

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Turkey

Weekly Report on Turkey's Political, Geo-Strategic, Social and Economic Issues,

Period: 15-22 JANUARY 2010

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Presentation: January 27, 2010

Report no.103

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POLITICAL ISSUES

KURDISH ISSUE

Kurdish, Turkish journalists call for dialogue

Monday, 18 January 2010 09:01

Today's Zaman

Kurdish and Turkish journalists who met in İstanbul on Saturday to discuss the role of the media put forward suggestions for the purpose of eliminating misperceptions and prejudices that exist both among Iraqi Kurds and in Turkey.

More than 60 journalists from both Turkish and Kurdish magazines, television channels and newspapers convened on Saturday for a one-day meeting organized by the Medialog Platform, an entity affiliated with the Journalists and Writers Foundation (GYV) that works to arrange opportunities for members of the media to discuss new projects and exchange opinions.

In the opening speech, Mustafa Yeşil, the head of the GYV, highlighted the meeting of the Abant Platform, which took place in Arbil in February 2009 as a first and significant step taken to establish dialogue between Kurdish and Turkish intellectuals, and expressed the opinion that the Turkish perception of northern Iraq and the Kurds living there started to change after this event.

Aza Hasseb Ali, a former minister in the Kurdish government, underlined that the negative view of Turkey had diminished when compared to the past because of the talks.

Ali also drew attention to the role of Turkish schools that have been operating since 1994 and praised the opening of Işık University in the region. "Although there is a border between Iraq and Turkey, we are closely dependent on each other; thus every development in Turkey has a direct effect on northern Iraq," Ali said.

State-oriented media, a hurdle to reflecting developments impartially

Yavuz Baydar, a columnist for Today's Zaman, expressed his criticism of the devastating effect military interventions have had on media freedom in Turkey but added that over the course of 20 years Turkey's taboos have begun to be abolished. "But we have a very long way to go to achieve a well-established democracy in Turkey," he stated.

Commenting on the attitudes adopted by the Turkish media, Mete Çubukçu, a veteran journalist with an interest in the Middle East, referred to two different approaches in media/state relations. “Either the state follows the media and makes some changes according to the reaction of the latter, or the stance of the media towards developments is shaped by the state. Unfortunately, the Turkish media have not been able to free itself from state policy and its concerns,” said Çubukçu, adding that during the ‘90s, the Turkish media took a provocative stance towards the Kurdish issue and generally associated northern Iraq with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). “However,” he emphasized, “after the start of the normalization process with northern Iraq, the media altered its line in accordance with the change in state policy.”

Drawing attention to the factors affecting the Turkish view of northern Iraq, sociologist and journalist Ali Bulaç maintained that Turkey’s national security concerns and the threat of separation in the country have been the main influences on perceptions about northern Iraq. “Northern Iraq in general was seen as a distant region which was very unstable and which constituted a threat to Turkish unity and whose leaders were unreliable. This negative approach, which is Orientalist, still prevails to some extent in Turkey,” noted Bulaç, underlining that “Kurdistan” is a reality and accepted in the Iraqi Constitution. “But it is hard to accept this in Turkey.”

Acknowledging that there are fears among Turks over a Kurdish separatist movement spreading in southeastern Anatolia, Mustafa Akyol, an author and journalist at the Star daily, condemned the military interventions that played on this fear in order to maintain military tutelage in Turkey. Nevzat Çiçek, another journalist, criticized his colleagues who now oppose the government’s attempts to resolve the Kurdish question and applaud past military interventions.

Talking about the difficulties for reporters in getting news from northern Iraq, he said, “It is much easier to be informed about Brazil. Turkish reporters do not know where the Kandil Mountains are -- this is a big problem. I suggest a group should be set up to provide news flowing from Kurdistan to Turkey.”

Remarking on how Turkey has been viewed by Kurds in northern Iraq, Bakir Karim Mohammad Salih, the chairman of the Mukriyan Foundation, noted that the history books of the Saddam era told the Iraqi people that the Ottoman Empire was a colonial state which exploited Arabs and Kurds in Iraq and attempted to assimilate them.

Salih referred to the action being taken to secure minority rights and the use of the mother tongue, pointing out that there are Arabic newspapers in northern Iraq where the population is composed mostly of Kurds. “We don’t see it as a danger,” he said. He also claimed that if Turkey can resolve its Kurdish problem, relations between Kurds in Iraq and Turkey will reach a peak, and this will contribute to Turkey’s rising influence in the region.

Fareed Saber Qader, the president of the Kurdistan Strategic Studies Center, noted there is no need for Turkey, a NATO member, to see northern Iraq as a threat. “The United Kingdom managed to forge friendly relations with its former colonies. Keeping in mind that the Ottoman Empire had never pursued a policy of colonialist expansion, Turkey should also have intensified ties with the countries founded in the Ottoman Empire’s territories,” said Qader, highlighting the significance of the resolution of the Kurdish problem in terms of the northern Iraq autonomous administration and Turkey. Although military operations and the stance of the Turkish army towards Kurds may result in a negative image of Turkey in the eyes of Iraqi Kurds, the ruling Justice and Development Party’s (AK Party) persistent efforts towards democracy in Turkey have influenced the Kurds in the region.

