acknowledged that Iran's possession of nuclear arms would pose a threat to Turkey's security. More than 34 percent, on the other hand, believes no such threat exists.

A full 66 percent of the respondents expressed their belief that Turkey is headed for a bad future, while 30 percent said the country is headed for a good future.

The poll was conducted from Jan. 3-8 by telephone among a random national sampling of 1,614 adults residing in cities, towns and villages. The margin of error for the overall poll was 2.5 percentage points, with a 95 confidence level.

Doubts linger as Istanbul becomes European culture capital

Friday, January 15, 2010 IŞIL EĞRİKAVUK

ISTANBUL- Hürriyet Daily News

Istanbul is filled with fireworks, concerts and other opening festivities this weekend as the city celebrates taking on the title of 2010 European Capital of Culture. Beyond the glamor, however, there are lingering questions about the participation of city residents, the government's effectiveness and the cultural projects' sustainability

Visitors to Istanbul's Beyoğlu district this weekend will see İstiklal Avenue decked out with twinkling lights, but they should keep in mind the famous Shakespearean quote: "All that glitters is not gold."

The decorations and the massive stage set up in Taksim Square are just glimpses of the activities that Istanbul residents will see this weekend as part of the official opening ceremonies of Istanbul as a European Capital of Culture. Organized in seven districts in the city, there will be several theater, dance and music events, including a concert by pop star Tarkan.

State Minister Hayati Yazıcı, who is also chairman of the Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture agency, said recently the 2010 projects would bring Istanbul many tourists as well as make the city visible on international platforms.

Yet, what exactly are these projects, organized with a budget of 800 million Turkish Liras, going to do for the city's cultural tourism?

Most of the agency's projects are temporary events that will not last into 2011," said architect Ömer Kanıpak, who served on the agency's executive board but later resigned. "For example, there are many restoration projects being established with the agency's budget. Instead of quickly putting makeup on the city, they should have set up a restoration institute," he told the *Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review*.

"Being the European Capital of Culture actually means producing sustainable projects as well as raising awareness of residents and visitors about the city and its cultural potential," said Neslihan Albayrak, a museologist who wrote her master's thesis on the agency's projects. "Cultural tourism is definitely an important issue too, but that is not the main purpose of this program. The important thing is to raise society's level of culture, which cannot be done by organizing short term projects," she told the *Daily News*.

Glorification of the past

The Capital of Culture agency is organizing 467 projects in the city throughout the year. Running under the category of arts, cultural heritage, urban implementations, tourism and several others, the total budget for these projects is 374.5 million liras, according to the agency's Web site. Statistics show that 70 percent of these projects are devoted to the renovation and restoration of cultural heritage sites, including the Topkapı Palace and Hagia Sophia.

"The reason that restoration projects have taken up this much space and budget is because of the state's approach to recognizing culture as the reconstruction and glorification of the past," said Urban Implementations Director Korhan Gümüş. "Most of these restoration projects are run by the state ideology, as if they are simple construction projects and closed to the creative mind. The restoration of Istanbul's city walls is a great example."

Indeed, a month ago the city walls' restoration project, run through the agency, opened up a major controversy. When the decision to run the project was decided through a bid, many non-governmental organizations, architects and academics raised their voices claiming that restoration should be conducted using the advice of experts rather than through a bid.

Yet another controversy surrounding the agency was in regards to the restoration of Taksim's milestone AKM building, home to the performing arts. After a long dispute between NGOs and state officials about whether it should be renovated, re-built or restored, the building's future is still unknown today.

Gümüş, who has been involved in the process of Istanbul becoming the European Capital of Culture since 2000 and who represents the NGO side of the argument, stressed the difficulties of collaborating with state officials.

"With the Capital of Culture process, the dominance of the state over culture was opened to a more democratic approach," he said. "Yet, it has not been easy. Our democratic approach was overshadowed by the state's technocracy and privately funded commercial models."

The process has also been a dead end for many. So far, all members that represented the NGOs on the agency's executive board have resigned from their positions for such reasons. Faruk Pekin from the Cultural Awareness Foundation is one of them.

“The administrative structure of the agency was left to state officials,” Pekin said in his resignation statement. “Those people do not approach the projects as if they are cultural projects. The agency has become an arm of the state.”

Yet, some people are more moderate toward the issue.

“It has been a learning process,” said Kanıpak. “I think [the opportunity] could have been used better, but I also think the expectations were overblown.”

“Istanbul’s culture capital process has brought up a question that no other European city could, and that is the process of modernization,” said Gümüş. “Before, the definition of a cultural capital was set in terms of belonging to the European nation-states. But with Istanbul it has shifted to an awareness of modernization.”

Other Capitals

Istanbul is not the only 2010 European Capital of Culture. Essen in Germany and Pécs in Hungary are also holding the title.

“The idea of the European Capital of Culture started in 1985,” said Neslihan Albayrak. “In 1999, it was decided that countries not part of the EU could be nominated for the title between the years of 2005 to 2019.”

In her thesis, Albayrak focuses on five previous culture capital cities, including Glasgow, Rotterdam, Thessalonica, Dublin and Luxembourg. Her thesis stresses the recognition of culture as an investment. “Dublin and Glasgow were two example cities that focused more on industries. Yet with the culture capital program they re-structured themselves and brought their cultural aspects forward with sustainable projects,” she said. “In the beginning, Istanbul aimed for such sustainability, but we will see whether it will happen or not in the following years. For sure we will see the agency’s logo on many events this year. Yet, opening an exhibition and organizing events does not mean everything. More important is who these events are communicating to and how.”

The sustainability of culture projects is hard to judge and debates are sure to continue through Istanbul’s turn as a culture capital. Only long after 2010 will the city see how much gold is truly in its glitter. Until then, visit Beyoğlu and enjoy the lights

GEO-STRATEGIC ISSUES

VISITS

Turkish FM due to Britain

Saturday, 09 January 2010 11:08

TIME TURK

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu will visit Britain on January 11 and 12 on a working trip.

In a press release issued on Friday, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that Davutoglu and his British counterpart David Miliband would discuss bilateral relations, Turkey's EU accession process, Cyprus and other regional and international issues.

Davutoglu will also meet with other important British dignitaries.

Ahmet Davutoglu will deliver a speech on common interests of Turkey and Britain at the King's College.

Turkish National Education minister due to Britain

Saturday, 09 January 2010 10:34

TIME TURK

Turkish National Education Minister Nimet Cubukcu will leave for Britain on Sunday to attend an education forum.

Cubukcu will participate in a forum on redesigning the education between January 11 and 13 as the guest of British secretary of state for children, schools & families as well as British secretary of state for business, innovation and skills.

Cubukcu will also attend the inauguration of Education & Technology Fair, and meet with British Minister for Higher Education & Intellectual Property David Lammy.

Cubukcu will return to Turkey on January 14.

Turkey-Lebanon cooperation meeting held in Ankara

Monday, 11 January 2010 22:26

TIME TURK

Prime Minister Sa'ad al-Din al-Hariri of Lebanon said that they would make significant initiatives with Turkey.

Al-Hariri delivered a speech at a meeting on Turkish-Lebanese cooperation hosted by the Union of Turkish Chambers & Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) over a dinner in Ankara.

Turkey and Lebanon would reciprocally lift visa procedures, and it would provide businessmen with great easiness, al-Hariri said.

Lebanese Prime Minister al-Hariri said they considered there were strategic relations between Turkey and Lebanon and they were eager to boost these relations.

In his part, TOBB Chairman Rifat Hisarciklioglu said Turkish state and also the union were eager to improve political and economic relations with Lebanon.

Trade volume between the two countries reached nearly 900 million U.S. dollars in 2009, but it should be increased, he said.

Hisarciklioglu said the two countries should sign a free trade agreement to boost economic relations.

Turkish President receives Lebanese Prime Minister

Monday, 11 January 2010 22:22

TIME TURK

The Turkish president received the Lebanese prime minister on Monday.

Turkey's President Abdullah Gul had a meeting with Lebanese Premier Sa'ad al-Din al-Hariri at the Cankaya Presidential Palace in Ankara.

Earlier on Monday, al-Hariri had a meeting with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali Sahin.

Prime Minister Erdogan also hosted a luncheon in honor of al-Hariri.

Turkish Foreign Minister leaves for Britain

Monday, 11 January 2010 22:19

TIME TURK

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu left for Britain on a formal visit on Monday.

Davutoglu will meet with his British counterpart David Miliband during his visit. Davutoglu and Miliband will discuss bilateral relations, Turkey's EU accession process, Cyprus and other regional and international issues in their meeting.

Davutoglu will also deliver a speech on common interests of Turkey and Britain at the King's College.

Pakistan's Punjab Chief Minister Visit to Turkey

Turkish Deputy Premier Meets Punjab Chief Minister

Monday, 11 January 2010 13:24

TIME TURK

Turkish State Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc met with Pakistan's Punjab State Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif in the Turkish capital, Ankara on Monday.

Speaking before the meeting, Arinc said that as a country which suffered from terrorism, Turkey closely monitored developments in Pakistan with "great grief."

"The latest incidents in Pakistan never pushed us into despair. Because Pakistan is a powerful state and a powerful nation, and it will certainly have success in the fight against terrorism," Arinc told reporters.

Arinc also called for global cooperation in the fight against terrorism and to keep peace in the world.

Sharif said on his part that Turkey and Pakistan had deep historical ties, adding that Pakistan was willing to learn from Turkey's experiences in the fight against terrorism.

"I believe that terrorism would end in Pakistan, which killed thousands," Sharif said.

Turkey's PM to go on tour of UAE, Saudi Arabia

Friday, 15 January 2010 13:29

TIME TURK

Erdogan will go on a tour of United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia on January 17 and 20, 2010.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan will go on a tour of United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia on January 17 and 20, 2010.

The Prime Ministry released a statement and said Erdogan would be accompanied by a delegation including Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, State Minister for foreign trade Zafer Caglayan, Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek, Energy & Natural Resources Minister Taner Yildiz and several other MPs.

Erdogan will attend and deliver a speech at the opening session of the third World Energy Summit in Abu Dhabi, UAE, on January 18.

Erdogan is set to have meetings with UAE's Emir Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan and Crown Prince Sheikh Muhammad bin Zayed al-Nahyan.

Erdogan is also scheduled to meet Saudi Arabia's King Abdallah bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud and several other senior officials.

On January 20, Erdogan will visit Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) based in Jeddah and meet OIC Secretary General Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu.

Erdogan's talks in UAE and Saudi Arabia are expected to focus on bilateral relations as well as

regional developments.

Erdogan will also exchange views on topics included in the agenda of OIC.

Turkey and Pakistan aim to triple trade

Friday, January 15, 2010 REETA PAAKKINEN

ISTANBUL – Hürriyet Daily News

Turkey and Pakistan aim to triple their trade volume from the current \$740 million to at least \$2 billion in the coming 18 months, Vice Chairman of the Punjab Board of Investment & Trade Pir Saad Ahsan-ud-Din said Friday.

Ahsan-ud-Din was in Turkey attending the Turkey-Pakistan CEOs Forum together with a delegation 110 Pakistani businessmen, the largest delegation from Pakistan overseas ever. The meeting was hosted by Turkey's Foreign Economic Relations Board, or DEİK.

"Our visit has four dimensions: political, economic, security and cultural. Turkey is the 16th largest economy in the world and we are the 26th largest. Together we have a population of 250 million people but a trade volume of only \$740 million, which means even less than we spend on Starbucks coffee. Our purpose here is to improve economic relations with Turkey and accordingly, the government has set a target of about \$2 billion of trade in the coming 14-18 months," Ahsan-ud-Din told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review.

"One of the key steps is to facilitate business-to-business contacts like DEİK is now doing," he added.

During the first half day of the delegation's visit, Turkish and Pakistani companies had already signed five business deals worth \$100 million. The deals included, a \$16 million deal between Al-Ghazi Tractors of Pakistan and Turkish firms Zirve Plastic and Genpart Foreign Trade, a \$3.5 million deal between Pakistani Ali Akbar Enterprises with Cansu Irrigation and Pollen Seeds Corporation of Turkey and an \$80 million deal between Pakistani 4B Group with Verscom and Greenlife Seeds.

Potential sectors

Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif of the Punjab State of Pakistan noted Turkey and Pakistan need to select the sectors for future cooperation.

"Doing everything at once will not bring us many results. These areas could be agriculture, dairy, dairy products, power stations and infrastructure tenders, as Turkey is very experienced in infrastructure and construction. The Punjab state is supporting these with full force," he said.

Ahsan-ud-Din noted the country is suffering from frequent power shortages, and power is one area that also Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has highlighted as having major potential for cooperation. "Infrastructure is another key sector where large-scale investments are needed. Like Turkey, Pakistan is a major transit hub, so this includes also transit vehicles. There is also need for some 4 million new residential units in the coming years, which require an investment of \$40 billion," Ahsan-ud-Din said.

The visa-free travel regime Turkish and Pakistani governments are planning will make business contacts between the two countries easier. "But there should also be more flights. That would definitely help the business. Until today the problem has been that we both – Pakistan and Turkey – have been focusing on different markets than each other," Ahsan-ud-Din said.

Trade balance in Pakistan's favor

Turkey's exports to Pakistan are relatively well-diversified, and include textiles, chemicals, machinery, consumer goods and transport equipment among others. Turkey's imports from

Pakistan are, on the other hand, not as diversified: 76 percent includes textiles, 9 percent is ready wear clothing, and the remaining is chemicals and other items. Esen Çağlar, an economist at the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey, or TEPAV, noted Turkish contractors in overseas business activity totaled \$24 billion in 2008, but Pakistan represented a share of only \$3.1 million, 0.01 percent of this. "There is a long way to go and a lot of potential. We need concrete agendas to build on the relations," Çağlar said.

Learning from Turkey how to tackle terrorism

The delegation's visit includes an important focus on security issues with Pakistan trying to learn from Turkey's experience in dealing with terrorism, Ahsan-ud-Din said. "Pakistan is going through a period of tremendous challenges in terrorism. Turkey has also faced that, the sad loss of about 40,000 people over the years. It has been horrible for us to see, but it is something we are now experiencing ourselves," he said, adding, "We want to learn from the Turkish experience and how they combated this experience."

Turkey-Pakistan CEO forum held in Istanbul

Friday, 15 January 2010 16:29

WORLD BULLETIN

The chief minister of Pakistani province of Punjab said that Turkey's performance constituted the best model for them.

The chief minister of Pakistani province of Punjab said that Turkey's performance constituted the best model for them.

Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif of Punjab was in attendance at "Turkey-Pakistan CEO Forum" hosted by Turkey's Foreign Economic Relations Board in Istanbul.

Sharif said at the meeting, "Pakistan's exports were higher than Turkey's exports in 1980s, but Turkey's exports exceeded 100 billion USD in 2009 while Pakistan's exports stood at 19 billion USD. During all those years, Turkey launched planned initiatives and put them into practice successfully."

"Today, we have a great opportunity in front of us and we must benefit from it. Turkey's performance constitutes the best model for us," he said.

Sharif said that Turkey and Pakistan should develop their cooperation especially in the sectors of education, industry, chemicals, textiles, husbandry and dairy production.

He also invited Turkish investors to join tenders for building of a hydroelectric power plant and coal power plant.

Meanwhile, Ali Irvali, chairman of Turkey-Pakistan Business Council, said that Turkey's biggest dam construction firms were working in a giant project in Pakistan while the equipment required by Pakistani textile sector was imported from Turkey.

"The current trade volume between Turkey and Pakistan is about 1 billion USD. We aim at increasing it to 2 billion USD by the end of 2010. Our most important problem is lack of a direct transportation line. We use ports of Italy and Singapore to ship goods to Pakistan. Actually, it is possible to transport goods from Istanbul to Lahore, capital of the Pakistani province of Punjab and the second largest city in Pakistan in five days," he added.

Turkey, Pakistan sign \$100 mln-business deals

Friday, 15 January 2010 15:38

WORLD BULLETIN

Turkish and Pakistani firms have signed business deals worth of 100 million USD.
Turkish and Pakistani firms have signed business deals worth of 100 million USD.
The deals were signed during a meeting hosted in Istanbul by Turkey's Foreign Economic Relations Board with the participation of Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif of Punjab State of Pakistan.

Al-Ghazi Tractors of Pakistan signed deals of 16 million USD with Turkish firms Zirve Plastic and Genpart Foreign Trade while Pakistani Ali Akbar Enterprises signed deals of 3.5 million USD with Cansu Irrigation and Pollen Seeds Corporation of Turkey. Another Pakistani firm, 4B Group, signed deals worth of 80 million USD with Turkish companies Verscom and Greenlife Seeds.

Total value of the business deals amounted to 100 million USD.

Aid Convoy incident-Egypt-Gaza Border

Convoy given 24 hours to deliver aid and leave Gaza

Friday, 08 January 2010 09:54

Today's Zaman

Aid trucks that entered the besieged Gaza Strip yesterday as part of an international convoy were ordered to leave the city within 24 hours, Egyptian officials announced yesterday.