The editor-in-chief of Today's Zaman, Bülent Keneş, also cited the lack of democracy and the military's role in politics as the main reasons behind several of Turkey's problems. "There is no Kurdish question in Turkey, there is no Armenian or devout Muslim problem in the country. What we have been suffering from is the role of the military in the civilian arena, which we are now challenging," he said.

Cengiz Çandar, a columnist at the Radikal daily, dismissed assertions that resolution of the Kurdish question is not possible through the initiative and emphasized that it is a long process that includes ups and downs. "It has started, and I believe the process is irreversible," he added.

Bar associations call for PKK withdrawal, end to military operations

Tuesday, 19 January 2010 08:59

Today's Zaman

Bar associations from 41 cities throughout Turkey met in Diyarbakir over the weekend to discuss the government's democratization initiative and urge the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) to withdraw from Turkey and for an end to military operations.

"It was one of the very few examples of unity among the bar associations. Forty-one bar associations, despite their different terminology, despite their different understandings, were able to sign the same declaration after long and vivid but very civilized and mature discussions," Emin Aktar, chairman of the Diyarbakir Bar Association, told Today's Zaman.

The bar associations came from cities throughout the Southeast as well as Bursa, Balıkesir, Yozgat, Ankara, Edirne, Çankırı, Kastamonu and Kayseri and discussed the government's democratization initiative and its chances of success given that "pessimism, hopelessness and divisions among society are very obvious," as their joint declaration stated. The bar associations also underlined that Turkey urgently needs a new constitution.

The same statement underlined that Turkey still has problems regarding human rights, the rule of law and democracy, which are directly linked with the Kurdish question.

The joint declaration suggested that the Kurdish question can be solved on the basis of democracy, freedom and justice and with methods excluding violence, arguing that Turkey has the power to succeed.

"Measures that will serve to remove risks should be taken. In order to prepare the ground for disarmament, the armed combatants should withdraw outside the boundaries of Turkey and the military operations should be stopped. We believe that such an atmosphere will serve to help the resolution of the problem with peace and common sense," the joint declaration said.

The bar associations called for the urgent amendment of laws in order to protect the rights of assembly and forming nonviolent political parties. The joint declaration stated that the exclusion of legitimate political powers from the system makes the ones using violence stronger.

They also urged people to pay attention to the social and economic dimensions of the democratization initiative and take measures to protect the independency of the judiciary.

The chairpersons of the bar associations also stated that Turkey urgently needs a new constitution, which should be prepared by the participation of all segments of society and that such a constitution should be based on respect for other cultures.

"We urged all civil powers in this country to take the initiative. We think this is the only way forward," Aktar said.

Banned pro-Kurdish DTP appeals to European court

Thursday, 21 January 2010 17:14

Today's Zaman

Former members of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), recently closed down by the Constitutional Court, have filed a case with the European Court of Human Rights in which they argue that the Constitutional Court is not impartial since it was e

Former DTP and current Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) Şırnak Deputy Hasip Kaplan submitted the petition to the court yesterday, the pro-Kurdish Fırat news agency reported.

The lawsuit comprises three complaints, one of which will be filed in the name of the corporate personality of the party while the remaining two will concern Ahmet Türk and Aysel Tuğluk, two former DTP deputies whom the Constitutional Court banned from politics.

The Constitutional Court decided to close the DTP and ban 37 of its members from politics, including DTP leader Türk and DTP deputy Tuğluk, on Dec. 11 of last year. The court deemed the party guilty of engaging in ethnic separatism and having links with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

The petition filed by former DTP members stresses that the Constitutional Court cannot be impartial as it is a remnant of the Sept. 12 coup. "This is in clear violation of Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights concerning the right to a fair trial," the petition reads. After Kaplan submitted the 78-page petition to the Strasbourg court, he convened a press conference at the European Parliament building. Kaplan once again reiterated the DTP's arguments opposing the closure. Arguing that the Constitutional Court did not allow the DTP access to certain documents during the trial process, he said a report prepared by the Constitutional Court rapporteur was not given to the DTP and that this violates the right to a fair trial, enshrined in the convention. Other arguments of the former DTP are as follows:

According to the petition, Article 10 of the convention concerning freedom of expression was violated. Other arguments of the former DTP members are that the closure decision violates Article 11 of the convention, which addresses freedom of organization; the closure decision is an act of discrimination against Kurds; Article 14 of the convention prohibits discrimination; the closure decision violates the defendants' property rights; and the closure decision violates the defendants' right to free elections, which is in breach of Article 3 of the Supplementary Protocol to the convention.

Previously, the European court has ruled in all lawsuits concerning party closures filed against the Republic of Turkey, excluding the closure of the Welfare Party (RP), that the right to freely organize was violated.

The Venice Commission, to which the Council of Europe refers when it comes to constitutional matters, prepared a document last year about party closures in Turkey, claiming that the Turkish Constitution's provisions about party closures are not in line with the European Convention on Human Rights and the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights.

OTHER POLITICAL NEWS

Fourth indictment demands life sentence for 5 naval officers

Tuesday, 19 January 2010 08:58

Today's Zaman

Prosecutors investigating Ergenekon, a clandestine group charged with plotting to overthrow the government, have completed the preparation of a fourth indictment in case, the Sabah daily reported on Monday.

The daily said a considerable part of the indictment is allocated to a large cache of munitions discovered in İstanbul's Poyrazköy district in April. The new document demands life sentences for five naval officers -- Lt. Col. Ercan Kireçtepe, Lt. Col. Mustafa Turhan Ecevit, Maj. Eren Günay, Maj. Emre Onat and retired Maj. Levent Bektaş -- on charges of “attempting to destroy the Turkish Parliament and government.”

The indictment also demands lengthy prison terms for 11 other naval officers for “being members of a terrorist organization” and “possessing unlicensed weapons.”

During excavations conducted as part of the Ergenekon probe in April, a large cache of munitions was exposed on land owned by the İstek Foundation in İstanbul's Poyrazköy district. The munitions are believed to have been buried underground to be used for planned assassinations of prominent figures in society.

Since the launch of the investigation into Ergenekon, which began in 2007, a wide range of weapons and munitions have been uncovered, buried underground or hidden underwater and at times abandoned on roadsides. The secret caches included anti-tank weapons, assault rifles, hand grenades, flame throwers and explosives. The Turkish Mechanical and Chemical Industry Corporation (MKE) confirmed that these weapons belonged to the military.

The new Ergenekon indictment demands up to 15 years in prison for Adm. Levent Görgeç, navy colonels Tayfun Duman, Şafak Yürekli, Mert Yanık, İbrahim Koray Özyurt, Dora Sungunay, Muharrem Naci Alacalı and Ali Türkşen and navy sergeant majors Halil Cura, Sadettin Doğan and Ferudun Arslan.

Also in April, police found a plot called the Cage Operation Action Plan on a CD seized during a raid of Bektaş's office. The plot exposed Ergenekon's plans to assassinate prominent figures of Turkey's non-Muslim communities and place the blame for the killings on the Justice and Development Party (AK Party). The desired result was an increase in internal and external pressure on the party, leading to diminishing public support for the government.

Turkish military's new coup plan irks some journalists

Thursday, 21 January 2010 16:49

Today's Zaman

A new plan allegedly drafted by members of the military aiming to overthrow the government failed to find coverage on a number of newspapers and news broadcasters' Web sites, a fate previously faced by several similar plans.

According to the Balyoz (Sledgehammer) Security Operation Plan, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) had a systematic plan to foment chaos in society by bombing mosques and attacking popular museums with Molotov cocktails. The attacks' desired result was to increase pressure on the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government over failing to provide security to its citizens. The attacks were to eventually lead to a military coup.

The plan was exposed by the liberal Taraf daily on Wednesday, but did not find coverage on the Web sites of many newspapers and news broadcasters. According to journalists who spoke with Today's Zaman, their colleagues refrain from giving wide coverage to such plans out of fear that their covert cooperation with the armed forces for the preparation of a chaotic atmosphere in the country would be revealed. To prove their thesis, the journalists pointed to yesterday's Taraf

report, which also stated that it would make public the names of 137 journalists who would cooperate with the armed forces after the implementation of the coup plan and 36 others who would be arrested and put behind bars.

“Some of our colleagues are concerned that their names are also included on that list. That’s most probably why they turn a blind eye to the coup plan,” said one journalist speaking on the condition of anonymity.

The journalist also said recent debates over Turkey becoming an authoritarian country through “civilian tutelage” could stand as evidence for cooperation between journalists and the armed forces against the government.

“Some media circles are already working to foment chaos in the country through such claims. They are now afraid to see their names in the expected list,” the journalist added.

The Sledgehammer Security Operation Plan also accuses the AK Party of working to damage the secular order of Turkey and replace the republican system with Shariah rule.

Taraf exposed similar suspected military plots in the past, which sent shockwaves across the country. Among them were the Action Plan to Fight Reactionaryism and the Cage Operation Action Plan.

The Action Plan to Fight Reactionaryism describes a TSK plan to damage the image of the AK Party government and the faith-based Gülen movement in the eyes of the public, to play down the Ergenekon investigation and to gather support for members of the military arrested as part of the inquest.

Ergenekon is accused of working to create a chaotic atmosphere in Turkey so people would welcome a military coup against the AK Party.

The Cage plan is believed to have been drafted by a group of Naval Forces Command officers to intimidate the country’s non-Muslim population by assassinating some prominent figures in their communities and thereby undermine the power of the ruling party.

Yet another subversive plot against AK Party exposed

Thursday, 21 January 2010 16:38

TIME TURK

Yet another underhanded plan allegedly by the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) that aimed to create an atmosphere of chaos in the country through a series of acts of violence which would eventually lead to a military coup was exposed by the liberal Taraf daily

The coup plan, titled the Balyoz [Sledgehammer] Security Operation Plan, was drafted in 2003, shortly after the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) came to power. The masterminds of the plan were retired Gen. Çetin Doğan, the then- commander of the 1st Army, retired Former Air Forces Commander Gen. İbrahim Fırtına and retired Gen. Ergin Saygun.