The trucks were expected to go in, unload their cargo and leave as quickly as possible. Egypt, which has been blocking the entry of the international aid convoy into the Gaza Strip, allowed the vehicles to enter the city on Wednesday, easing back from the strict blockade after Turkish officials' intervention.

Before the convoy's entry through the Rafah crossing there were clashes in the area, as a riot broke out along the border in protest of Egypt's blockade of the Gaza Strip, which is located between Egypt and Israel. One Egyptian border guard died and at least 40 were injured in the clashes. This comes a day after several hundred international activists clashed with police in the Egyptian port city of Al Arish when they were told that a portion of their aid convoy would be allowed to enter Gaza only through Israel.

Five Justice and Development Party (AK Party) deputies and more than 200 Turkish citizens are part of the aid convoy, which departed from England 131 days earlier. Following yesterday's clashes, Turkish officials stepped in, after which Egyptian officials allowed the convoy to pass through.

Humanitarian Aid Association (İHH) spokesperson Salih Bilici said the tensions rose when some plain-clothed officers among the Egyptian riot police teams deployed in front of the Al Arish port started throwing stones at the convoy. He said the Egyptian police attacked convoy participants with batons and used tear gas, causing 40 people including several Turkish journalists to be injured. Seven were detained during the events, according to Bilici.

According to reports from the region, Egyptian officials wanted to confiscate 57 vehicles, which they said were bought in Egypt but had Turkish license plates. AK Party deputy Murat Mercan called Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, who according to reports called his Egyptian counterpart Ahmed Ebulgeyt. After a lengthy conversation between the two, Egyptian officials allowed entry to a large portion of the convoy.

Turkish Embassy officials in Egypt contacted various people in the Egyptian Foreign Ministry yesterday. Egypt's ambassador to Ankara also attended meetings at the Foreign Ministry in

Ankara. Diplomatic talks finally produced results and by late Wednesday portions of the humanitarian convoy had begun entering Gaza.

George Galloway, a British lawmaker and leader of the convoy said the Egyptians' attempts to send some trucks of the convoy to Israel was "unconscionable" He also praised Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for his efforts to help Palestine. Galloway was quoted in the Turkish media yesterday as having said "I wish Egypt, all Arab countries and even England get a prime minister like Erdoğan," in remarks translated into Turkish as such. As the convoy started entering Gaza, there was "joy and emotional moments" in Gaza streets, according to an Al Jazeera reporter at the scene.

AK Party deputies meet Haniyeh

Meanwhile, Turkish deputies in the convoy met with Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh. AK Party deputies Mehmet Hıdır Nil, Seracettin Karayağız, Cemal Yılmazdemir, Hüsnu Tuna and Murat Mercan, who also heads Parliament's Foreign Relations Commission and Contentment Party (SP) Secretary-General Temel Karamollaoğlu also crossed the Egyptian border yesterday.

In his speech during his meeting with the Turkish deputies, Haniyeh said he was very happy to see the visitors in Gaza. "We still haven't forgotten Prime Minister Erdoğan's courageous act in the face of Israel's attacks and blockade," he said, referring to Erdoğan's walking off the stage during a panel discussion in Davos last year in protest of Israeli attacks on Gaza last January after an angry exchange with Israeli President Shimon Peres.

Haniyeh said he attached great importance to Turkey's stance regarding the rights of Palestinians, noting, "With the new policy Turkey has been pursuing, the Middle East is also being reshaped."

He said they had followed the journey of the convoy from the start, seeing the difficulties they had to face. He said those who finally made it to Gaza on Wednesday night were "true heroes." During his meeting with the deputies, he also thanked President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Erdoğan and the Turkish nation for their support. Haniyeh also noted that the region where new homes will be built with cement from the Turkish Red Crescent will be named after Fatih Sultan Mehmet, the Ottoman emperor who conquered İstanbul in 1453.

Prime Minister Erdoğan also commented on Wednesday's developments yesterday. He said, "Our stance on Gaza is not the reflection of a change of axis in our foreign policy, but the reflection of our sincerity and humanity."

Aid convoy a propaganda tool for Hamas, Abbas says

Friday, 08 January 2010 08:50

Todays Zaman

Visiting Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has said he is concerned about the fate of Turkish-Egyptian ties in the wake of tensions over the delay of an international aid convoy bound for the Hamas-run Gaza Strip and held the convoy's leaders responsible

The British-based Viva Palestina convoy, which also included Turkish lawmakers and activists, entered Gaza after a tense standoff with Egyptian authorities. The members of the group scuffled with Egyptian police at the Mediterranean port of El Arish on Tuesday when Egypt refused to allow part of the convoy pass.

The Egyptian decision sparked tensions at the Gaza-Egypt border as well. One Egyptian border guard was shot dead and scores of Gazans were wounded when Gazan youths hurled stones

across the border at the Egyptian security forces. Turkey earlier said the aid convoy should be allowed to reach Gaza. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has been in talks with his Egyptian counterpart to resolve the tensions with the aid convoy, which eventually reached Gaza on Wednesday evening.

Describing the clashes and the killing of an Egyptian border guard in a scuffle on the Gaza border on Wednesday as an “unfortunate incident,” Palestinian President Abbas accused members of the Viva Palestina aid convoy of being a “propaganda tool” for Hamas.

“Aid must be assistance only. Not a propaganda tool,” he said, lashing out at British MP George Galloway, who has been leading the convoy. “Egypt is a sovereign country and they [Egyptian officials] have every right to determine which route the convoy should take. But Galloway insisted on another route,” he said.

Abbas, speaking to a group of journalists in Ankara on Thursday following talks with President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, appeared to be very much concerned that the incident might damage the relations between Egypt and Turkey, both of which are heavyweights in the Middle East. “Turkish and Egyptian relations are excellent and we do not want any harm to come to them,” he underlined, warning that incidents like this might be used by third parties to derail the peace process in the Middle East. He further argued that Hamas might be using the issue of the border-crossing at Rafah as leverage to gain legitimacy on the international platform.

More than 500 international activists have taken part in the Viva Palestina convoy, bringing tons of humanitarian supplies, as well as vehicles, to Gaza. The group includes British, American, Jordanian and Turkish activists and lawmakers, including Murat Mercan, the chairman of parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee.

Turkish leaders who met with Abbas called for an end to the conflict between the rival Palestinian groups. “We will celebrate here once you end your disputes,” Prime Minister Erdoğan told Abbas at their meeting on Wednesday, according to the Anatolia news agency. Abbas said on Thursday that he asked Turkish officials to talk to his bitter rival Hamas in order to convince the Islamist group to accept an Egyptian-brokered reconciliation deal. “Turkey should talk to Hamas and do everything possible to convince them to take part in elections as a way of achieving reconciliation and unity in Palestine,” he said in response to a question posed by Today’s Zaman.

“We agreed to sign a reconciliation deal in Egypt, but Hamas later refused to sign the agreement, asking for several reservations and amendments to be considered,” he charged, stressing that Hamas is fearful of holding elections in the Gaza Strip, which it rules, out of concern that it may lose out to the Abbas-led Fatah movement. He claimed that when Egypt sent the deal to be signed by both parties they said not to ask for any amendments to it. “Hamas came to power through free and fair elections. Why is it that they are afraid of holding another one?” he questioned.

“There is the need to hold elections and Hamas should not be allowed to disrupt democratic life,” Abbas said. “We believe in democracy. Hamas does not. If you are looking for a pre-determined election result, then this is certainly not a democracy,” he added. The Egyptian compromise proposal calls for elections to be held in June when Abbas’ extended term ends.

The reservations of the Islamic Hamas movement, which took control of Gaza by force in 2007 after the coalition between Fatah and Hamas broke down, involve security matters, the date of the elections and the reform of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Hamas forced Fatah security forces out of the Gaza Strip after it won the 2006 elections. Its parliamentary term ends

in January 2010 but Hamas refuses to heed Abbas' calls for elections unless political unity is restored in the West Bank, where Fatah holds sway.

Abbas lambasted exiled Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal for exploiting religion for political purposes. "In terms of religion, there is no difference between us and Hamas as we are both servants of God and adherents of Islam," he said, adding, however, that the Hamas leaders are exploiting Islam for their own ambitions.

Abbas also dismissed rumors that Turkey was trying to impose its own will on the Palestinians to achieve reconciliation between rival factions in Palestine. "I met with Turkish President Abdullah Gül, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and none of them hinted at any imposition of Turkey's viewpoint on us," he said, stressing that all talks were held in very candid and transparent manner and nothing was swept under the carpet. "Turkey wants to play a role in the Palestinian issue and we want that as well," Abbas said, praising Turkish efforts to provide development assistance and establish industrial zones in the north and the south of Palestine.

Israel responsible for stalemate

The Palestinian president reiterated his position on the stalled Middle East peace negotiations, saying, "We are not asking for any new preconditions on the resumption of talks." He accused hard-line Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of creating obstacles to future talks. "First of all, settlements are not frozen, despite Israel's claims. Second, Netanyahu does not recognize the legitimacy of the talks and has declined to publically endorse the two-state solution," Abbas said.

Abbas also dismissed reports which claimed that he failed to back Richard Goldstone's report on Operation Cast Lead in which the chair of the UN fact-finding mission accused Israel and Hamas of human rights violations and war crimes during the three week offensive in Gaza. "I endorsed Goldstone's report and backed the resolution that was brought before the UN Human Rights Council," he underlined.

Egypt-Gaza Border Not a Normal One, Says Envoy

Friday, 15 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Egypt's border with Gaza is not a normal one, and if it is treated as a normal border, like the Egypt-Libya border, it would mean the recognition of Gaza as an independent state and its separation from the West Bank, said the Egyptian ambassador to Ankara.

"Gaza should be treated in a different way. It is still under Israeli occupation," Ambassador Alaa El Hadidi told Ankara-based think tank USAK on Friday.

"But Hamas wants to turn the border with Gaza into an international border. What does this mean? We do not want to separate Gaza from the West Bank. We do not accept that. We do not want to destroy the unity of Palestine," he said, warning that separating Gaza from the West Bank would deal a serious blow to the Palestinian cause.

The top diplomat clarified the Egyptian position regarding the turbulent passage of an aid convoy bringing relief supplies to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip controlled by Hamas. He said the crossings from Egypt to Gaza are organized under an international agreement because of the extraordinary situation of the Gaza border.

"It is our land; it is our territory. We are not a banana republic," said El Hadidi, calling for respect for his government's rules.

Cairo wanted the aid convoy to cross Gaza from Egypt's El Arish port. Upset with the coverage of the convoy crisis in Turkey, the diplomat repeated that his country was not preventing the passage of any convoy to Gaza.

'Turkey, Egypt not rivals'

The recent crisis accelerated diplomatic traffic between Turkey and Egypt and sparked commentaries that the two countries were rivals in the region. The ambassador said: "We are not in competition with Turkey. It was we who invited and encouraged Turkey to play an active role in the Middle East."

He continued: "We trust Turkey because we believe Turkey can play a constructive and positive role. We are not jealous of Turkey. How come?"

Cyprus Talks

Leaders Begin Intensified Talks In Cyprus

Monday, 11 January 2010 13:27

TIME TURK

President Mehmet Ali Talat of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and Greek Cypriot leader Demetris Christofias met under a new and intensified stage of negotiations in Cyprus on Monday.

The first round of intensified talks began at the residence of Taya Brook Zerihoun, the special representative of the UN Secretary General in Cyprus, at the buffer zone in Lefkosa.

Apart from Talat and Christofias, their teams, Zerihoun and UN Secretary General's Special Adviser on Cyprus Alexander Downer are also attending the meeting.

Intensified talks will be held in two rounds and each round will take 3 days, officials said.

Leaders will also meet on Tuesday and Wednesday as part of the first round while they will get together on January 25, 26 and 27 within the framework of the second round.

Cypriot leaders held their 60th meeting last Monday as part of the negotiations they launched in September 2008 to find a comprehensive settlement to Cyprus issue.

The leaders are expected to discuss "management and share of power", "economy", "European Union" and "property" issues in their intensified negotiations.

UN sees the intensified talks as "an important opportunity to achieve a remarkable improvement in the ongoing process in the island".

On the other hand, sources said that the Greek Cypriot party refused the issues proposed by TRNC to be discussed during intensified talks before they were even brought to table, moreover, it leaked the details of such package to the press.

In an "unofficial" meeting presided by Christofias on Sunday, Greek Cypriot party leaders said that Talat's proposals were "unacceptable and they could not lay the foundation for the talks".

TRNC expressed disappointment over such development and Turkish Cypriot presidential spokesperson Hasan Ercakica said in a written statement that Talat was expecting to hear the "official view" of the Greek Cypriot party from Christofias during today's gathering.

"Despite the problems in the negotiation process, TRNC is determined to act in accordance with the official stance to be laid down by the Greek Cypriot party before UN officials and to continue with its positive contributions provided that the opposing party displays a positive attitude as well," Ercakica said.

CYPRUS ISSUE

Gaining independence from the UK in 1960, Cyprus became a bi-communal Republic where Greek and Turkish Cypriot constituent communities would share power guaranteed by the UK, Turkey and Greece. However, reluctant to share power and pursuing a policy of Enosis (Union) with Greece, Greek Cypriots soon expelled Turkish Cypriots from power and terrorised and ghettoised them.

Decades long armed attacks on the defenseless Turkish Cypriots culminated in 1974 when an Athens-backed Greek Cypriot military coup on the island led to Turkey's intervention based on its rights stemming from guarantor agreement.

Although the Republic of Cyprus as described in the 1959 agreements is no longer there, Greek Cypriots continue to enjoy this title and international recognition while the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, a fully democratic government representing Turkish Cypriots, still suffers under an unfair political and economic blockade.

Cyprus joined the EU as a divided island when Greek Cypriots in the south rejected the UN reunification plan in twin referendums in 2004 even though the Turkish Cypriots in the north overwhelmingly supported it.

The promise made by EU foreign ministers before the referendums to end the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots and establish direct trade with north Cyprus remains unfulfilled.

Cypriot Leaders Continue "Intensified Talks"

Tuesday, 12 January 2010 13:11

TIME TURK

President Mehmet Ali Talat of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and Greek Cypriot leader Demetris Christofias met on Tuesday under a new and intensified stage of Cyprus talks.

The meeting takes place at the residence of Taye Brook Zerihoun, the special representative of the UN Secretary General in Cyprus, at the buffer zone in Lefkosa.

Cypriot leaders are expected to continue negotiating "management and share of power" the whole day on Tuesday.

The leaders focused on "management and share of power" for 9 hours on Monday, discussed differences of opinions, and Greek Cypriot party expressed its views on the topic to Turkish Cypriot party. The views are expected to be relayed in a written way on Tuesday.

Monday's meeting took place in a tense atmosphere as Greek Cypriot party considered proposals of the Turkish party as "unacceptable".

Intensified talks will be held in two rounds and each round will take 3 days. The first round of the intensified talks will be concluded on Wednesday.

Cypriot leaders held their 60th meeting last Monday as part of the negotiations they launched in September 2008 to find a comprehensive settlement to Cyprus issue.

The leaders are expected to discuss "management and share of power", "economy", "European Union" and "property" issues in their intensified negotiations.

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Cypriot leaders begin intensified talks on shaky ground

Tuesday, 12 January 2010 12:00

Today's Zaman

Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat (R) and Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias talk before their meeting at a UN compound in the UN buffer zone in the divided capital of Nicosia on Monday.

Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders on the ethnically divided island of Cyprus launched a new round of intensified talks on Monday, aimed at paving the way for a potential peace deal this year; yet prospects seem dim for a positive outcome as the Greek side has recently rejected a package proposal on governance and power-sharing floated by the Turkish side.

Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat started six daylong sessions on Monday, hoping to overcome obstacles that had hindered progress during 60 meetings over the past 16 months.

Last week UN Special Envoy for Cyprus Alexander Downer handed Christofias the Turkish Cypriot side's proposals on governance and power-sharing. Christofias summoned a meeting of party leaders on Sunday to discuss the Turkish Cypriot proposals.

Greek Cypriot news reports said the Turkish Cypriot side has conditionally accepted the Greek Cypriot proposal for a weighted vote or cross vote. This would mean that both communities will

vote for president and vice president, though the Greek Cypriot vote would be weighted based on the population ratio between the two communities. One of the conditions set is that Turkish nationals will enjoy the same rights EU nationals would have in Cyprus after a settlement, while a second condition calls for two Flight Information Regions, news reports said. A third condition states that the president and vice president of the country would have veto powers.

Yet the Greek Cypriot side eventually rejected the proposals, labeling them as “unacceptable” and a public relations move by Turkey, who they believe is behind the blueprint.

“These proposals cannot form the basis for discussion,” Greek Cypriot government spokesperson Stephanos Stephanou said, following the Sunday meeting. “It was established at the meeting that the proposals ... are unacceptable and are way off the agreed basis for negotiations for a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation with political equality as this is defined in the relevant UN resolutions for a single state, with a single sovereignty, one international personality and a single citizenship,” he added.