The Taraf report claimed that the coup plan -- a nearly 5,000-page document -- was agreed at a military meeting attended by 162 active TSK members, including 29 generals. According to the plan, the military was to systematically foment chaos in society through violent acts, among which were planned bomb attacks on the Fatih and Beyazıt mosques in İstanbul. The two are among the most frequented mosques in the city.

The bomb attacks were code-named “Çarşaf” (Black Chador) and “Sakal” (Beard) and were to be launched on a Friday, shortly after prayers. A nine-member squad -- under the command of a captain identified only by his initials, H.T. -- was to plant a remote-controlled bomb in a shoe cabinet at Fatih Mosque before leaving the building. The bomb would be detonated only seconds

after the completion of the Friday prayer. A number of provocateurs would help increase chaotic atmosphere inside the mosque.

At Beyazıt Mosque, a similar bomb would be placed in the garden of the mosque by a team of gendarmerie officers, led by Maj. H.Ö.

The bomb would be detonated around 10 minutes before the call to Friday prayer. Provocateurs were to take to the scene once again, this time urging the frustrated crowd to hold violent rallies across the city. The desired result of these rallies would be an increase in domestic pressure on the AK Party government over their failure to ensure the security of people attending prayers at mosques.

The names of former Naval Forces Commander Adm. Özden Örnek -- the author of controversial diaries which revealed that four force commanders devised plans in 2004 to stage two military coups -- retired Brig. Gen. Süha Tanyeri and retired Col. Fikri Karadağ are also frequently mentioned in the plan.

Retired military judge Ümit Kardaş told Today's Zaman that he was not surprised by the coup plan at all.

"There has always been a junta within the military. Nothing surprises me. There has been no investigation into the generals [whose names are cited in the plan]. It is not certain how the judiciary will act on the coup plan. Why hasn't there been a parliamentary commission to investigate coup plans? The government is like a lame duck. It has been declared the focal point of anti-secular activities. A certain group in the media has been obsessed with claims of civilian fascism. The public is totally confused. ... How will we call the security forces to account? No one is discussing this point," he added.

TSK would crash its own jet

The Thunderstorm Air Operation Plan, part of the coup plan, was dedicated to a number of TSK plots to create tensions between Turkish and Greek military aircraft, which would culminate in a Turkish jet crashing after a skirmish with Greek jets. The TSK would get the jet to crash if the plan failed.

According to the plan, Turkish military aircraft would provoke Greek pilots by entering Greek airspace. A dogfight between aircraft of the two countries would result in the crash of a Turkish jet. If they were unable to provoke Greece, a Turkish pilot would crash one of the Turkish jets, blaming it on the Greeks. Subsequently, the Turkish media would accuse the AK Party government of failing to ensure the security of the country.

The tension would increase in the following days, with Turkish security forces patrolling Turkey's borders with Greece. The Turkish navy would increase the number of training exercises in the Aegean Sea, giving the impression that they were preparing to go to war with Greece. Warplanes would be kept ready for flight at the Balıkesir, Bandırma, Çiğli, Çorlu and Dalaman airports. A group of high-ranking members of the military would increase their dialogue with businessmen, jurists and the public in order to boost the image of the Turkish military in the eyes of the public.

The plan clearly stated the desired result of the tension between Turkey and Greece: "By using the existing weapons systems, psychological pressure will be inflicted on the government and Parliament."

The Sept. 12, 1980 coup d'état, the most violent military intervention in Turkish history, was an example for the Sledgehammer Security Operation Plan. The plan states that the Sept. 12 coup put an end to all the problems and chaos in the country. "There is no need for extra efforts for the

elimination of a similar threat. The easiest method would be the implementation of a Sept. 12-like operation,” noted the plan.

Plot to attack the İstanbul Aviation Museum

The coup plan also aimed to ignite tension between members of the military and “fundamentalist groups” in society in the name of the protection of the country’s secular values.

According to the plan, the members of the 34th Fleet Command would hold a rally in Kadıköy Square. A huge number of people would attend the rally. A second rally would be held in the conservative Çarşamba area of the Fatih district. The rally would be followed by an attack on the İstanbul Aviation Museum in Yeşilköy by men and women in tunics and black chadors. The attackers would throw Molotov cocktails at the museum and would carry green flags representing Islam.

The planned attack was to show conservative Muslims as enemies of the secular republic and worsen relations between the TSK and the AK Party government.

The museum attack would be followed by a series of similar attacks at military facilities, including the 3rd and 8th Main Jet Base Commands. The force behind the attacks would again be fundamentalist groups that want to bring Shariah to Turkey. After the attacks, security forces would start patrolling streets and roads as if it was a period of military rule. The security forces would detain suspected individuals and would use weapons if necessary.

“Activities will continue without interruption until the government declares martial law. If Parliament fails to garner the required support of deputies for the declaration of martial law, the Air Forces Command will stage air shows in Ankara’s city center upon an invitation by the Ankara Chamber of Commerce [ATO]. The low-altitude flights above the Parliament building will make deputies feel the presence of the TSK,” stated the coup plan.

‘AK Party, major threat to secular order’

The coup plan also described the “enemies” and “friends” of the armed forces in the country. According to the document, the AK Party stands as the major threat to Turkey’s secular order. “Encouraged by the practices of the ruling party, reactionary groups interpret the principle of secularism, which stands as the basis of our state structure, in accordance with their own interests and objectives. Within this scope, it is widely seen that they insist on using the headscarf -- a symbol of the movement of reactionaryism -- in many state institutions. Such an insistence is aimed at establishing a state order based on religion, which is against the principles of a secular republic,” suggested the document.

The plan accuses the AK Party of serving the interests of the United States and the European Union instead of the interests of the Turkish Republic and allowing reactionaryism to gain ground in the country. “The followers of the AK Party and religious communities are rapidly setting up their own cadres in state posts. Using the opportunity of being the ruling party, the AK Party is working to make the media, civil society organizations and the bureaucracy dependent on the government. The party also aims to restore an [religious] education system through tekke and zaviyes [dervish lodges] to train fundamentalist individuals,” reads the document.

The plan also criticized the EU and Middle Eastern countries for lending support to the reactionary and separatist activities of the AK Party.

The plan stated that the AK Party received around 30 percent of the vote in the Nov. 3, 2002 parliamentary elections, but a significant percentage of the vote for the party came from voters who were protesting the lack of a strong political will in the country. The plan expressed the military’s displeasure at the AK Party being represented in Parliament.

“It has become an urgent need to remove them [the followers of the AK Party] not only from the TSK but also from all public institutions. Our plans and activities to protect the republic are ongoing,” notes the plan.

The plan also called for more coordinated activities with the Support for Modern Life Association (ÇYDD), the Atatürkist Thought Association (ADD) and the Turkey Youth Union (TGB).

“We will continue coordinating our activities and attitudes with the opposition parties to thwart any propaganda or legal amendment by the AK Party [against the secular order of the country],” adds the coup plan.

Devlet Bahçeli makes three constitutional change proposals

Wednesday, 20 January 2010 13:07

Today's Zaman

Not happy with a constitutional reform package that will be brought to Parliament by the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government, Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli offered three proposals to the government regarding the change in the Constitution. Speaking at the parliamentary group meeting of his party yesterday, Bahçeli allocated most of his speech to the discussion of constitutional changes. He proposed that work for change in the Constitution should be launched after early or general elections, that a committee of representatives from the political parties in Parliament with the name “Consensus Committee for Constitutional Change” and that a democratic convention be made regarding the articles on which the committee will reach a consensus.

Bahçeli said that if his party's proposals are not accepted by the government, the government might still push for change in the Constitution because there are no political obstacles before it to do so. However, he warned that the government resorting to such means will make it a “focal point of activities against the indivisible unity of the nation,” as well as “being a focal point of anti-secular activities.”

The AK Party faced a closure case in 2008 over charges of “being a focal point of anti-secular activities.” The party escaped closure but was fined.

Bahçeli also warned that pushing for change in the Constitution by relying on its numerical majority in Parliament would result in a heavy cost for the government.

Explaining the red lines of his party regarding change in the Constitution, he said: “Opening the founding principles of the republic to debate, triggering a polarization among different ethnicities under the cover of democracy, legalizing separatism or remaining silent in the wake of these threats is the same as a threat against the existence of the state and the nation. No matter what everyone else says, they would mean betrayal for us. The nationalist movement will never allow those who harbor such goals to achieve their goals.”

Gov't plans to introduce new system for fair representation

Wednesday, 20 January 2010 18:15

Today's Zaman

The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) has plans to include among proposals in a constitutional reform package to be introduced later this year a new mechanism to allow parties that fail to pass the 10 percent election threshold to be represented in

The AK Party will propose a 20-article constitutional change package to Parliament before general elections to be held in 2011. Speaking to Today's Zaman, AK Party parliamentary group deputy chairman Bekir Bozdağ said they are almost done with the package and that they plan to send the changes to Parliament in June.

In an interview with journalists on his flight from Moscow to Ankara, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also said last week that constitutional reform in Turkey would soon become inevitable. He said the initial changes to the Constitution the AK Party was planning were minor. "They [the opposition parties] filibuster even the smallest change. We would not bring a package that would hold Parliament hostage," Erdoğan said. The prime minister also said Turkey should get used to holding referenda since they plan to refer constitutional amendments to the public. Burhan Kuzu, chairman of Parliament's Constitutional Commission, also confirmed to Today's Zaman that the package would be brought to Parliament soon. One of the most important changes to be suggested is the "Turkey deputy" system, introduced in response to criticism against Turkey's current 10 percent election threshold. The government suggests that 100 deputies in the 550-seat Turkish Parliament be elected as "Turkey deputies" to provide fair representation for parties. According to the AK Party's proposal, these 100 deputies would be elected according to the percentage of the overall vote political parties receive. For example, a party that received 50 percent of the nationwide vote will have 50 Turkey deputies, while a party that received 1 percent vote will receive one Turkey deputy. This way, securing only 1 percent of the vote will guarantee a party representation in Parliament.