On Saturday the Turkish Foreign Ministry confirmed that the Turkish Cypriot side had offered the Greek Cypriot side a “package proposal” on governance and power-sharing issues.

Nevertheless, Ankara’s confirmation, which came in a written statement, did not elaborate on components of the proposal.

Recalling Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s proposal for having a quadrilateral meeting among Cypriot leaders, Britain, Greece and Turkey within the framework of UN-led Cyprus negotiations, the ministry said the latest proposal “once more proved the Turkish Cypriot side’s sincerity for reaching a fair and permanent resolution in the shortest time” and is a “very important initiative for reaching this goal at the end of intensified talks in January.”

ISRAEL AND TURKEY

Israel expresses uneasiness over Turkish TV drama

Monday, 11 January 2010 22:28

TIME TUERK

Israeli Foreign Ministry expressed uneasiness over a popular Turkish TV series, "Kurtlar Vadisi" (The Valley of The Wolves), through diplomatic channels.

Turkish Ambassador to Israel Oguz Celikol has been summoned to Israeli Foreign Ministry on Monday, diplomats said.

Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon expressed Israeli government's uneasiness and regrets over the TV series.

Israeli media reports claimed that recent episodes of "the Valley of The Wolves", which deals with relations between the state, mafia and business circles in Turkey, had shown Israeli secret service Mossad's operation in Turkey and contained anti-Israel messages.

Diplomacy a la Lieberman: Insult to envoy shaking ties

Wednesday, 13 January 2010 14:42

Todays Zaman

Troubled relations with Israel hit a new low when an Israeli protest against a Turkish television series crossed the boundaries of diplomatic civility and turned into an insult against Ambassador Oğuz Çelikkol, in a scene that appeared to be the design of

Turkish-Israeli relations have been strained since Israel's deadly offensive in the Gaza Strip, which left about 1,400 Palestinians dead, including many civilians, and brought heavy international criticism upon Israel, including accusations of war crimes and crimes against humanity by a United Nations investigation. Since the offensive, Turkish-Israeli bilateral relations have seen exchanges of harsh remarks between Israeli and Turkish officials and crisis incidents despite efforts to tone down the crisis atmosphere.

Nonetheless, Monday and Tuesday's diplomatic kerfuffle between the two sides was an exception, since the way Çelikkol was treated by Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon introduced an unprecedented example of diplomatic rudeness. Chronologically, the incident started when Ayalon summoned Çelikkol to the Knesset on Monday afternoon to express outrage over an episode of the popular Turkish television series, "Valley of the Wolves: Ambush," which depicted Israeli intelligence service Mossad agents spying inside Turkey and kidnapping Turkish babies.

At the beginning of the meeting, Ayalon was seen telling the cameramen to film him and his aide sitting on tall chairs, and Çelikkol on a lower chair, with the Israeli flag in the middle.

The ambassador was also filmed waiting in a corridor for the meeting to begin, and when it did, he was offered nothing to drink or eat.

In Ankara, during the same hours on Monday afternoon, at a joint press conference with visiting Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan lashed out at Israel for violating Lebanon's airspace and using disproportionate force against Palestinians in Gaza. Israel's response came shortly afterwards, with officials slamming Erdoğan's "unbridled attack" and accusing him of seeking to harm ties. "Israel reserves the right to protect its citizens against rocket attacks and terrorism by Hamas and Hizbullah. Turkey is the last country that should preach morality to Israel and to the Israel Defense Forces," a statement by Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesperson Yossi Levy said.

At the end of the tense Knesset meeting, pictures taken during the meeting between Ayalon and Çelikkol -- ostensibly showing the latter purposefully embarrassed -- marked the end of the longest two days between Israel and Turkey.

Israel's Ambassador to Turkey Gabby Levy was summoned to the Foreign Ministry on Tuesday morning and ordered to explain both the way Çelikkol was treated and Yossi Levy's statement, which explicitly blamed Turkey for being "immoral."

Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu, who was formerly Turkey's ambassador to Israel, told Ambassador Levy that the treatment of Çelikkol was an "unacceptable impudence," and that "everybody should know their place."

Turkish diplomatic sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Today's Zaman that the ministry is considering recalling Çelikkol to Ankara for consultations.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry separately released a written statement in response to the statement by Yossi Levy, firmly denying accusations of spreading anti-Semitism.

Political agenda and 35-year-long diplomatic career

Ayalon on Tuesday refused to apologize for his manner toward Çelikkol, suggesting that he "didn't intend to humiliate him, merely to convey a message." After he summoned Çelikkol, in a break from the diplomatic norm, Ayalon invited the press for a photo-op, during which he was seen telling the cameramen to film him and his aide sitting on tall chairs, and the Turkish envoy on a lower chair, with the Israeli flag in the middle, Israeli reports said. The ambassador was also filmed waiting in a corridor for the meeting to begin. When it did, he was offered nothing to drink or eat.

During the photo-op at the start of the meeting, Ayalon reportedly told the photographers in Hebrew: "Pay attention that he is sitting in a lower chair and we are in the higher ones, that there is only an Israeli flag on the table and that we are not smiling." Çelikkol's associates told Israeli Army Radio on Tuesday that the meeting with Ayalon was the most humiliating event he had experienced in 35 years as a diplomat.

The associates said Çelikkol had no idea what the topic of conversation was to be when he was first seated. When the cameras left the room, the sources said, the meeting was normal and professional. "Had the ambassador understood Ayalon's intentions, which were only expressed in Hebrew, he would have responded in kind," the sources told Israeli Army Radio.

While Israeli Army Radio quoted officials in Jerusalem on Tuesday morning calling Ayalon's conduct "harmful to the strategic interests" with Ankara, a former Israeli ambassador to Turkey, Alon Liel, told the station that "a new sort of diplomacy" had been invented, and that Lieberman had "made up a new way of reprimanding."

"This time, they made him sit on a low chair, next time maybe they'll make him crawl, and who knows, maybe the time after that they'll beat him up at the entrance," he said.

Ayalon himself openly admitted that he and Lieberman had planned the details of the encounter, but told the radio station that such behavior was "standard diplomatic conduct," offering no apology.

"I won't apologize. It's the Turks who should -- for what Erdoğan said and for the television series," Ayalon said. "We are merely setting boundaries."

Israeli Foreign Ministry sources, meanwhile, said Lieberman was trying to stop Defense Minister Ehud Barak from visiting to Turkey next week, in order to maintain the recent tensions between the two countries. The same sources said that Lieberman's efforts were aimed at preventing Turkey from resuming its role as mediator in Israel's peace talks with Syria

"We get the sense that Lieberman wants to heat things up before Barak's visit," a senior Israeli Foreign Ministry source was quoted as saying. "All of the recent activities were part of Lieberman's political agenda."

Unfairness against history

Anti-Semitism charges by Israel led to serious anger in Ankara, who says that its foreign policy favors dialogue, engagement and peaceful methods instead of disproportionate use of force and isolationist policies.

"Throughout history, Turks have extended their hands to Jews whenever they fell on hard times. Turks' and Jews' long history of living together is the history of mutual respect and tolerance. Hence, we reject the claim that 'Turkey is the last country that should preach morality to Israel' as a claim which does not comply with the memory of the Jewish people. This expression, which distorts facts, is unfair to history," the Turkish Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

"We believe that expressions within the Israeli Foreign Ministry statement directed toward Turkey are remarks delivered with domestic political contemplations and have surpassed their goal; we harshly condemn these expressions."

Parliament's Foreign Affairs Commission Chair Murat Mercan and ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) Deputy Chairman Kürşad Tüzmen, as well as main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) Deputy Chairman Onur Öymen, were those who criticized Ayalon's treatment of Çelikkol. Mercan said such approaches deepened Israel's isolation in the region, while Tüzmen expressed hope for the correction of such a mistake through mutual visits. Öymen, meanwhile, said calling the incident "a diplomatic scandal" would not be a sufficient description, calling on the government for retaliatory action.

Erdoğan slams Israel over violation of Lebanese airspace

Tuesday, 12 January 2010 11:59

Today's Zaman

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan lashed out at Israel on Monday for violating Lebanon's airspace and using disproportionate force against Palestinians in Gaza, the latest in a series of criticisms Ankara has directed at the Jewish state's policies in t

“It is impossible for us to remain silent about what Israel has been doing. We believe that pressure should be exerted on the Israeli administration. According to UN resolutions, Israel has violated rules over 100 times.

If they are not to be implemented, why do these rules exist?” Erdoğan stated at a joint press conference with Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri in Ankara.

Hariri's visit to Turkey came days after the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) last week called on Israel to end its daily violations of Lebanese airspace. “Israel ought to halt the flights which constitute a violation of Lebanese sovereignty,” UNIFIL spokesperson Andrea Tenenti said Thursday, adding that these violations are “a matter of continued discussion with Israel.”

A spokesperson for the Lebanese army said Lebanese anti-aircraft guns opened fire on four Israeli warplanes that were violating its airspace at low altitudes over the southern area of Marjayoun on Monday morning.

Calling Israel's moves threatening for international peace, Erdoğan also pledged to voice its warnings against Israel both at international platforms such as the United Nations Security Council and during an upcoming visit of Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak to Turkey, which is expected to take place later this month. Turkey is a temporary member of the Security Council. A UN spokesman in Lebanon said Monday the overflights were a violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which ended the devastating 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon's Shiite Hezbollah. For his part, Hariri blamed Israel for accusing the Lebanese government of irresponsibility, claiming to have found explosive materials in southern Lebanon without any basis to make such accusations.

Today, Israel continues its violation of our airspace and waters,” Hariri said. “In my opinion, an attack against Lebanon is itself terrorism. We have to stand united against Israel. The time has come for doing this,” he added.

‘No excuse for Gaza attack’

The press conference with Hariri was also a venue for Erdoğan's strongly-worded warnings to Israel, whose warplanes killed three Islamic jihad gunmen in an air strike on Sunday as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned that the military would respond harshly to rocket and mortar fire from Gaza. The aircraft targeted a group of Palestinian militants in the central Gaza Strip, killing the three with an air-to-ground missile, Palestinian medics said. The Israeli military said the militants were targeted as they were preparing to fire rockets into Israel. “What is your excuse this time?” he asked, underlining that there were no rockets fired from Gaza that would justify Israel's attack on Sunday.

Erdoğan accused Israel of using white phosphorus shells in its offensive in Gaza last year. “No one can claim that phosphorus shells are not weapons of mass destruction,” he said.

Turkey's ties with Israel have been strained by Erdoğan's frequent criticism of the Jewish state's use of force against Palestinians as well as during the 2006 war against Hezbollah forces in Lebanon.

Discussing the possibility of war to make Iran drop its nuclear program, Erdoğan said, "The region will not accept a new Iraq syndrome." Turkey has long defended Iran's right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful use.

"Those who are warning Iran over nuclear weapons are not making the same warnings to Israel," Erdoğan said. "The five permanent members of the Security Council must be just. Israel has not denied the existence of its nuclear arsenal; on the contrary, it has admitted it."

No backtracking on Davos decision

He, meanwhile, repeated that he will not be attending the World Economic Forum to be held in Davos, Switzerland later this month. Last year's forum was the venue for his harsh public criticism against Israeli President Shimon Peres over the deadly Gaza offensive. Erdoğan walked out of the session and promised never to come back to Davos.

"I said it once. This is over; I will not be going there again," he told reporters.

Turkish president gives ultimatum to Israel, setting deadline for the response

Wednesday, 13 January 2010 14:49

Today's Zaman

In a stern warning to Israel, Turkish president Abdullah Gül said on Wednesday that Israel has until midnight to rectify what many in Turkey regarded as unprecedented example of diplomatic rudeness to Turkish ambassador by Israeli official earlier this week.

In the meantime, the half-way apology expressed by the Israeli side was found insufficient and did not go as far as satisfying the conditions set forth by Turkish foreign ministry, diplomatic sources here in Ankara told.

Turkish Foreign Minister Israel's Apology In Line With Turkey's Requests

Thursday, 14 January 2010 10:51

TIME TURK

The Turkish foreign minister said on Wednesday that Israel's letter of apology was in line with Turkey's requests.

Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said that the letter of apology from Israel to Turkey included the elements Turkey had demanded.

"For us, the matter has been solved," Davutoglu told reporters in the Croatian capital of Zagreb.

Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon, who summoned Turkish Ambassador in Tel Aviv Oguz Celikkol Tuesday to express Israel's uneasiness over a Turkish TV-series showing Israeli agents kidnapping a child, had Celikkol sit at a lower armchair in front of a table with only the Israeli flag on it, refusing to shake his hand in front of the press.

Ayalon's snub violating all diplomatic manners drew strong reaction from Turkish officials.

Turkey asked Israel to make an apology. Turkish and Israeli foreign ministries released statements one after the other.

On Wednesday evening, Israel sent a letter to Turkey apologizing for Danny Ayalon's treatment of Celikkol.

Speaking to reporters, Foreign Minister Davutoglu defined settlement of the diplomatic row as a positive development.

"I hope we would not face such incidents again, and our bilateral relations would be maintained within an ethical framework and the scope of courtesy rules as required by international

diplomacy," Davutoglu said.

Davutoglu said Turkey would show respect to all countries as long as relations were maintained in that way.

"We would once more like to stress that it will be to the best interests of countries that show such stance not to go on assuming such attitude and behaving that way," he also said.

Davutoglu said Turkey-Israel relations were comprehensive, but the recent regional policy of Israel and the great deal of civilian loss in intense attacks on Gaza irrespective of whether they were civilians made Turkish public indignant.

"We will continue to show reaction until Israel assumes a pacifist policy," he said.

Davutoglu said such criticisms were a part of Turkey's responsibility to the region.

"We want peace to prevail in our region, and we want good relations in our region," Davutoglu said.

Davutoglu also wished that Turkey and Israel had good relations and hoped that the Middle East peace process would be settled on a right axis among Palestine, Syria and Lebanon.

The Turkish foreign minister wished that Israel assumed pacifist policies and contributed to a lasting stability.

"Turkey-Israel relations will be settled on a right axis in such an atmosphere, but we will not accept permanent tension in our region," he said.

Also, Davutoglu said Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak's scheduled visit was a visit that could be paid.

Israel apologises to Turkey in diplomatic spat after ultimatum

Thursday, 14 January 2010 09:07

Today's Zaman

Israel apologised to Turkey on Wednesday for televised berating Ankara's ambassador in a dispute that has strained the once good ties between the Jewish state and the Muslim regional power.

In a stern warning to Israel, Turkish President Abdullah Gül on Wednesday said that Israel has until midnight to rectify what many in Turkey regarded an unprecedented example of diplomatic rudeness to the Turkish ambassador by Israeli official earlier this week. Gül said Ambassador Ahmet Oğuz Çelikkol will be recalled if the row over his treatment is not resolved by Wednesday night.

After Ankara on Tuesday demanded an apology for his televised berating of Çelikkol on Monday, Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon issued a statement conceding that his behavior toward Çelikkol had been inappropriate.

While Ayalon stopped short of using the word, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described the statement as an "apology" and said he was glad that it had been made. But President Gül appeared not to see it that way. "If the problem is not resolved by tonight, our ambassador will take the first flight tomorrow [Thursday] to return home for further consultations," Gül vowed, speaking to reporters during a reception on Wednesday. Gül stressed it is up to the Israeli leadership to defuse the tension.

"We will later evaluate the case," he said, hinting that Turkey might be lowering its representation in Tel Aviv to the charge d'affaires level.

President Gül described the insult to the Turkish ambassador as "unacceptable" and called on Israeli higher leadership to rectify the situation. "It may have been the act of a man who does not

know what he was doing,” he said, “However, in the final analysis the liability lies with the Israeli government.” “Israel is responsible here,” he added. Asked why Turkey is having problems with Israel while enjoying very good relations with all other neighbors, Gül said the question should be directed to the Israeli side. “Look at what they have been doing. The question should be posed to them as to why Israel is isolating itself from the region and the world,” he noted.

In the meantime, the halfway apology expressed by the Israeli side was found insufficient and did not go as far as satisfying the conditions set forth by the Turkish Foreign Ministry, diplomatic sources here in Ankara said.

Reports posted from Jerusalem said Ayalon’s “apology” came in a statement conceding that his behavior toward the envoy had been inappropriate.

“My protest against the attacks on Israel in Turkey remains valid,” Ayalon said, referring to Turkish leaders’ criticisms of Israeli policy toward the Palestinians and to a Turkish television drama which portrayed Israeli diplomats as criminals. “Nevertheless,” the statement continued, “It is not my way to disrespect ambassadors’ honor and in the future I will clarify my position in a diplomatically acceptable manner.”

According to reports, a separate statement from Netanyahu’s office which described Ayalon’s statement as an “apology” said, “The prime minister feels that the protest issued to the Turkish ambassador was fundamentally correct but it should have been conveyed in the conventional diplomatic mode.”

“Thus, it is not possible for us to accept some expressions conveyed through news reports as an official and appropriate apology. We haven’t yet received any official statement by the Israeli side here at the Foreign Ministry headquarters either,” the same sources said.

Earlier on Wednesday, diplomatic sources accompanying Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during an official visit to Moscow had already told the Anatolia news agency that Ayalon’s statement was not “sufficient.”

Israel sent a formal letter of apology to Çelikkol on Thursday.

"I had no intention to humiliate you personally and apologize for the way the demarche was handled and perceived," Ayalon said in the letter, released by the Israeli government.

"Please convey this to the Turkish people for whom we have great respect. I hope that both Israel and Turkey will seek diplomatic and courteous channels to convey messages as two allies should."

On Monday, Ayalon had made clear in televised remarks that he would not shake hands with Çelikkol, ensured no Turkish flag was displayed on the table and made the envoy sit on a low couch, confronted by three Israeli officials in higher chairs, in order to ram home his displeasure with Ankara.

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, one of whose priorities is countering a perceived nuclear threat from Turkey’s neighbor Iran, was due to hold previously announced talks in Turkey on Sunday. Reports posted from Jerusalem suggested that the visit would take place at the invitation of President Gül. However, Turkish diplomatic sources in Ankara made clear that Barak would be the guest of his Turkish counterpart, Vecdi Gönül.

As of Wednesday afternoon, Turkey was ready to go ahead with its scheduled plans to host Barak. Çelikkol was already scheduled to travel to Ankara later this week for preparations for the visit, yet it will become clear whether he will stay longer than planned in Ankara according to Israel’s response, which was expected by Ankara within the deadline declared by Gül.

Turkish-Israeli relations have been strained since Israel’s deadly offensive in the Gaza Strip,

which left about 1,400 Palestinians dead, including many civilians, and brought heavy international criticism upon Israel, including accusations of war crimes and crimes against humanity by a United Nations investigation. Since the offensive, Turkish-Israeli bilateral relations have seen exchanges of harsh remarks between Israeli and Turkish officials and crisis incidents despite efforts to tone down the crisis atmosphere.

During a visit to Greek Cyprus, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman urged the Turkish leadership to use official channels for such criticism.

“We have had good relations with Turkey for many years and we respect the Turkish state and people. But that is exactly what we expect in return -- for them to treat us with dignity and respect. Any issues or questions that they may have can be raised using dialogue, direct dialogue, even if we don't see eye-to-eye [on] some issues.”

Nonetheless, Lieberman's remarks were far from reflecting an understanding of Turkey's anger and sensitivities over diplomatic customs as the latest diplomatic kerfuffle between the two sides has been an exception, since the way Çelikkol was treated by Ayalon introduced an unprecedented example of diplomatic rudeness.

'Valley of the Wolves: Palestine' might lead to more crises

Thursday, 14 January 2010 09:26

Today's Zaman

A scriptwriter for the Turkish television series “Valley of the Wolves” has said that they have started work on a new spinoff, “Valley of the Wolves: Palestine,” which might lead to more crises between Turkey and Israel.

Bahadır Özdener told NTV that they could have been even harsher in their criticism of Israel in the series. Israel has complained that Turkey should be more careful about how it depicts Israel in the television series.

“We were trying to show that Israel and the United States are behind acts of terrorism. Memati's son Ali Memati was kidnapped by Israel,” he said, referring to the plot of the series.

In one part of the series, main character Polat Alemdar rescues Ali Memati, who was held at the Israeli Embassy.

Özdener also said that they had featured a Jewish doctor who was involved in an organ mafia in another story arc and that operations in Israel later revealed a similar network in the real world.

“Israel should remove its hands from bloody activities. We don't do as much as we could. There is a real human drama in Gaza. We want to draw the public's attention to that fact,” he said.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been fiercely critical of Israel's use of overwhelming firepower against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, prompting tension in the relations of the two countries.

Israel faces truth of new paradigm in relations with Turkey

Friday, 15 January 2010 08:51

Today's Zaman

The latest crisis between Turkey and Israel, which was triggered by a televised insult against Turkey's ambassador in Tel Aviv, has underscored the presence of a new paradigm in bilateral relations between the two countries which has de facto been in force

Despite caving in to demands from Turkey and apologizing for the insult to its ambassador on Wednesday, it is not yet clear whether Israel will embrace this new paradigm set by Turkey, which says return to normal in bilateral ties depends concrete steps by Israel to end the months-long humanitarian tragedy in Gaza as well as a sign of willingness to revive peace efforts in the Middle East.

On Monday, Israel's deputy foreign minister, Danny Ayalon, summoned Turkey's Ambassador to Israel Oğuz Çelikkol to complain about a Turkish television drama that portrayed Israeli diplomats as masterminds of a child abduction ring. Ayalon invited media crews to cover the start of the meeting in Jerusalem and pointed out that there was no Turkish flag on the table. He also said he was deliberately avoiding shaking hands with the ambassador. In television images broadcast in Turkey, Çelikkol was seen seated on a low couch, accentuating the sense of a slight. Ayalon later conceded his behavior toward the envoy was inappropriate.

But Turkish President Abdullah Gül, who is scheduled to host Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak on Sunday, said on Wednesday afternoon that Ayalon's admission was insufficient and demanded a full apology, noting that Israel had until midnight to rectify the unprecedented example of diplomatic rudeness to the Turkish ambassador.

On Wednesday night, the Turkish Foreign Ministry announced that Israel had sent a formal letter of apology to Çelikkol.

"I had no intention to humiliate you personally and apologize for the way the demarche was handled and perceived," Ayalon said in the letter. "Please convey this to the Turkish people for whom we have great respect. I hope that both Israel and Turkey will seek diplomatic and courteous channels to convey messages as two allies should."

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan told reporters late on Wednesday that the Turkish Foreign Ministry had received "the expected, desired answer."

Nonetheless, adding more criticism of Israel, Erdoğan warned that: "Israel must put itself in order and it must be more just and more on the side of peace in the region."

A 'spoiled child'

On Tuesday in London, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu had already renewed his country's criticism of Israel over Gaza, underlining that its 2008 invasion of the territory had marked the turning point in Turkish-Israeli relations. Speaking to the Anatolia news agency early on Thursday morning upon his arrival in Zagreb for trilateral consultations with officials from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, Davutoğlu said Israel's killing of civilians in Gaza produced a significant indignation among Turkish people.

The Turkish government, meanwhile, has also given a "fair" reaction because the attacks on the Gaza Strip torpedoed its intense diplomatic efforts for the Middle East peace, Davutoğlu added: "We will continue giving this reaction until Israel embraces a pro-peace policy."

Such criticism against Israel is a part the Republic of Turkey's responsibility toward the region, Davutoğlu said, in an apparent bid to refute some comments suggesting that the policy regarding Israel was mainly designed because of "the pro-Islamic motives" of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party).

Yet, Davutoğlu was crystal clear when explaining the basis of Turkey's policy to Anatolia: "We want peace to be sovereign in our region; we want good relations to be sovereign. We also want good relations to exist between Turkey and Israel. We believe that good relations can be achieved only within a peace perspective. Our criticisms are criticisms which are directed within this framework. We hope that in the period ahead Israel embraces pro-peace policies and these

pro-peace policies contribute to maintaining a permanent stability in our neighborhood. In such an environment, Turkey-Israel relations settle on a right axis.”

On Jan. 2, at a joint press conference with visiting Davutoğlu, the Saudi foreign minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, said Israel acts like a “spoiled child” because the international community is not tough enough in pressuring it to make concessions. While criticizing Israel’s settlement, Faisal said the international community needed to get tougher with Israel: “When other countries violate international law, they get punished, except for Israel. If war crimes are committed, other countries get punished, except Israel. Israel has become in the international community like a spoiled child.”

As a matter of fact, Ayalon’s treatment of Çelikkol was clearly reflecting the immaturity of “a spoiled child.” Although the formal apology expected by Ankara eventually arrived, there seems to be no concrete signs which show that Israel will be more “mature” in its relations with Turkey from now on.

Military spectacle and public opinion

According to Hasan Kanbolat, who heads the Ankara-based Center of Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM), while analyzing the course of affairs in Turkey’s relations with Israel in last few years, one should first of all take note of the fact that Turkey’s relations in the region dramatically changed after Turkey began accession negotiations with the European Union in 2005. At this time, Ankara felt the need to rearrange its relations in the Caucasus, the Balkans and the Middle East by reaching out to the people and intellectuals of these regions by interacting of economic, political and cultural fields.

“From now on, the relationship between Turkey and Israel cannot be evaluated solely by looking at the triangle of the Israeli Defense Ministry, the Turkish General Staff and the Pentagon. There is the need for a rearrangement which will include people and non-governmental organizations and Israel should understand it this way: It is not possible to maintain this relationship solely by counting on influencing the Turkish General Staff through channels of the Pentagon and the US-based Jewish lobbies,” Kanbolat told Today’s Zaman. “Instead of angry outbursts, there is the need for a balanced, principled and friendly contact to overcome the tension,” he added.

Back in October, when Israel voiced its disappointment through the media over Turkey’s decision to change a joint international military exercise, which was to have included Israel, into a national military exercise, Davutoğlu had clearly stated: “Turkey cannot be seen as having military relations with Israel at such a sensitive time, when there are no peace efforts, when peace has not gained momentum. ... While passing through such a sensitive period of time along which there is no effort for peace in the region, Turkey takes pains not to be involved in such a military spectacle.”

Since the tension over the Gaza offensive began, Israel has apparently counted on the fact that cooperation in the defense field is the engine of bilateral relations between Israel and Turkey. The armies of the two countries have cooperated in military training. Israel is one of the two countries with which Turkey has the highest rate of military cooperation, the United States being the other. In addition to military cooperation, Turkey is undertaking a large number of joint projects with these two countries in the defense industry.

An article penned by Zvi Bar’el published on Thursday in the Israeli daily Haaretz revealed how Israel neglected public opinion in Turkey, while counting on the strength of defense ties with the country.

“The serious damage is really in the deep erosion in Turkish public opinion, which was the basis for Turkey’s warm relations with Israel. But the Turkish public is not ready to suffer insult to its

envoys. It is the public that takes to the streets when it is not satisfied with its government. They are vocal when their government's policies are not to their liking. It is this same public that in 2003 didn't let the Erdoğan government permit American use of Turkish airspace en route to Iraq and the same public that turned out in huge numbers to protest Operation Cast Lead in Gaza. It is also the same Turkish public that viewed the Jews as an historic ally, from Ottoman times," Bar'el recalled.

Barak visit to Turkey may help mend frayed ties

Wednesday, 13 January 2010 14:50

Today's Zaman

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak will pay a one-day visit to Turkey on Sunday, Turkish and Israeli officials have said, a trip that could help mend frayed ties between the two regional powers

Barak's office said on Tuesday that the visit was at the invitation of Turkish President Abdullah Gül. Asked whether he would meet Barak, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan briefly said on Tuesday that he will not. Also Tuesday, Israeli media cited Israeli officials as saying that a recent crisis in ties between Israel and Turkey was designed on purpose by Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who had planned details of a meeting between Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon and Turkish Ambassador to Israel Oğuz Çelikkol, which was humiliating for the latter.

The same sources said Lieberman is now looking to "heat things up" before Barak's trip, so as to torpedo attempts to mend the tensions. "We get the sense that Lieberman wants to heat things up before Barak's visit," a senior Foreign Ministry source told the Haaretz daily. "All of the recent activities were part of Lieberman's political agenda."

Haaretz highlighted that the Turkish government was expected to give a warm welcome to Barak, who alongside Labor Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer was looking to bring the allies' relations back to stability.

Last year, NATO member Turkey barred Israel from participating in a NATO war exercise, a decision criticized by Washington. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said it was a result of public concern about Israel's military campaign in Gaza. Since the 1990s, there has been close military cooperation between Turkey and Israel, including the use of Turkish airspace by the Israeli air force for training. The two countries share intelligence and have strong trade ties, including the sale of strategic military equipment.

Turkish Human Rights Group Calls for Barack Arrest Warrant

Thursday, 14 January 2010

USA K PUBLICATIONS

Turkish human rights group Mazlumder has demanded that a warrant be issued for the arrest of Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Israeli media reported on Thursday.

According to a statement issued by Mazlumder on Wednesday night, the request is based on international criminal law that calls for all accused of perpetrating war crimes to be tried in accordance with universal jurisdiction and Turkish law, according to Israeli daily Ynet. The call for his arrest is anchored in accusations put forward in the Goldstone report relating to Barack's involvement in Operation Cast Lead, Israel's assault on Gaza last winter.

Barack is due to visit Turkey in the coming days, the daily added.

"Israel perpetrated genocide and crimes against humanity. IDF forces bombed the UN building, hospitals, and schools. As was proven by lab tests performed by Turkish universities, they also used phosphorous bombs, which are forbidden. It is known that Israel used an assortment of ammunitions that caused physiological and psychological diseases among the Gazan population," the Israeli daily Ynet quoted the statement as saying.

The request has reportedly been made in the past, the daily added, citing that Turkish Minister of Justice Mehmet Ali Shahin had previously rejected it.

"We know that Barak will arrive in Turkey on the 17th of the month ... [we] need to put him on trial and prevent every other Israeli who is responsible for war crimes from entering Turkey freely. We remind the Turkish prosecution of its role. We remind them that Britain has already decided to arrest Tzipi Livni when she was slated to arrive in the country."

"We remind them that Shimon Peres and Ehud Olmert must also be arrested according to Article CMK-98 of the Turkish law, which grants us the right to try them."

In December, a similar arrest warrant was issued against Tzipi Livni for her involvement in last winter's war, prompting British Prime Minister Gordon Brown to affect a change in law, granting the General Attorney a veto power over the issuance of arrest warrants for internationals accused of war crimes visiting the UK.

In February 2009, a request to issue arrest warrants for then Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Livni and President Shimon Peres was called for in Turkey, which were then rejected by the Ankara general prosecutor.

Israel's Barak protested, arrest warrant asked in Turkey / PHOTO

Friday, 15 January 2010 17:23

WORLD BULLETIN

World Bulletin / News Desk

Turkish human rights groups issued a formal request for arrest warrant against Israeli defense minister Ehud Barak upon landing in Turkey.

Turkish human rights groups issued a formal request for arrest warrant against Israeli defense minister Ehud Barak upon landing in Turkey.

The move comes after a number of international efforts to arrest Israeli political military leaders over war crimes allegedly committed in occupied Palestinian territories.

MAZLUMDER's Istanbul Branch and Ozgur-Der gave a notice to the state prosecution in Sultanahmet Court, requesting to order Barak's arrest upon landing in the country for the war crimes in Gaza offensive.

Branch Chairman lawyer Cihat Gokdemir said in a statement sent to World Bulletin, "We call on Turkish authorities not to allow any Israeli officials to walk freely in the country although they ordered killings of hundreds of civilians".

Turkish Foreign Minister Says They Overcame Problem with Israel

Friday, 15 January 2010

TIME TURK

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said that the recent problem between Turkey and Israel was overcome.

Davutoglu, who is currently in Croatian capital Zagreb to attend the tripartite consultation meetings of Turkey-Bosnia & Herzegovina-Croatia, said at a news conference, "the Israeli party sent us a letter we had been waiting for, and apologized. Accordingly, the problem was overcome."

He refused to make further comments saying that he did not want to talk about the Middle East in Zagreb instead of developments in the Balkans.

Israel apologized yesterday over a crisis which erupted after Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon summoned Turkish Ambassador in Tel Aviv, Oguz Celikkol, on Monday to criticize a Turkish television drama. During the meeting, Ayalon refused to shake the Ambassador's hand and ignored the diplomatic courtesy. Turkish Foreign Ministry issued a statement calling on Israel "to abide by diplomatic courtesy and respect.

Turkey is expecting steps to repair the treatment of our Ambassador in Tel Aviv." Davutoglu also made a statement and said that no one could dare to disrespect the Turkish Ambassador.

Turkey, Israel on track to close drone deal, official says

Friday, January 15, 2010

ANKARA – Agence France-Presse

Turkey and Israel appear to be on track to finalize a long delayed multimillion-dollar deal for the delivery of 10 drone aircraft for the Turkish air force, a Turkish official said Friday.

The project, launched in 2005, was under threat of cancellation amid delays and rising tensions between the two countries over Israel's devastating offensive in the Gaza Strip last year.

"Turkish experts are currently in Israel to test the drones," the defense ministry official told Agence France-Presse on condition of anonymity.

Should the systems pass the tests, six aircraft will be brought to Turkey's southeastern province of Batman, on the border with Iraq, for further tests, the official added.

"If there are no problems, we will take the drones. We expect the delivery to take place in the first six months of this year," he said.

Barak's visit

The announcement came ahead of a visit by Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak to Turkey on Sunday for talks on mending battered ties following the latest diplomatic row.

On Wednesday, Israel was forced to apologize after Ankara threatened to withdraw its ambassador over Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon's public dressing down of the envoy.

The drone project had been expected to be completed in the second half of 2009, but it was delayed by technical problems, forcing Turkey to give the two contractors – Israel Aerospace Industries and Elbit – a deadline until early 2010 and threaten to cancel the tender.

Last week, Defense Minister Vecdi Gönül said that negotiations were under way on the compensation the Israeli companies would pay for the delay, but refused to give a figure.