If the proposal is passed, political parties will submit a list of 450 prospective deputies to the Supreme Election Board (YSK) before the general elections and a list of 100 for the Turkey deputy positions. The 100 seats allocated for Turkey deputies will be distributed among the parties based on the percentage of the vote they receive.

If this system had been implemented in the July 22, 2007 elections, the AK Party would have received 47 of these seats, while the Republican People's Party (CHP) would have gotten 20 and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) 15. AK Party officials say this system will bring fairer representation to Parliament than a lowering of the election threshold would.

The AK Party wants the new method of election to go into effect in the next general elections, scheduled for July 22, 2011, so the law should be passed at least one year before the elections in order to affect the 2011 elections. The government will reportedly try to convince opposition parties to back the proposal.

Package includes more amendments

The package will also include constitutional amendments that would make party closures more difficult. The principles set forth by the Venice Commission of the European Council will be taken as the basis for party closures. As in many European countries, only those political parties that espouse violence or terrorism will be closed down. Prosecutors will no longer have the right to demand one-year bans from politics for members of parties that have been shut down. With the changes, parliamentary elections will be held every four years instead of the current five, and local elections will be held in October instead of March, as has been the practice.

The structure of the Constitutional Court will also be changed, by increasing the number of court members from 11 to 18, and civil servants will be granted the right to go on strike.

The structure of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) is also to be altered. The justice minister and the minister's undersecretary will not be members of the HSYK.

The package in addition seeks to establish a parliamentary commission on "political ethics" that will work in secrecy and monitor whether any politician has broken the law through involvement

in public procurement tenders or contracts. The package will introduce restrictions on politicians' ability to own companies.

An ombudsman law, of crucial importance in the EU harmonization process, has also been included in the package. The law, which was previously vetoed by former President Ahmet Necdet Sezer on the grounds that the "ombudsman" institution did not have a definition in the Constitution, is necessary since Turkey currently has no separate institution to inspect public services.

Turkish deputy PM says Turkey needs a new constitution

Sunday, 17 January 2010 17:03

Today's Zaman

Turkish deputy prime minister said on Saturday Turkey needed a new constitution.

Replying to questions of reporters, State Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç said there was need for a new constitution which included EU norms, and which was more democrat and more civil.

Turkey's reputable attitude in foreign policy and its efforts for global peace have been watched by the world with a great appreciation, he said.

Responding to a question, Arınç said they considered that Turkey did not need an early election. "The government has been fulfilling its task successfully. The opposition parties don't have sufficient power and capacity for an early election. They may aim at spoiling political and economic stability in the country," Arınç said.

If there is an early election in the country, no one could prevent the Justice and Development (AK) Party from coming into political power, he said.

Civilian tutelage arguments found groundless

Sunday, 17 January 2010 16:58

Today's Zaman

While Turkey has been trying to normalize civilian-military relations as a country with a history of frequent military interventions, a discussion over whether Turkey is facing civilian -- rather than military -- tutelage under the single-party government

Yet, this new way of criticizing the actions of elected lawmakers in their attempt to change the status quo has been found unconvincing and groundless by analysts, who evaluate the rise of so-called civilian tutelage concerns as a show of resistance to the country's changing face.

"The actual problem is that the privileged class does not want to acknowledge the outcomes of democracy. Yet, since representatives of this class cannot express this frankly, they want to block the rule of those elected on absurd grounds such as 'civilian tutelage' or 'civilian coup.' In fact, they are also aware that what they say is nonsense," said Berat Özipek, an academic and a member of the Association for Liberal Thinking.

The argument was brought forward by Nuray Mert, a columnist and academic, during an interview with the Vatan daily. Mert's argument was quickly adopted by anti-government circles who expressed fears about Turkey becoming an authoritarian country. Several columnists who have been writing that they believe that a civilian dictatorship is approaching are of the opinion that at the end of this process Turkey will be a country like Russia and that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will turn into a leader similar to Russia's Vladimir Putin, who is known to have

an authoritarian character. In fact, those following Turkey's political agenda carefully can easily remember that the "civilian coup," "civilian fascism" or "civilian authoritarianism" arguments were discussed in August of last year but failed to gain much popularity then. Analysts who then voiced their concerns about the possibility of the rhetoric of a "civilian coup" being an instrument in a new psychological operation against the government now say that those who deliberately brought this rhetoric to the agenda to make a fuss out of nothing have been successful this time. Sabah daily columnist Emre Aköz, who was among those who drew attention to the rising popularity of the "civilian coup" discourse in his column in August, says this groundless and absurd discourse should not even be discussed.

"When you discuss this rhetoric, which is invented in accordance with the current agenda and which is purely imaginative, it starts to become real. It should not even be discussed," stated Aköz in a phone interview with Sunday's Zaman.

Recent years full of contrived rhetoric

This debate is, in fact, reminiscent of another heated debate that happened before the July 22, 2007 elections, after which the AK Party emerged stronger, receiving 46.6 percent of the vote nationwide. Back then, opponents of the government claimed that Turkey was heading toward an Islamic regime ruled by Shariah. Since this argument did not scare the public or diminish support for the AK Party, "civilian authoritarianism" seems to have been selected as a fresh new argument to oppose the ruling party. "What happened to arguments saying Shariah rule is coming? Even a strong believer of this argument [journalist İlhan Selçuk] has recently said there is no longer such a threat. 'Civilian coup' arguments are also like that; they have no basis. This is in fact a trap, and society should not fall in this trap," Aköz says.