The drone contract was part of a \$185 million project that involved the manufacture of 10 aircraft, surveillance equipment and ground control stations, with Turkish firms providing sub-systems and services.

Under a 1996 military cooperation deal, Turkish-Israeli ties have flourished greatly until last year when the two countries fell out about Ankara's almost daily criticism of Israel over the Gaza war.

Turkey's finance minister says not to attend Davos meeting

Friday, 15 January 2010 13:58

WORLD BULLETIN

Turkey's finance minister said that he would not attend this year's Davos Economic Forum. Turkey's finance minister said Friday that he would not attend this year's Davos Economic Forum.

Turkish Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek told a news conference in Ankara on budget performances of 2009 that he would not attend the Davos Summit because of some changes with his program.

"I had been set to pay visits to London and New York to meet with investors. However, my program was changed. I am going to accompany Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan during his visits to two different countries."

Earlier, Prime Minister Erdogan and State Minister & Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan announced that they would not participate in the Davos meetings.

During last year's summit, Prime Minister Erdogan stormed off a panel discussion with Israeli President Shimon Peres, and vowed to never come to Davos again. "For me Davos is over. I will never attend this meeting again," said Erdogan, angered by the panel's moderator who had failed to give much time to the Turkish premier to respond to Peres' remarks over Israel's Gaza offensive.

TURKEY'S EU NEGOCIATION PROGRESS

Turkey'S Chief Negotiator On Country'S Eu Process

Tuesday, 12 January 2010 13:14

TIME TURK

Turkish State Minister and Chief Negotiator for EU talks Egemen Bagis said on Monday that European leaders did not talk about privileged partnership in recent months due to Turkey's successful activities.

Commenting on Turkey's ongoing EU process and replying to questions during a conference at Istanbul's Kultur University, Bagis said, "French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel have not been using the expression of 'privileged partnership' for the last 6 months. The steps taken by Turkey have a great role in such development".

Bagis also said that Turkey had a tough year in its EU process, and chapters on taxation and environment were opened to negotiation during the rotating presidencies of the Czech Republic and Sweden.

"There will not be elections in Turkey in 2010. We would like to work together with the opposition parties to pass reform laws in the parliament," Bagis said.

Regarding Cyprus issue, Bagis said that Turkey's expectations on the matter were clear.

"Cyprus issue should not constitute a problem for Turkey's EU membership just like it did not cause any problems in the candidacy and membership of the Greek Cypriot party. It takes two to tango and we are on the stage waiting for Greek Cypriots. We will not give up on Cyprus just to become an EU member," he said.

Turkey, Spain discuss possible chapters to be opened

Friday, 15 January 2010 16:46

WORLD BULLETIN

Turkey and Spain discussed Wednesday possible chapters to be opened in the accession negotiations under the Spanish EU Presidency.

Turkey and Spain discussed Wednesday possible chapters to be opened in the accession negotiations under the Spanish EU Presidency.

Turkey's Chief EU Negotiator Minister Egemen Bagis who is visiting Spain separately met with Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos and State Secretary for EU Affairs Diego Lopez Garrido.

Parties agreed to open "the food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policies", "public procurement", and "Competition Policy" chapters and launch initiatives to open the "Energy" and "Education and Culture" chapters which has been blocked by the Greek Cypriot Administration.

Diplomats who spoke on condition of anonymity said Spain reiterated its support to Turkey's EU bid.

Spain, which has close ties with the Greek Cypriot Administration vowed to exert utmost efforts towards a settlement to the Cyprus issue.

The Turkey-Spain Intergovernmental summit scheduled to be held in Madrid in February was also discussed during the meetings.

Minister says EU's visa limits for Turkish businessmen "unfair"

Friday, 15 January 2010 16:42

WORLD BULLETIN

Pointing to the 3 million Turks living in Germany, Caglayan said, "We are not aware of our strength".

Turkish State Minister Zafer Caglayan said on Friday that Turkish businessmen could create opportunities by purchasing the name rights of companies that did not operate in certain sectors in Germany anymore.

In a gathering with Turkish businessmen in the German capital of Berlin, Caglayan said that Turkish entrepreneurs who carried out activities in Germany should establish closer relations with Turkey.

Pointing to the 3 million Turks living in Germany, Caglayan said, "We are not aware of our strength".

Caglayan also informed the participants on the latest developments in German economy and said that services sector started to gain importance in the country.

Describing such development as an opportunity, Caglayan said the name rights of world-wide known German companies could be purchased and their market shares could be obtained by Turkish businessmen.

"I believe there will be many opportunities in the sectors that are being left by Germans. We can act as matchmakers for you. You should come together with German businessmen," Caglayan addressed the Turkish entrepreneurs.

Criticizing Europe's visa requirements for Turkish businessmen as well, Caglayan said that it was unfair to ask for visas from Turkish businessmen while free movement of goods was authorized due to Customs Union agreement.

Turkey, Syria Mulling Cooperation In Higher Education

Tuesday, 12 January 2010 13:12

TIME TURK

Turkey and Syria are set to collaborate on higher education, including exchange of students and academics as well as mutual recognition of diploma equivalency.

A delegation of Turkish Higher Education Board and rectors of several Turkish universities, headed by chairman Yusuf Ziya Ozcan, will travel to Syria this weekend to meet with their Syrian colleagues.

Turkish and Syrian delegations will get together in Latakia to discuss possible cooperation areas, including exchange of students and academics, establishment of research programs and centers, teaching of Turkish and Syrian languages at each others' universities, launching of joint postgraduate programs, cooperation of university hospitals, organization of joint workshops and youth forums.

The delegations will also discuss mutual recognition of equivalence of diplomas.

TURKEY'S PM VISIT TO RUSSIA

Turkey, Russia can carry out many projects, says Erdoğan

Thursday, 14 January 2010 09:28

Today's Zaman

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said yesterday that relations between Turkey and Russia have reached a high point and noted that the countries have the potential to complete many projects jointly.

“There are many projects Turkey and Russia can realize together as two important actors in the world,” Erdoğan said during his meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in Moscow. Erdoğan expressed his pleasure with the fact that there is a common desire in both Turkey and Russia to develop bilateral relations.

“Our relations with Russia have reached a high point recently. The fields in which we cooperate have begun to diversify. We have cooperation in the fields of politics, culture and commerce. I believe that, both in bilateral and regional relations, there are many things we can do together as two important actors.

Energy is a very important area of cooperation. We have an ideal partnership in this field.”

Russia is Turkey's single biggest trading partner and provides two-thirds of its gas. The two countries have bilateral trade ties totaling some \$40 billion.

Medvedev said the two countries had ambitious goals and Turkish-Russian relations were improving, which was in line with the definition of a strategic partnership.

He said there were huge energy projects between Turkey and Russia while voicing his wish that the two countries would take further steps in energy during Erdoğan's visit.

The Russian president also underlined the importance of improving Turkish-Russian relations to settle many complicated regional problems. Medvedev said the similarity in perspective of the two countries on various matters had a determining role in the region. Prime Minister Erdoğan later had a meeting with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin. The two were expected to hold a joint press conference after their meeting.

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Turkey and Russia move closer to building strategic partnership

Friday, 15 January 2010 21:11

Today's Zaman

Turkey and Russia have come closer to building a strategic partnership by agreeing to deepen cooperation in the area of energy and work on a plan to lift visa requirements for their citizens. The two countries also have ambitious plans to boost their trade volume to \$100 billion in the coming years. "Our relations are developing and becoming more diversified in the political, military, economic and cultural spheres. What is exciting for me is that both sides have a positive will," to further boost ties, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said at a joint press conference with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, late on Wednesday.

Erdoğan, who had talks with Putin and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev during his one-day visit to Moscow, announced that the two countries will start work on abolishing visa requirements for their nationals.

"The prime minister [Putin] has just given us the good news that efforts to mutually abolish the visa requirements will go forward as planned," Erdoğan said, adding that the Turkish side hoped that a final deal would be concluded during an upcoming visit by Medvedev in May or June. Erdoğan said later in İstanbul that the two countries would also hold a strategic cooperation council meeting during Medvedev's visit, a cooperation platform similar to the ones Turkey launched with neighboring Syria and Iraq last year.

Both Putin and Erdoğan pledged to increase the use of national currencies in bilateral trade, which the leaders want to boost to \$100 billion within the next five years. Erdoğan said the aim is achievable in the next four years.

In another key achievement of Erdoğan's short visit, Energy Minister Taner Yıldız and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin signed a memorandum on building nuclear power plants in Turkey in a sign that Russian firms would be given a second chance to build Ankara's first plant. Turkey canceled a previous tender to build a nuclear power station, after a court earlier ruled the tender, won by Russian Inter RAO and Atomstroieksport and Turkey's Park Teknik, invalid due to problems with the pricing of electricity from the plant.

Putin and Erdoğan also had talks on energy projects. Putin said the governments of Italy, Turkey and Russia should consider signing a deal to support the proposed Samsun-Ceyhan pipeline, an oil link between Turkey's Black Sea coast and the Mediterranean.

The Russian prime minister also said Russia has won Turkish support for all its major oil, gas and nuclear projects, while carefully avoiding its usual harsh criticism of the rival trans-Turkish EU-backed Nabucco gas pipeline. He said Ankara had pledged to fully clear the Russian gas pipeline project South Stream before November 2010, when construction is due to begin.

"We have an agreement that before Nov. 10, 2010 ... the Turkish government will make all the necessary judgments and issue a construction permit. In the course of today's talks Mr. Erdogan confirmed these intentions," Putin said. "I very much hope this work will be finished as planned," he said, adding that the work on South Stream was going according to plan with environmental, geological and seismic studies near completion.

Putin also said the project, which apart from Russia's gas export monopoly Gazprom involves Italy's ENI, may benefit from an inter-governmental agreement between Russia, Turkey and Italy.

Turkey aspires to become a key transit hub for Europe, but is facing a tough balancing game between rival projects supported by Moscow and the European Union. It insists South Stream

and Nabucco are not rivals.

Putin added that cooperation with Turkey should also involve asset swaps between major firms and added Russian firms were ready to take part in the privatization of Turkey's state assets.

Russia: No link between Armenia ties, Karabakh

Putin also told Erdoğan that Turkey should not link the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh, a region of Azerbaijan populated by ethnic Armenians who are now in control of the area, to its bilateral relations with Armenia. "Both the Nagorno-Karabakh problem and the Turkish-Armenian problem are very complicated by nature. I do not think it is right to tie them into one package," Putin said. "It is unwise from both a tactical and a strategic point of view to package these problems together," he added.

On Thursday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov echoed Putin at a press conference with his Armenian counterpart, Eduard Nalbandian. "To try and artificially link those two issues is, in my opinion, not correct," Lavrov told reporters in Yerevan. "We are interested in this relationship normalizing. The sooner that happens, the better for the whole region."

Turkey and Armenia agreed in October last year to establish diplomatic ties and reopen their land border, closed by Ankara in 1993. But the accords need parliamentary ratification, a step Turkey says depends on Armenia making concessions in the festering conflict with Turkish ally Azerbaijan over the breakaway mountain region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

"I don't want to have the impression, and I think the international community also does not, that Turkey is specially blocking the ratification of the protocols," Nalbandian said. "What's a reasonable timeframe? It's not dragging it out or creating artificial barriers."

Putin Says Turkey, Russia Agree to Revive Pipeline Projects

Thursday, 14 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

Turkey and Russia have agreed to revive joint pipeline projects, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday.

Putin told a joint press conference with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Moscow that he proposed a three-party agreement among Turkey, Italy and Russia on pipeline projects from Russia to western Europe.

Asked about the South Stream, a proposed pipeline project routed from Russia to Bulgaria and further to Italy and Austria through Turkish waters in the Black Sea, Putin said Russia expects Turkish approval for underwater works by November 2010.

On joint nuclear power projects, Putin said Russia wanted to boost cooperation with Turkey, recalling the agreement signed between the two countries last year.

Putin also said that Russia was eager to increase cooperation areas, especially on agriculture. He said Turkish and Russian officials would also work on lifting mutual visa restrictions between the two countries.

Putin's Karabakh stance may hurt Turk-Armenian deal

Friday, January 15, 2010 Ümit ENGİNSOY

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's recent visit to the Russian capital, Moscow, is largely seen as successful in terms of bilateral energy deals. Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin's public

remarks on the territorial dispute of Nagorno-Karabakh effectively means a hurdle for the Turkish-Armenian normalization efforts, analysts say.

Putin told Erdoğan during Wednesday's talks that Turkey should not link the Nagorno-Karabakh problem between Armenia and Azerbaijan to the normalization of its bilateral relations with Armenia.

"Both the Nagorno-Karabakh problem and the Turkish-Armenian problem are very complicated by nature. I do not think it is right to tie them into one package," Putin told a news conference after his talks with the Turkish prime minister.

"It is unwise from both tactical and strategic points of view to package these problems," he said. Turkish and Armenian foreign ministers signed a set of agreements on Oct. 10 under which Ankara and Yerevan should set up normal diplomatic relations and reopen their land border, effectively putting an end to a century of hostile relations.

But there are signs that the reconciliation process is now facing an uphill battle. The Turkey-Armenia accord needs to be ratified by parliaments of the two neighbors before being implemented, but there is no indication of when both nations may bring the deal to their parliaments.

The issue that lies at the root of the problem is the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Turkey's close friend and ally.

No end in sight for Karabakh

Turkey first wants to see progress toward the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict before opening its border with Armenia. And the Armenians are hinting no sign of this.

Nagorno-Karabakh, a mostly Armenian-populated enclave inside Azerbaijan, and parts of Azerbaijan proper has been under Armenian occupation since a war in the early 1990s. As a result of this war, Turkey has refused to set up normal diplomatic relations with Yerevan and has been keeping the land border with Armenia closed since 1993.

Like Putin, U.S. President Barack Obama's administration has also been urging Turkey to unconditionally put into effect the deal with Yerevan.

Putin's remarks make it clear that Russia has no intention to press the Karabakh Armenians and Yerevan for an urgent reconciliation on the enclave's future. And without strong Russian or U.S. pressure, the Armenians will see little reason to compromise on this matter.

As a result, the Turkish parliament, for its part, will see little reason to ratify the normalization deal with Yerevan, which effectively could mean the collapse or suspension of the reconciliation process.

"In fact, a real reconciliation involving Turkey and Azerbaijan on the one side and Armenia on the other is one of the last things Putin's Russia would want to see, because such a deal may pave the way for the construction of new pipelines carrying Eurasian oil and natural gas to the West, bypassing Russian territory," said a former senior Turkish diplomat.

"Russia is very jealous about its present monopoly in transporting Eurasia's energy resources to the West, and doesn't want to see new and U.S.-backed rivals in an area which it still continues to view as its backyard," said the former diplomat. "So, the status quo is in Russia's benefit."

US front

The potential collapse of the Ankara-Yerevan deal would mean more problems for Turkey in its relationship with the United States, and this plays into the hands of Armenian-American groups. Despite the possibility of normalized ties between Ankara and Yerevan, Armenian-Americans' top priority is to obtain Washington's recognition of World War I-era killings of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as "genocide."

"In the face of Turkey's ongoing campaign of denial, we must redouble our efforts to secure U.S. reaffirmation of the Armenian genocide and urge the swift passage of the Armenian genocide resolutions in Congress," said Bryan Ardouny, executive director of the Armenian Assembly of America, a major Armenian-American group, last weekend.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will meet with representatives of major American Armenian groups next month. "The Republic of Armenia through its president, has taken bold steps, yet the Republic of Turkey continues its counterproductive actions with respect to normalizing relations with Armenia," said Ardouny. "As such, this meeting [with Clinton] offers an important opportunity to discuss the U.S. administration's efforts to hold Turkey accountable," he said.

Turkey has strongly warned that any formal U.S. genocide recognition would lead to a major and lasting deterioration of bilateral ties.

Turkey expects Armenia's progress over Azerbaijani ties

Friday, 15 January 2010 12:05

WORLD BULLETIN

Turkey and Armenia signed two protocols last October to resume diplomatic ties and normalize relations.

Head of a Turkish parliamentary committee has said relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan should get "a bit riper" before a debate was launched on the committee floor over protocols Ankara and Yerevan signed to normalize relations.

"We are all eager to bring the protocols to the committee and the parliamentary floor, and we do want to see relations get normal but at this time it would be in vain to debate the issue which is highly likely to be revoked by the committee," Murat Mercan, chairman of foreign relations committee with the Turkish parliament, told reporters on Friday.

Turkey and Armenia signed two protocols last October to resume diplomatic ties and normalize relations.

Armenia and Azerbaijan waged a six-year war over Upper Karabakh in Azerbaijan. The region has been occupied by Armenia since a 1994 cease-fire, but is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan.

Turkey cut all diplomatic ties with Armenia after the occupation, and a border gate between the two countries has remained closed since then.

"The Turkish people are very sensitive about the rapprochement between Azerbaijan and Armenia as well as Azerbaijan's rights. Efforts to settle problems between [Baku and Yerevan] would help Turkey ratifying the protocols," Mercan said.

OTHER ISSUES

Erdoğan calls for just stance on Iran over nuclear program

Thursday, 14 January 2010 09:25

Today's Zaman

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called on the West to treat Iran fairly when dealing with its nuclear program, saying other countries in the region should also not be allowed to have nuclear weapons, a reference to Israel.

We do not want nuclear weapons in our region. But it would be unfair to ask one country not to obtain nuclear weapons while another country in the region already has them," Erdoğan said Wednesday in a speech he delivered at Moscow State University during a visit to the Russian capital. "If those who have the power do not act in a just manner, then the world will be a place where right and wrong are not distinguishable. There will be no global peace in such a world," he continued.

Erdoğan has repeatedly said his government is opposed to Iran acquiring nuclear weapons, but urged that Israel, which is widely believed to possess nuclear weapons although it has never openly acknowledged it, should also be facing pressure to get rid of them.

In Moscow, he reiterated his opposition to the proliferation of nuclear weapons, saying that due to excessive spending on military defense, hundreds of millions of people are living in poverty and hunger. "We accept that acquiring nuclear technology for peaceful and civilian purposes is a sovereign right for countries. But we have told Iranian authorities numerous times that we are against nuclear weapons," he said.

Turkey, which has expanded its political dialogue and economic cooperation with Iran, particularly in the field of energy, calls for diplomatic means to resolve the dispute over Iran's nuclear program, saying military sanctions would destabilize the region. Erdoğan said Turkey has been urging Iran to take steps to defuse tensions with the West over its nuclear program. "We have been telling all parties involved that there is no solution other than a peaceful resolution," he said.

Turkey's trade volume with Iran has already reached \$10 billion and the next target is to increase this figure to \$30 billion in the near future, Erdoğan said.

The prime minister also gave firm assurances that his government remains committed to the goal of European Union membership. "We are progressing toward membership in the EU in a determined way. There is no turning back, there is no option on the table other than full membership," Erdoğan told the audience.

Turkey opened accession negotiations with the EU in 2005 but progress has been slow since then. Countries opposed to Turkey's membership, such as France and Germany, call for a privileged partnership instead of accession. Ankara has repeatedly dismissed the idea, saying there is no alternative to full membership.

Erdoğan also said that the year 2010 was critical for a solution in Cyprus. The division of the island complicates Turkey's EU accession process. The EU suspended accession talks on eight of the 35 chapters with Turkey in 2006 due to Turkey's refusal to open its ports and airports to traffic from Greek Cyprus. Ankara says it will not open its ports and airports unless the EU takes steps to ease the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots, in line with a promise it made in 2004.

Turkey to Send Humanitarian Aid to Haiti

Friday, 15 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkey will send mobile hospital and humanitarian aid to Haiti, the Prime Ministry said on Friday.

The Prime Ministry Press Center said Turkey would dispatch a mobile hospital, two check-up devices, 20-member relief team, 10 tons of medicine and medical equipment.

Also, Turkey will send 20 tons of tents, blankets, foodstuffs and kitchen sets by a General Staff plane.

An earthquake measuring 7.2 on the Richter scale hit Haiti on January 12, 2010. The International Red Cross estimates 45,000 to 50,000 people were killed in the devastating quake.

Excluded by US and EU, Turkey undertakes own mediation in Bosnia

Friday, January 15, 2010 BARÇIN YİNANÇ

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

Excluded from a joint U.S.-EU initiative to improve the shaky state structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Turkish government is proceeding with its own mediation effort to reconcile the quarreling sides.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu met Friday in Belgrade with his counterparts from Serbia and from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Davutoğlu and the Bosnian minister were in Zagreb on Thursday to hold talks with Croatian minister.

Friday's meeting in Belgrade is the fourth since Turkey, Serbia and Bosnia decided last fall to establish a trilateral consultation mechanism.

"The United States and the European Union initiated a new process to overcome the political deadlock in Bosnia, called the Butmir process. Turkey and Russia were excluded," said Erhan Türbedar, a Balkan analyst. "I believe Turkey resented being left out."

The Butmir talks opened Oct. 20, while the first Turkish-Serbian-Bosnian trilateral meeting took place Oct. 10 in Istanbul.

Turkey is extremely concerned about the deterioration of the situation in Bosnia, where a lack of consensus between political factions continues. Many believe the Dayton Accords, which ended the four-year Bosnian War in 1995, produced a hastily written constitution that needs to be revised. "Bosnia is getting out of control," said Türbedar, who works for the Ankara-based Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey, or TEPAV.

"Bosnia is collapsing," said a Turkish diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The deepening discord between the three communities – Bosnians, Croats and Serbs – slowed the transition from a country governed by the international community to a fully functioning state. Turkey is particularly concerned by the separatist tendencies of Republika Srpska, one of the two political entities making up Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to a Turkish diplomat. The country is also worried by Bosnian Croats' increasing sense of seeing themselves as a separate entity while they are part of the Bosnian-Croat federation.

With the future of Bosnia seen as increasingly in danger, Turkey has started its own efforts to reconcile the sides.

"Turkey first established the consultation mechanism between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The aim is to contribute to reconciliation between Serbia and Bosnia and also encourage Serbia to use its influence over the Serbs in Bosnia to overcome the political stalemate," said Türbedar.

The ministers of the three countries have met three times. On their second meeting, they decided to convene once every month.

A similar process has been initiated with Croatia. The meeting in Zagreb on Thursday was the first. "There is progress," said a Turkish official who refused to give further details because of the sensitive, secret substance of the discussions.

Türbedar recalled that in 1993 Turkey had also approached Zagreb and had been successful in reconciling Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Muslims, who were at war with each other at the time.

“Turkey is giving the message that the best solutions to regional problems can come from regional actors,” he said.

According to Türbedar, one of the reasons why Turkey was excluded from the recent joint U.S.-EU efforts is the EU’s belief that Turkey is taking sides and favors Bosnian Muslims, and, as such, cannot be an objective mediator.

The foreign minister of Sweden, which was holding the EU term presidency when the U.S.-EU joint initiative began, advised Turkey to also be in touch with Republika Srpska.

“On Bosnia, we have suggested to the Turkish foreign minister to go not only to Sarajevo – Sarajevo is already an open door – but also to Banja Luka (Republika Srpska) to contribute to reconciliation in the country,” Carl Bildt said in an interview last month. “Turkey can do more than Turkey has been doing to contribute to reconciliation inside the country.”

Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdžić is playing the Ankara card, but this is not necessarily going to bring about a solution, Bildt said in the interview, which will be published in the forthcoming issue of Turkish Policy Quarterly.

“The Turkish ambassador to Sarajevo has been to Republica Srpska,” said Türbedar, adding that Turkey has always tried to maintain dialogue with all sides. “But it is a fact that Turkey believes the interests of the Bosnians are not taken into consideration.”

Not everyone agrees that the situation is deteriorating in Bosnia. “It is exaggerated,” Verena Knaus, an analyst from the European Stability Initiative, told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review. “Things are getting better. We have to apply different parameters to analyze the situation. We should not measure it as a post-conflict state.”

Yet for some, 2009 was a lost year for Bosnia, which was not admitted in December to the NATO Membership Action Plan. The liberalization of the visa-travel regime with EU countries also failed to include Bosnia.

ECONOMICS ISSUES

Turkey’s auto production down 24 percent in 2009

Saturday, 09 January 2010 12:08

TODAY’S ZAMAN

Turkish automobile manufacturing sustained a contraction in 2009 and fell 24 percent to 869,953 units compared to 2008 due to worsening demand amidst the global economic crisis, the Automotive Industry Association (OSD) said on Friday.

In a statement, the OSD said the demand for automobiles in Turkey may shrink 10 percent in 2010 if the impact of the economic crisis lingered, but said production was seen as stable for 2010.

The OSD also underlined that the light commercial vehicle and tractor segments especially have already started suffering halts in production in 2010 due to falling demand. In its report titled “A Look at the Automotive Industry in 2009, 2010,” the OSD estimated that the domestic and external demand for automotives will at best stay at their 2009 levels given that there will be no additional financial support or other types of incentives in both Turkey and the EU.

A significant portion of the increase in demand in 2009 had stemmed from incentives, he said and predicted a decline in the market by around 10 percent this year unless the government decides to introduce new measures.

“It is necessary to initiate a value-added tax (VAT) reduction of 8 percent for light commercial vehicles and tractors, which were disregarded during the tax incentives of 2009. While doing

this, it has to be kept under consideration that our industry is selling these domestically-designed products in global markets, that the surplus value in these products is quite high and that the share of imported goods in the domestic market is low,” the OSD report read.

The report also asserted that a full recovery of the auto industry from the adversities of the crisis will take three to four years judging from previous experience of hurdles and crises in the economy.

Turkish Centbank expects year-end inflation as 6.90 P.C.

Saturday, 09 January 2010 12:05

TIME TURK

The Central Bank of Turkey forecast on Friday the year-end inflation around 6.90 percent.

The Central Bank released a survey for the first term of January 2010 in which it projected the year-end inflation around 6.90 percent.

In its previous survey in December 2009, the bank expected the year-end inflation as 6.27 percent.

The Central Bank's year-end growth rate in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was up from -5.7 to 3.7 percent in this recent survey over the previous one.

The bank projected the year-end USD around 1.5400 Turkish liras (TL). It was 1.5138 TL in the previous survey.

Also, the Central Bank of Turkey raised the year-end current (accounts) deficit projection from 11.4 to 19.5 billion USD.

Turkey's bond rating upgraded amidst crisis

Saturday, 09 January 2010 12:00

TODAY'S ZAMAN

International credit rating agency Moody's Investors Service has upgraded Turkey's government bond rating one notch due to the agency's growing confidence in the “government's financial shock-absorption capacity.”

In a press release issued yesterday, Moody's revealed that it had increased Turkey's government bond rating by one notch from Ba2 from Ba3, also changing its outlook for the rating from stable to positive. This move is the first upgrade in Moody's bond rating for Turkey in more than four years, reflecting the agency's confidence in government policy during the sharp economic contractions of 2009.

The last upgrade to the rating occurred on Dec. 14, 2005, when the rating increased from B1 to Ba3.

“Although Turkish growth has contracted very sharply -- even more sharply than was seen in its 2001 financial crisis -- the resilience of the public finances relative to past such crises has been notable,” said Sarah Carlson, the lead analyst for Turkey in Moody's Sovereign Risk Group.

“The ability of the government and the country more generally to regroup when faced with a very significant economic and financial challenge indicates that Turkey has reached a higher level of resiliency -- which is what our ratings ultimately reflect.”

Carlson called the 2009 financial crisis a “stress test” of policy reforms enacted in the greater part of the decade. She added that Turkey's ability to rebound from external or domestic shocks is the result of an improvement in policy credibility during this period.

Speaking of the passage of the 2010 budget, Carlson said it was in line with the government's medium-term economic plan and that it "represents a first in a three-year plan towards reining in the budget deficit and returning the budget to a primary surplus position." She added that a budget surplus could be achieved under this framework "barring election-related spending setbacks."

Moody's long-term outlook on Turkey's growth was also positive, though it noted that growth is not likely to resume at the pace achieved in the mid-2000s "due to global and local factors." The agency also applauded Turkish industry's ability to expand into new export markets and therefore reduce its dependence on EU countries.

Fiscal rules needed

Despite the positive outlook on Turkey, Carlson cautioned that Turkey continues to face risks. According to Carlson, its debt affordability metrics are still poor by international standards, with interest/revenues estimated at 27 percent and debt/revenues at 219 percent in 2009. She also noted that Turkey needs more robust policy rules that would instill additional discipline to the budget process. "A fiscal rule targeting ongoing budget restraint would enhance the Turkish authorities' fiscal credibility, particularly given the slippage that occurred even prior to the onset of the crisis and the absence of an external anchor like the [International Monetary Fund] IMF or EU," she said.

In a related rating action, Moody's also raised the foreign currency bank deposit ceiling from B1 to Ba3 and the local currency bank deposit ceiling to A2 from A3. The outlooks on both are stable. The İstanbul Stock Exchange's İMKB-100 benchmark index ended the first session of trading on a slightly positive note yesterday after the announcement at 55,041.93, an increase of 0.1 percent from closing on Thursday.

Çağlayan: Turkey committed to free market principles

Wednesday, 13 January 2010 14:53

Today's Zaman

Foreign Trade Minister Zafer Çağlayan has voiced Turkey's determination to apply free market principles to international trade.

Speaking to reporters following a meeting with International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Chairman Victor K. Fung in Ankara on Tuesday, Çağlayan said global trade had gone through restructuring due to the global financial crisis. Terms such as capitalism were redefined while people had to embrace an even tougher atmosphere of competition in global trade, he explained. Çağlayan stated that Turkey was strictly against protectionism in global trade, which he noted became more apparent following the emergence of the crisis. "In a cutthroat environment, some countries and businesses preferred protectionism, anticipating that they would come out of the crisis first."

The crisis, in this sense, damaged fair competition in global trade, the minister argued. Recalling that Turkey was one of the 13 economies that enjoyed an upgrade in their credit rating, the minister said the country is seen as one of the prominent players of the future that will leave their mark on the global economy. "Turkey is poised to become one of the centers with regard to a healthy free market condition," he added.

ICC Chairman Fung said countries should avoid protectionism, particularly in the current atmosphere, in which global markets are showing signs of sustainable recovery. He noted the importance of protecting free market conditions while markets struggle to improve. Stating that

trade is the driving force behind the global economy, he said countries should strive to maintain a healthy trade system. He added that Turkey, as a member of the G-20, could contribute to this process.

Tourism sector 'slightly affected' by decline in number of Israeli tourists

Thursday, 14 January 2010 10:42

Today's Zaman

Turkey's tourism industry was only slightly affected by a heavy decline in the number of tourists from Israel in 2009, sector representatives have argued.

Following Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's heated exchange with Israeli President Shimon Peres in Davos last year, which would later be referred to as the "Davos incident," the number of tourists from Israel to Turkey declined noticeably. The latest data show the number of tourists coming from Israel to Turkey in 2009 was 44 percent lower than in 2008.

This, many argue, was as a direct result of what happened in Davos. Erdoğan's walkout, however, was applauded by many Muslim countries. The tourism industry, in this sense, does not seem to have been much affected by the decline in number of Israeli tourists, as sector representatives note that they compensated for this loss thanks to a significant increase in the number of tourists from some nine Middle Eastern countries.

Speaking to Today's Zaman on the issue, Turkish Hoteliers Federation (TÜROFED) Vice Chairman Seçim Aydın said the Davos incident opened up a new era in tourism between Turkey and Middle Eastern countries, sparking great interest among tourists from the region. The number of Israeli tourists may have been lower in 2009, but more Arab tourists flocked to Turkey at the same time, Aydın says. According to the TÜROFED vice chairman, Arab tourists spend a lot more than Israelis do and this was enough to compensate for the decline in the number of tourists from Israel. "We realized this in 2009."

The manager of Fatih Turizm, Bülent Günel, says spending habits are as important as the number of tourists, and Arab tourists have huge potential to this end. "Arabs certainly spend more than Israelis do," he said. Günel said the tourism industry had lost nothing but rather earned more following the "one minute" Davos incident.

According to Ministry of Culture and Tourism data, Turkey, despite the global financial turbulence, was the sole country to increase both its number of tourists and tourism revenues in 2009 over the preceding year. Observers argue that the country will enjoy even better figures in tourism in 2010.

Underlining that all-inclusive packages played an important role in attracting more tourists, particularly from the Middle East, sector representatives say they earned relatively more from individual tour packages. Aydın said most Israeli tourists preferred all-inclusive packages that cost 200 euros on average. "And they spend most of their time at their hotels. This means Israelis spend as little as possible. ... However, when you look at Arab tourists, they take their time to attend different events, visit many places and hence spend much more." Aydın said a further decline in the number of Israeli tourists would not do much harm to Turkish tourism under these circumstances.

According to officials from the Ministry of Tourism, the major factor leading Israelis to cancel their trips to Turkey was propaganda telling them that "Turkey is no longer a safe place" rather than a reaction to the Davos incident. Hotel managers said they are committed to doing their best to dispel such negative rumors and will welcome Israeli tourists.

Hydroelectricity to play key role in reducing energy dependency

Thursday, 14 January 2010 09:29

Today's Zaman

Hydroelectric power plants are key to producing energy from domestic renewable sources and reducing dependence on external and expensive energy, Minister of Environment and Forestry Veysel Eroğlu has said.

Speaking at the opening of the 29th Energy Efficiency Week on Wednesday organized by Sektörel Fuarçılık in İstanbul, Eroğlu stressed the importance of hydroelectric power plants for reducing Turkey's dependence on foreign energy sources while calling on the nation to redirect its energy demands to domestic renewable sources.

Eroğlu revealed that producing \$1,000 of gross domestic product (GDP) required 400 liters of petroleum equivalent and that this figure is on average 200 liters in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries and 100 liters in Japan. He said the nation is "wasting" energy, 75 percent of which comes from external sources. "We obtain 75 percent of our energy from abroad, pay foreign currency reserves for it, and then waste it. This is absolutely illogical. We need to produce energy from our own sources."