In addition to debates over the fear of Shariah or "Turkey becoming Iran," Turkey's past years have been full of discussions based on a certain contrived rhetoric or arguments, which erupt at times of heated debate in the country, come to the forefront of the agenda and then are forgotten. The best example of such a term is "neighborhood pressure," a term coined by internationally renowned sociologist Şerif Mardin to describe the pressure exerted by a peer group that encourages a person to change his or her attitude, behavior and/or morals. It was launched during the process of drafting a new constitution and the possibility of a new law abolishing the headscarf ban at Turkish universities, nearly three years ago. Such a possibility sparked an outcry among supporters of the headscarf ban, who claimed that allowing headscarves at universities would be the beginning of a slow but inexorable move toward forcing all women to cover their heads in public -- due to neighborhood pressure. While it was one of the most frequently heard expressions during that time, it has seemingly disappeared. Another "magical" statement for some was that "Turkey is becoming Malaysia," when, in 2007, some said the government's efforts to rewrite the Constitution would undermine secularism and turn Turkey into an Islamic country like Malaysia. "The fear of becoming Malaysia" was also forgotten quickly after being a topic of discussion for some time. Aköz says these topics of discussion were used as instruments of a psychological operation, just like civilian fascism. Some recent plots believed to have been prepared by members of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) to destroy the AK Party and documents seized as part of an ongoing investigation into Ergenekon, a clandestine gang accused of plotting to overthrow the government, have also referred to such topics, which were used to back psychological wars against the government and the public.

Democratization or civilian authoritarianism?

According to many, it is questionable that the "civilian dictatorship" arguments come during a time when efforts to balance civilian military relations are gaining support, anti-democratic

formations within the military and the bureaucracy are being unearthed and the country is trying to address the problems faced by some groups in the country through democratic improvements. “Democracy started to improve very rapidly for the first time in Turkish history in the last seven years. Some circles are now trying to kick up a row by making up these concepts. If you do not believe in public will and oppose democracy, you call the political will which came to power through elections tutelage,” Hasan Celal Güzel, a former state minister and Radikal daily columnist, told Sunday’s Zaman.

According to İhsan Dağı, a professor in Middle East Technical University’s (ODTÜ) international relations department, what people imply by civilian tutelage and civilian fascism is in fact democracy. “The fear they have is not the fear of fascism but the fear of democracy. A group of elitist bureaucratic minorities see the democratization process as a threat. Civilian tutelage debates are a sign of improving democracy in Turkey,” Dağı says.

Although the ruling AK Party government has taken up many democratic initiatives to settle Turkey’s long-standing issues, some of which laid the groundwork for “civilian tutelage” arguments, what the party was not able to do in terms of reforms is much more than what it has been able to do. Stating that Turkey has been trying to move from oligarchy toward democracy since the 1950s, Berat Özipek says the sine quo non of democracy, namely respecting the will of the “demos” (people), has yet to be established. “For example, it is just funny to say that a prime minister [Erdoğan], whose many democratization steps have been prevented by bureaucratic forces although his party has enough of a majority in Parliament, whose possible presidential candidacy became an issue of a military memorandum and who even failed to enable his headscarved wife to be an equal citizen is trying to establish a ‘civilian tutelage’,” Özipek says. Although Dağı stresses that this new rhetoric has not been made up by the opposition to take the country to early elections but was the work of the newspapers of the Doğan Media Group, which has long been at odds with the government over a tax fine against the group, Güzel says the bureaucratic elitist group, including the Republican People’s Party (CHP), has been using this rhetoric to create an artificial agenda against the government.

Danger in ‘civilian dictatorship’ discourse: laying groundwork for a cou

The rising popularity of the civilian authoritarianism label on the government also recalls Turkey’s first major coup d’état in May 27, 1960, remembered as a breaking point in Turkey’s political history and a long-standing determining factor in Turkish politics.

On May 27, 1960 the military overthrew the government of then-Prime Minister Adnan Menderes. Güzel recalls that Menderes was also accused of bringing the country under civilian dictatorship, which was the excuse of the coup leaders.

He recalls that on April 18, 1960, then-CHP leader İsmet İnönü openly threatened Menderes with a coup d’état, accusing his party of censoring the press, being engaged in acts that would harm the republic and the principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey, and violating the Constitution. “If you keep going on this path, even I will not be able to save you. When the conditions are right for it, a military coup is a lawful right of the people,” Güzel quotes from İnönü, who was addressing Menderes. Agreeing with Güzel, Özipek also stresses that some feel the need to make up the concept of “civilian tutelage” to prevent Turkey from getting past its military tutelage and thus legitimizing possible military interventions in civilian governments in the future.

Public view: Turkish Military still harbors pro-coup faction

Monday, 18 January 2010 08:59

A considerable part of the Turkish nation believes that a pro-coup formation exists within the military, but a larger part does not think military members would dare to stage a coup d'état, according to the latest results of a monthly opinion poll.