Speaking about criticism that claims hydroelectric dams and power plants cause environmental damage, Eroğlu stated that the criticism was "partly" fair. He continued by revealing that last year Turkey consumed 200 billion kilowatt-hours of energy and that only 25 percent came from hydroelectric and water-based energy sources. The rest, or about 60 percent, came from natural gas consumption. "Even Russia doesn't use natural gas in electricity production," he added. Noting that Turkey needs to break free from its external energy dependency by using alternative renewable sources on its own soil, he stressed the potential of water as a crucial energy source. "We have the potential to create 180 billion kilowatt-hours from hydroelectricity. We've only been able to tap into 20 percent of this, the rest of the water is going to waste," Eroğlu said. He added that they have opened up this potential to the private sector, issuing licenses for electricity production from water to private actors, with over 1,500 applications for licenses to build hydroelectric projects, with 136 granted in the last two years alone. "We don't have petroleum or natural gas. But we do have water, and we will take advantage of it."

Transportation has role to play

Speaking on energy efficiency in transportation, Eroğlu noted that Turkey needs to shift toward hybrid automobile use and that they are currently in talks with the Treasury to provide tax discounts for hybrid automobile purchases. He added that research is currently being carried out by the UN Hydrogen Technologies Research Center in İstanbul to use hydrogen-based fuel sources in public transportation, adding that there is significant potential in reducing greenhouse gas emissions through public transportation, as exemplified by projects such as the Metrobüs in İstanbul.

IMF's prescription is not addressing Turkey's needs'

Friday, 15 January 2010 09:09

Today's Zaman

Foreign Trade Minister Zafer Çağlayan said Turkey has so far shied away from signing a stand-by deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) since the IMF's suggestions far from meet Turkey's expectations.

It recommends that all countries spend more to thwart the crisis but calls on Turkey to behave thrifty, the minister argued and said that this is not acceptable.

Çağlayan was speaking in Germany to an audience of Turkish businessmen who were attending Heimtextil, one of the world's most important textile fairs.

Speaking about his visit to Russia, he stated that significant progress has been made for building a logistic center in Russia. Negotiations over white meat exports to Russia were also about to finish successfully, the minister said, adding that this will provide Turkey with a demand equal to nearly 40 percent of its total white meat production, which is about 1.25 million tons a year.

Çağlayan noted that the Russian side stated that they will make the required amendments to enable trade with domestic currencies between the two countries in a near future. Russia and Turkey will abolish visa requirements by May, the minister added.

Çağlayan spoke about export figures, criticizing a drop in the value of the Turkish lira against some currencies. He noted that the value of the lira and amount of exports declined by 23 and 10 percent, respectively, last year compared to 2008. "If we had sold this amount of goods at 2008 prices, the total value would be \$123 billion instead of \$102 billion," he said. The exchange rate between the Turkish lira and the US dollar decreased from 1.5 in 2002 to 1.45 in 2010 despite the fact that inflation remained at low levels during this period, the minister pointed out, remarking that the correct exchange rate level between the lira and US dollar can only be determined by taking this fact into account.

An institution like the Central Bank of Turkey does not have the luxury to only care about price stability, but it should make its plans regarding the future, Çağlayan maintained. He also criticized the central bank for being late to reduce interest rates. If the bank had started to reduce interest rates a year and a half ago, he argued, exports would be around \$230 billion.

Babacan joins PM Erdoğan, decides to boycott Davos meeting

Friday, 15 January 2010 09:10

Today's Zaman

Economy Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan told reporters on Thursday that he does not plan on attending this year's World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting, to be held in Davos, joining Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who last year walked out. Speaking during a joint press conference with Ziraat Bankası General Manager Can Akın Çağlar and Halkbank General Manager Hüseyin Aydın in Ankara, the minister said he had attended the Davos meetings over the past seven years but decided not to go this year, emphasizing that this decision was not necessarily related to ongoing talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on an anticipated stand-by deal.

"I do not think our meeting with IMF officials will exceed one hour in Davos apart from all the other meetings. This, however, is not enough to seal a deal," he explained. Babacan said Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also approved of his decision. He added that the government will soon be able to provide updates on the course of IMF talks.

Babacan said the government plans to accelerate the privatization of public banks in the coming months. He hinted the Halkbank and Vakıfbank would see more public offerings in 2010. The minister noted that the government places heavy importance on following developments in

global finance markets and making sure that public banks are not harmed either during privatizations or public offerings.

Making mention of the banks' profitability in 2009, he said banks may not be able to realize the same profit levels in 2010. The minister asserted that, thanks to previous precautions, the Turkish finance industry managed to keep problems at bay during the global credit crunch. The state is responsible for making the necessary rules that will ensure a healthy and competitive environment in the market. Some developed countries, which had more public banks than Turkey, had to allocate billions to save these banks during the crisis, he explained. "We think private banks should be encouraged more. There won't be major problems so long as everyone complies with market rules," he said.

Babacan also shared his remarks on the performance of the Ziraat Bankası and Halkbank. He said public banks are no longer administered with political motives but run on purely economic considerations. Contrary to their losses in the past, public banks are earning profits and these profits largely stem from banking activities, the minister added.

Babacan supported his claims by stating a few figures. Ziraat, for example, had only TL 37.7 billion worth of assets in 2002; the figure has since risen to TL 124.5 billion as of the end of 2009, the minister said, adding that the bank's loans amounted to TL 4.2 billion in 2002 whereas this number rose to TL 36.5 billion last year. Deposits, on the other hand, climbed from TL 28.4 billion to TL 98.5 billion. In addition to these figures, the bank enjoyed a profit of TL 2.7 billion in nine months, which Babacan noted was the highest figure ever a Turkish bank has recorded. Other figures the minister provided included the bank's investment loans, which accounted for 30 percent of the total amount of loans it extended in 2009, that the rate of its non-performing loans fell to 2.4 percent from its 62.1 percent level in 2002, which is much lower than the average rate of 5.3 percent in the Turkish banking business, and that the interest rates on agricultural loans declined to up to 6 percent per year from its former level of 15 percent in just one year since the beginning of 2009.

Halkbank achieved great success, too, Babacan said. Halkbank's assets climbed to TL 57.2 billion as of the end of 2009 from TL 17.4 billion in 2002 and its deposits rose to TL 40.8 billion by September 2009 from the year-end figure of TL 11.5 billion in 2002. The rate of non-performing loans was 5 percent, again lower than the sector average. Babacan also noted that Halkbank has the highest share in loans extended to small companies in the entire Turkish banking industry.

Bad news for banks

The minister also spoke about fees initially charged on newly opened branches. He said these fees will now apply for all offices. Babacan said this measure was introduced to provide extra financing for the most recent increase in retirement pensions. The government introduced a set of price increases in tobacco products, alcoholic beverages and fuel to finance the pensions but continued looking for new resources since revenue from these hikes did not fully cover increased budget expenses.

A bank was normally required to pay a one-time fee of TL 27,000 for a new office it opens. With the new system, an office opened in a district that is home to less than 5,000 people will pay a fee of TL 24,000 every year. If the office is located in a district with a population of between 5,000 and 25,000, the bank will have to send TL 36,000 to the Treasury's coffers for this office. Finally, banks will pay an annual fee of TL 48,000 for their offices operating in places that are home to more than 25,000 people. The total number of bank offices in Turkey is 9,500 and

nearly half of them are located in cities.

Unemployment rate declines to 13 percent

Friday, January 15, 2010

ISTANBUL - Daily News with wires

Turkey's unemployment rate declined to 13 percent in the three months through November, from 13.4 percent in the period a month earlier.

That rate, however, also indicated a jump from a revised 11.2 percent in the same period of last year, the Ankara-based Turkish Statistical Institute, or TurkStat, said on its Web site Friday. The jobless rate had hit 16.1 percent in February, the highest since records began in 2005, according to Bloomberg.

The number of unemployed rose by 569,000 compared to the same period of the previous year, reaching 3.29 million. The unemployment rate rose 2.5 percent, to 15.5 percent, in urban areas and 0.6 percent in rural areas, where it stood at 8.2 percent.

Non-agricultural unemployment rose 2.4 percent, to 16.4 percent, for the October period, which covers September, October and November, compared to same period the previous year.

The labor-force participation rate for the period was 48.8 percent, with an increase of 1.2 percentage points compared to the same period of the previous year. The labor-force participation rate was 46.4 percent, with a 0.8 percentage-point increase in urban areas, and 54.1 percent, with a 1.9 percentage-point increase, in rural areas during this period.

Improvement in labor market conditions seems to be gaining pace, Fortis said in an e-mail to investors. " However, some part of this improvement is probably related with the temporary hirings in the public sector, as the payrolls increased especially in the community social and personal services," it added.

Turkey forecasts \$17.3 bln-public investments in 2010

Friday, 15 January 2010 11:38

WORLD BULLETIN

Turkey forecasts 17.3 billion USD of public investments in 2010.

Turkey published its investment program for 2010 in Friday's Official Gazette, and said the public investments would be around 17.3 billion USD (27.7 million Turkish liras-TL).

In the investment program, Turkey regards one USD around 1.6042 TL.

The revolving funds and social security institutions, state economic enterprises, the Iller Bankasi of Turkey (a state bank that provides loan for public investments in municipalities and provincial administrations), and the institutions within the scope of privatization are expected to make this 17.3 billion USD of public investments.

When the investments of local administrations are also added, public investments will be around 25.5 billion USD (40.9 billion TL).

Turkey reveals 2009 budget deficit as \$34.8 bln

Friday, 15 January 2010 11:50

WORLD BULLETIN

The Turkish finance minister announced on Friday the year-end (2009) budget deficit as 34.8 billion USD.

The Turkish finance minister announced on Friday the year-end (2009) budget deficit as 34.8 billion USD.

Turkey's Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek held a press conference on budget performances of 2009, and said Turkey's budget deficit was 34.8 billion USD (52.2 billion Turkish liras-TL).

"Turkey's budget expenditures were 267.3 billion TL (178.2 billion USD), and revenues were 215.1 billion TL (143.4 billion USD)," Simsek said.

Turkey's budget deficit was only 17.4 billion TL (11.6 billion USD) in 2008.

"The budget deficit was below what we have forecast in the medium-term financial program," Simsek said.

Simsek also referred to budget performances in December 2009, and said the budget figures in December was better than their projections.

Turkey's budget expenditures were 27.7 billion TL (18.4 billion USD), revenues were 21.9 billion TL (14.6 billion USD), and budget deficit was 5.9 billion TL (3.9 billion USD) in December 2009.

SOCIAL ISSUES

Swine flu left behind, Saudi Arabia expects more for umrah tours

Friday, 08 January 2010 08:53

Today's Zaman

The swine flu virus was found to be only slightly more serious than the average flu, leading Saudi Arabia to expect the number of people traveling to Mecca to increase.

The demand to travel to Saudi Arabia for umrah, a visit to the Kaaba in Mecca that is similar to the pilgrimage, or hajj, to Mecca and Medina, decreased considerably in Turkey during the holy month of Ramadan due to anxiety about the H1N1 virus; however, as the virus was found in December to be only a little more serious than the average flu season, hotel owners in Saudi Arabia are now expecting the numbers of people traveling to Mecca to increase.

While there is a restriction on every country in the number of people allowed to visit Mecca to perform their hajj, a pilgrimage to the Islamic city of Mecca and one of the conditions of Islam, there are no restrictions for umrah.

The H1N1 virus, widely known as swine flu, was a hot topic around the world approximately seven months ago when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared H1N1 to be a pandemic last June. Following the WHO statement, many experts feared that about 3 million pilgrims from over 160 countries congregating around Mecca's holy sites would facilitate the transmission of the virus. Therefore, authorities in Saudi Arabia advised persons over 65 and under 12, pregnant women and people suffering from terminal illness to postpone their pilgrimage. They also tightened up health measures at airports, and some Muslims from various countries were barred from traveling to Saudi Arabia. However, the December figures reassured people who were worried that a flu pandemic could kill millions.

Visiting Turkey on the occasion of beginning the hajj and the umrah season, hotel officials from Mecca and Medina and tourism agencies arranging hajj and umrah packages said they were more hopeful about this year than last due to a recent study by researchers from the UK Medical Research Council and the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) showing that the H1N1 virus is only a little more serious than an average flu season.

Khalid A. Abuamrah, the executive manager of Al-Dakheel Hotel in Medina, expressed the opinion that this year they are expecting more demand for umrah than last year. "Saudi Arabia hosts hundreds of thousands of Muslim pilgrims every year, but this year the world encountered the swine flu virus. It affected the whole world and made people afraid because health officials said this pandemic could cause many deaths. Naturally, this resulted in people feeling anxious about travelling to Saudi Arabia by plane, and consequently there was a decline in the demand for umrah, but with the waning of the spread of the H1N1 virus, the number of people coming to Saudi Arabia for umrah will increase."

Mekki Remzi Elkutbi, the general director of the Hodhod Tourism Agency in Saudi Arabia, stated that swine flu had been exaggerated around the world and that people were very worried about it. In an interview with Today's Zaman, he said that despite a global outbreak of the H1N1 flu virus, only five people had died during the hajj.

Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz al-Rabeeah, the Saudi health minister, said that umrah had ended without the major flu outbreak feared by some experts, with only five deaths from the H1N1 flu virus out of 73 recorded cases.

Underlining that there was no significant problem in Mecca with swine flu, Mekki Remzi Elkutbi, who has one of the biggest tourism agencies in Saudi Arabia, claimed that it was one of God's mysteries that Saudi Arabia had not encountered a bad outbreak of swine flu. "People realize that swine flu is a kind of influenza. With the number of swine flu cases on the decline in the world, it became clear that the H1N1 virus threat had been exaggerated and the public was put into an unnecessary panic. For these reasons, we expect more demand for umrah this year," Elkutbi added.

Turkish pilgrims preferred as customers by Arab hoteliers

Managers and officials from hotels in Saudi Arabia visited Turkey for the International Hajj and Umrah Tourism Fair, which took place Tuesday and Wednesday at the Grand Cevahir Hotel and Congress Center. Through this event, they had an opportunity to advertise their facilities and services to tourism agencies in Turkey.

Most of the participants have four or five-star hotels in Mecca, and their hotels are among the best. Every year about 3 million people, including 120,000 from Turkey, request reservations at these hotels. They said they preferred to have Turkish pilgrims staying at their hotels because of the characteristics of Turkish people.

Fuat Omar Alkhomri, manager of the Al Khomri Hotels Group, emphasized that Arabs like Turks and that they generally establish good relationships. "Everyone pays to stay in a hotel, but at Al Khomri Hotels, we put priority on people who respect their surroundings, and we see this with Turkish pilgrims. They are good customers, and we prefer to have Turks staying in our hotels," he noted.

Another issue to which Alkhomri drew attention was Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's walkout in Davos during a panel discussion on Gaza at the World Economic Forum (WEF).

Erdoğan, who has not hesitated to voice anger at the disproportionate use of force by Israel, which led to the killings of hundreds of civilians, walked off the stage in protest of a moderator who refused to allow him to speak in response to Israeli President Shimon Peres' remarks defending the Israeli offensive in Gaza. Alkhomri wished Erdoğan God speed for daring to display an attitude that most people were afraid to give voice to.

Turkish Films To Compete In Iranian Film Event

Monday, 11 January 2010 19:26

TIME TURK

Two award-winning Turkish films will compete in this year's Fajr Film Festival, one of Iran's leading film events.

Director Mahmut Fazil Coskun's "Uzak Ihtimal" (Wrong Rosary) and Cemal San's "Aci" (Pain) will vie in the international film category of the festival.

Films from 15 countries will take part in this year's international competition that will take place from January 25 to February 4.

Last year, in the 27th edition of the festival, Turkish feature films "Sut" (Milk) by director Semih Kaplanoglu, "Pandora'nın Kutusu" (Pandora's Box) by Yesim Ustaoglu, "Beyaz Melek" (White Angel) by Mahsun Kirmizigul and short film "Yokus" (The Slope) by Mehmet Can had competed along with 277 films from 63 countries in the Iranian film event held annually in Tehran.

COMMENTARY

A 'very difficult' thing for Israel

Friday, January 15, 2010

CENGİZ ÇANDAR

HURRIYAT

Was Turkey able to repel Israel? Yes, it was. Famous for usually being obnoxious and because of that, leading the U.S. administration in a pretty dance, making its European allies sick and tired, Israel bowed before Turkey and apologized for the first time. Turkish President Abdullah Gül demanded an apology and gave time for Israel to respond.

This is an excellent opportunity to see what the "New Middle East" means. The "New Middle East" that is emerging with a "New Turkey in the region."

If you cannot understand this and get panicked because of Turkey's stance against Israel, or if you justify Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon's arrogance with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's "Davos move," you will find yourself, together with Ayalon, off to the side within 53 hours.

Do you think Ayalon and his boss Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have realized they made a mistake and apologized just to act virtuously? No. They apologized because they were pressured to do so. They could not remove pressures and made political calculations. They were forced to make an apology. Israeli President Shimon Peres, who was personally and directly subjected to Erdoğan's heavy criticism last year in Davos, seemed to play a critical role in this "apology." As a matter of fact, he tried to turn this crisis into a "personal error" and said the other day it was a mistake of a man, not the state, and Ayalon's behavior was not diplomatically accurate, and it was good he apologized. Why? Because Peres is a well-experienced, smart man. He calculated Israel would be harmed more than Turkey in this "crisis" and reached the conclusion that an "apology" will help more to Israeli benefit. Was Israel not harmed by the apology? Yes it was, but if Israel had not apologized, the crisis could have deepened, and Israel could have been hurt more.

One of the people thinking similarly is Benjamin "Fuad" Ben-Eliezer, Israeli deputy prime minister. He is a politician exerting the outmost efforts to "keep relations with Turkey on track." When the crisis occurred, Ben-Eliezer was in India. He spoke to the Israeli radio there and said,

"We have enough problems with the Muslim world without picking a fight with a country that has 72 million Muslims." He said, "When I met Turkish officials in November, I told them what was needed to be said behind closed doors."

Ben-Eliezer with his cynical expression both teaches a lesson to his coalition partner Ayalon and to Lieberman and teaches how Turkey should be regarded. In the eye of some Israeli politicians and possibly of top U.S. officials, Turkey is the leader of the Muslim world, a center of power. When you stand against Turkey, you invite the wrath of the entire Muslim world.

But what did Turkey do to be perceived as such?

Turkey did it through its regional policy since Erdoğan's "one minute" move in Davos last year. Therefore, we should acknowledge that Turkey's post-Davos policy was effective.

In the recent crisis that emerged this week between Israel and Turkey, let's see who the really harmed party is. The Kadima Party in the Israeli opposition slammed the government's policy followed in this "diplomatic crisis" with Turkey. Interestingly enough criticisms over the apology were made by the rightist newspaper Jerusalem Post, which endorses implicitly the Netanyahu line in the country. The daily stressed that Ayalon is no diplomatic neophyte. He has been around for quite some time, first in the Foreign Ministry, then in the Prime Minister's Office, then as Israel's ambassador to Washington and now as deputy foreign minister. The Jerusalem Post's story went on:

"He knows the rules, the decorum, the etiquette, yet he violated them in his treatment Monday of Turkish Ambassador Oguz Çelikkol. In doing so, he diverted attention from Israel's justified complaints over Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's ceaseless haranguing of the country and Turkey's viscosly anti-Israeli television series, onto the fact that the Turkish envoy was intentionally seated on a lower sofa, with Ayalon and his aides looking down at him from up high."

The end result: Turkey comes out looking like the victim, and Israel is forced to apologize, something Erdoğan never did – even after very undiplomatically upbraiding Israeli President Shimon Peres last year in Davos and then storming off the stage.

"In addition, and perhaps most damagingly, ammunition was given to those in Turkey who – like Erdoğan – want to distance Ankara from Jerusalem."

Erdoğan is not a Turkish King Louis XIV: He is not the state. There are many inside Turkey – in the courts, the military, the civil service bureaucracy – who would like to see Turkey's sharp tone toward Israel change. The problem now is that it will be more difficult for those people to raise their voices.

"For instance, if the military says – for its own interests – it wants to begin warming the ties with Jerusalem, those – like Erdoğan – who want to distance the relationship, can answer, "After they humiliated us?"

This is a sincere expression of who the Israeli right is against in Turkey and which Turkish groups they feel close to. With one thing missing though: The Post forgot to mention the spin-doctors in the Turkish media lamenting, "Turkey is becoming a single-party dictatorship, a civilian dicta regime..." They forgot to talk about spokesmen of the insider friends aforementioned.

There are some people who believe, although Israel apologized, bilateral relations are "seriously damaged" as some accurately point a finger to the source of the most harmful damage.

The liberal Haaretz's columnist Zvi Bar'el says in his article:

“The serious damage is really in the deep erosion in Turkish public opinion, which was the basis for Turkey's warm relations with Israel. But the Turkish public is not ready to suffer insult to its envoys. It is the public that takes to the streets when it is not satisfied with its government. They are vocal when their government's policies are not to their liking.

“It is this same public that in 2003 did not let the Erdoğan government permit American use of Turkish airspace en route to Iraq and the same public that turned out in huge numbers to protest Operation Cast Lead in Gaza. It is also the same Turkish public that viewed the Jews as a historic ally from Ottoman times.

“That foundation was shaken this week by treatment that reminded the Turks of the way Ottoman sultans humiliated foreign emissaries. That will be very difficult for the Turkish public to forgive.”

This is a realistic assessment of the Turkish public opinion's feelings towards Israel. However, politics cannot seek revenge. In fact, Erdoğan, upon his return from Moscow, accepted Israel's apology and said, “Israel should pull itself up and be fair.”

Perhaps, this is the “very difficult” thing for Israel, more “difficult” than forgiveness of the Turkish public opinion.

An open letter to Israelis (from a concerned Turk)

Friday, January 15, 2010

Mustafa AKYOL

HURRIYAT

Dear friends,

I hope all is well in the Holy Land. Things are not too bad here in Turkey. Yet one thing that certainly does not look great is relations between our countries, which hit an ugly low this week. In fact, since the beginning of your government's “Operation Cast Lead” in Gaza, which happened a year ago, a continual war of words has been going on between your leaders and ours. But no war of words has ever helped anybody. So, as a humble commentator on Turkish affairs who would be happy to see better Israeli-Turkish relations, let me offer a few honest thoughts.

The New Turkish Republic

First, we all should see something: The Turkish Republic of today is more democratic and more Muslim-minded than it ever used to be. And these two things are not contradictory at all. In the last decade, the power of the democratically elected government has steadily increased vis-à-vis the secularist bureaucratic elite that had dominated the country since the late '20s. As a result, the cultural sensibilities of the majority of Turkish society, in which Muslimhood plays a great role, have become more influential in policymaking.

The practical result of this is that Turkey is ruled by people such as Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has a greater emotional connection with the Muslim Palestinians, and not by the ultra-secular generals who look at the Islamic world with distaste. (I know that some of you think Turkey was doing much better under those generals, but I strongly suggest consulting with our liberals or Kurds, who tasted torture in military prisons or who saw their friends assassinated by the gendarme.)

This is not to say that everything that comes out of this more democratic Turkey is sensible – no, not at all. Some of the harsh rhetoric against Israel that we see in our media is indeed fueled by anti-Semitism, which exists within various political camps. The recent TV series that depicted the Israeli military as a bunch of sadists were indeed childish and silly. Turks are a highly

emotional people and their anger against the carnage in Gaza, which I share, can easily lead to the vilification of Israel, which I criticize.

However, what I or you would prefer to see does not matter much here. What matters is that this New Turkish Republic, as political analyst Graham Fuller wisely calls it, is here to stay.

But is this bad news for Israel?

Well, it depends. If you are willing to achieve a fair two-state solution, which will bring security to you and a viable homeland to the Palestinians, the rising popularity of Turkey on the “Arab street” might actually be an asset. People say that Erdoğan is the new hero of the Middle East, and please note that he has achieved this by calling for not a “world without Zionism,” but a Gaza with happy children. If you really want peace, a just peace, this New Turkish Republic can help you by reaching out to some of your toughest enemies, such as Hamas.

But if you are willing instead to keep and even expand your illegitimate settlements in “the territories,” and continue to rely on an Iron Wall to defend yourself from an angry nation to whom you have done wrong, then, sorry. The New Turkish Republic will not be of any help. Because, believe me, it will never, ever forsake the Palestinian people.

The lesson we learned

When we Turks raise the issue of the plight of the Palestinians, though, you Israelis often remind us of our own sins, such as the plight of the Kurds. You have a point. But I have a point too. So please listen.

Yes, we Turks have been oppressive to our Kurdish citizens since the '20s, banning even their very right to speak their own language. Yet we are not occupiers in southeastern Turkey, and the place that we really occupied, northern Cyprus, is at least safe and sound.

But I want to tell you something else that the saner among us have understood over our decades-long “war against terrorism” directed at the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK. Our powerful generals repeatedly told us that this was a military problem and they would “solve” it swiftly by “killing all terrorists, one by one.” Some also believed that “the Kurds only understand brute force,” and showed a great deal of it by burning thousands of villages.

Only now are we realizing that the PKK stemmed not only from its fanatical ideology, but also from the original sins of our state and its arrogant suppression of the Kurds. One thing I really like about the New Turkish Republic is that it gets this fundamental truth, and embraces a much less militarist and much more reconciliatory paradigm.

I think you should take the hint. You should see that there is no military solution to terrorism rooted in an angry people. The real solution is to admit the wrongs you have done to those people, give them back what they deserve, and, by doing all this, empower the moderates on their side.

If you keep on rejecting this and relying on militarism, then, my friends, the future does not look bright for you. The end of this road is to become something like the apartheid regime in South Africa. Look, even now your soldiers cannot enter the U.K. — the U.K., for God’s sake! — fearing that they might be arrested for their assault on Gaza, which a U.N. report said included war crimes.

I really don’t want you to go down that way; hence my prayers go to the peaceniks on your side. And, unlike some others here, I am not hopeless. For I know that the Jewish people, with all their admirable history, faith and culture, have the potential to be a light unto nations, rather than bring death unto the children of Palestine.

Israel hits a hard rock

Thursday, January 14, 2010

Semih Idiz

HURRIYAT

Politicians often say and do stupid things. It seems part of their calling. Turkey is a good example in this respect. But when professional diplomats – whose calling is to diffuse, and not inflame, crises – start to act stupidly, then this points to a systemic problem.

We always assumed Israeli diplomats to be of the highest caliber. At least the ones we know are such. Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon has, however, proven this not to be the case every time.

His remarks in Hebrew to the assembled members of the Israeli media, after he called Ambassador Oğuz Çelikkol to the Foreign Ministry earlier this week to protest an anti-Israeli Turkish film, were enough to make any sensible Israeli shudder with shame and wonder what kind of people are running their Foreign Ministry.

Ayalon's remarks, and the theatrical set-up he had prepared for Çelikkol, are part of diplomatic history now, so there is no need to repeat them. Suffice it to say that even a spokesman for Ayalon's own extreme right "Yisrael Beiteinu" party told Israeli media that Ayalon's political career was over. Others say his diplomatic career is too.

Ayalon's behavior – obviously given the initial go ahead by Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman – was not only amateurish in terms of the childish theatrics it entailed: there was also a diplomatic miscalculation involved.

Ayalon also committed the same mistake that Turkey committed at the time over the rabidly anti-Turkish film "Midnight Express." He called in Çelikkol to protest the anti-Semitism of a Turkish TV series called the "Valley of the Wolves."

Israel recently lodged a similar protest in Ankara over another series called "Separation" and achieved partial results then. However, the "Valley of the Wolves" was shot by a private company, just like "Midnight Express."

The series called "Separation," on the other hand, which was also offensive for Israelis, was done for the state-owned TRT. So the government could intervene there because it has a legal right to. Given Turkey's democratic and legal system, there was no way the government could stop the airing of the "Valley of the Wolves." Only prosecutors could act. But, considering the new EU-orientated legal changes and the general sympathy for the Palestinians in this country, it is unlikely that they would.

By not seeing the subtle difference here, and by going after the "Valley of the Wolves" the way it did, Israel in fact provided all the advertisement the series needs. It was exactly the same with Midnight Express.

When the Turkish government lodged formal protests over that film in Western capitals where it was being shown, it got the same answer everywhere: "This is a matter that the government can not intervene in because of our democratic system."

More to the point, however, when it became public knowledge that Turkey was protesting the film, public interest in it skyrocketed, even winning it an Oscar in the end.

The makers of "Valley of the Wolves" are now doubly defiant, saying that if this part angered Israelis, they should wait for the next one for which they can start getting angry for already.

Some say they want to dramatize the “Goldstone Report.” And why should they not then want to capitalize on the publicity Israel will provide them, no matter how reprehensibly racist and anti-Semitic their final product may be?

For this writer, both the “Valley of the Wolves,” and the mentality that produces such racist rubbish have always been reprehensible. Whether it is “Midnight Express” or a Turkish production makes no difference.

But that is beside the point; Ayalon has generated all the publicity the “Valley of the Wolves” needs.

Even the Americans behaved sensibly when a previous film version of the “Valley of the Wolves” depicted American soldiers as wanton killers of women and children in Iraq. They kept quiet and provided the movie with as little publicity as possible.

In the background of all this is of course Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s continuing harsh salvos against Israel, which are beginning to grate badly on Israeli and pro-Israeli nerves. He did the same last week during the visit of the Lebanese Prime Minister.

Coincidentally, that came just as Ayalon was staging his amateur theatrics in Israel, which incidentally had nothing to do with Erdogan’s words, but concerned “The Valley of the Wolves.” Erdogan’s remarks, in which he accused Israel of attacking innocent Palestinians, supported Iran’s nuclear program and sided with Lebanon against Israel. The remarks merely made matters worse, of course.

It is clear that Erdogan’s sympathy for the people of Gaza – and his open sympathy for Hamas – is clouding his judgment here as a leader, even if his outbursts are causing much pleasure in the streets of the Arab world.

Neither can one argue anymore that Erdogan is doing all this because he is emotional. He seems to be pursuing a campaign aimed at reducing ties with Israel to the benefit of Syria and Iran.

Whatever the case may be, he appears to be not too far away from achieving his aim.

It now remains up to Israel’s Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister, Ehud Barak, to try and mend fences. Barak, who is known to value ties with Turkey, will be in Ankara on Sunday.

The fact is, however, that Ankara has raised its stakes after Ayalon’s antics. Of course Ayalon still remains defiant, even if he had to formally apologize to Turkey in the end.

Israeli media quoted his office on Thursday as claiming that “Israel will benefit from the manner in which Ayalon handled the crisis. The result is that today Turkey will be more careful with its statements.”

If these remarks are true, it is clear that Mr. Ayalon still has no proper concept of the situation. He has caused a veritable flood of statements from Turkey hitting at Israel in the hardest manner possible.

In addition to this, if he thinks that “Turkey will be more careful with its statements” in the future, then he hasn’t an inkling of a notion about Erdoğan.

At any rate, the whole world is now aware that a formal apology was issued by him to Turkey. Rather than continue making remarks that will most likely prove to be untrue, he should ponder the reasons that forced him to apologize to Turkey. That was clearly forced on him in order to save already-strained ties with Turkey.

After all, Alon Liel, a former senior Israeli diplomat who knows Turkey well, was quoted by the Financial Times on Thursday saying that Israel needs Turkey more today than Turkey needs Israel.

The simple fact is that an Israel that is increasingly isolated in the world could not risk losing Turkey as well.

From the Bosphorus: Straight - Keeping Haiti in our minds and hearts

Thursday, January 14, 2010

HURRIYAT

Most any concern, opinion, prediction or complaint that we might choose to express in this space pales in the face of the news continuing to come from the tragic island of Haiti. This is a nation, a society, a culture essentially born of the savage institution of slavery. Even its Creole language, with a few rules borrowed from French grammar, is essentially a new language, created through the amalgamation of the mutually unintelligible tongues its inhabitants brought from their native Africa.

Haiti was the second country after the United States in the Western Hemisphere to gain its independence. Haitians have much in which to take pride: The first independent nation in Latin America, the first post-colonial independent black-led nation in the world, the only nation whose independence was gained as part of a successful slave rebellion.

But despite this unique and strong civic culture, it is a society all but cursed by history: More than 32 military coups d'état, merciless exploitation by transitional expatriates, occupation by U.S. marines from 1915 to 1934, brutality by the Duvalier dynasty that ruled the country from 1957 to 1986 through a private death squad known as the "Tonton Macoutes," the ravages of AIDS brought by North American tourists, unending trauma wrought by hurricanes and the ill-fated efforts of Jesuit-turned-politician Jean-Bertrand Aristide that have resulted in the country becoming all but a ward of the United Nations.

And now, an earthquake that has left behind destruction that is scarcely imaginable. As we write, tens of thousands are certainly dead and dying. Some estimates of the death toll reach as high as 500,000 – equal to 5 percent of the entire population. Aid efforts have mobilized from the United States to China, from Cuba to the European Union. But with the basics of infrastructure devastated, reports of children dying without access to medicine while aid convoys are stuck at the airport are likely to continue in the coming days.

We can take comfort that 52 Turkish policemen on the island as peacekeepers have survived and quickly reorganized themselves to participate in the relief efforts. We are eager to hear reports from two Red Crescent officials on their way to Haiti to ascertain what Turkey can do. For we certainly understand on our own just what the devastation of an earthquake means, as well as the importance of international aid and support at a terrible time.

So we wait, face-to-face with our own ineffectualness in such a moment. As we struggle to find meaningful deeds, all words fail. Israeli diplomatic insults... political combat... economic recovery... educational reform... all upon which we might comment today seem trivial.

As we await the knowledge of how we might help, we must keep the people of Haiti in our minds and in our hearts.