Özer Sencar, Dr. Sıtkı Yıldız and Dr. Ünal Bilir of the Ankara-based MetroPOLL Strategic and Social Research Center conducted a survey on perceptions of the military, democracy and the judiciary. More than 55 percent of respondents said they believe there is a group within the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) that seeks to stage a coup. Thirty-six percent said there is no such group, while 8.9 percent declined to comment.

The figures, however, point to a decrease in the belief in a democratic stance on the part of the Turkish military when compared with those in a past survey. According to a poll in July 2009, slightly more than 48 percent of respondents said they believed there is a pro-coup wing within the TSK.

The Turkish military has recently become the center of mounting criticism due to its protective stance toward many of its members who are accused of working to overthrow the democratically elected government. Through frequent press statements, the TSK has stood by its staff and accuses the media of working to undermine the military.

Respondents were also asked about the possibility of the TSK staging a coup d'état. Only 26.9 percent said such a possibility exists. An overwhelming 62.2 percent said the armed forces could not stage a coup. More than 10 percent said they had no idea.

A potential military coup has remained a topic of heated debate in Turkey, particularly after the launch of the trial into Ergenekon, a clandestine criminal organization charged with working to topple the Justice and Development Party (AK Party), and the exposure of a number of suspected military plots to that end. The plots mention military plans to assassinate prominent figures in society and put the blame on the ruling party, which would eventually lead to a coup.

Another important question directed at participants concerned internal unrest within the military against its pro-coup wing, which revealed that respondents were divided into two camps on the question. More than 46 percent said the military carries out a satisfactory fight against that wing, while slightly more than 47 percent thought the contrary.

The TSK has been criticized for failing to take action against its staff members who are suspected of being involved in illegal acts that could be considered preparations for a coup.

Asked whether they believe in the existence of the deep state in Turkey, a crushing 66.2 percent said yes. Only 23 percent said no, while 10.8 said they had no idea.

The term "deep state" refers to illegal formations and gangs. Among those formations are Ergenekon, Gladio and JITEM, a clandestine illegal unit in the gendarmerie thought to be responsible for hundreds of murders and various other atrocities that took place in the Kurdish Southeast in the '90s under the guise of anti-terror efforts.

Dozens of suspected Ergenekon members are currently in jail pending trial on the grounds that they formed an illegal organization working to overthrow the government. Among them are active and retired members of the military, businessmen and journalists. The results of the survey point to a 9 percent increase in the number of those who believe in the existence of a deep state when compared with responses from a February 2007 poll.

Half of respondents think 'cosmic search' is legal

The MetroPOLL survey also evaluates the legitimacy in the eyes of the public of an ongoing search at the headquarters of the Special Forces Command by a civilian judge and prosecutor.

The search began in late December after the apprehension of two officers from the Tactical Mobilization Group -- a unit under the General Staff's Special Forces Command -- as they stood watch near Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç's house in Ankara's Çukurambar neighborhood. The search at the Special Forces Command, where confidential military documents are kept in archives referred to as the "cosmic room," has been applauded by most observers as they believe it will shed light on a number of secretive incidents in the country's past. The search aims to reveal whether there is a military plot to assassinate high-level politicians.

Some jurists and columnists, however, argued that the search was not legal as a civilian judge or prosecutor was not entitled to examine documents that could include state secrets.

More than 50 percent of respondents disagreed and said the search was legal and was in line with the necessities of the legal order in Turkey. Almost 40 percent said the search was not legal, while 10.1 percent said they had no idea.

Respondents were also asked about the statements of the General Staff concerning allegations against the military. Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ holds frequent press conferences to express the military's views on developments in the country and responds to questions from members of the press. While 42.4 percent said they find the General Staff's statements sincere and satisfactory, 45 percent said the General Staff was neither sincere nor satisfactory in its statements.

Başbuğ recently appeared before the press to argue that the TSK is not engaged in any illegal act that could be termed "coup preparations." However, instead of responding to the public's questions about an alleged assassination attempt against the deputy prime minister, the military chief accused the media of working to damage the image of the armed forces.

Another question in the survey aimed at evaluating the credibility of the military in the eyes of the public. Asked how their perception of the chief of General Staff and the military was impacted by recent developments in the country, almost 57 percent said their trust in the General Staff and the military had not changed at all. Nearly 30 percent said their trust in the two was influenced negatively, while 10 percent said the recent developments had a positive impact on their faith in the General Staff and the military.

Respondents were, 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. Sixty-six percent of respondents expressed the 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 between Jan. 3-8 by telephone on a random national sampling of 1,614 adults residing in cities, towns and villages. The margin of error for the poll was 2.5 percentage points, with a confidence level of 95.

Newly exposed coup planned to turn the clock back to 1923

Friday, 22 January 2010 11:48

Today's Zaman

The Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) hoped to take Turkey back to 1923, the time when the republic was proclaimed, after the staging of a coup d'état against the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government, the Taraf daily reported on Thursday.

According to the coup plan -- titled the Balyoz (Sledgehammer) Security Operation Plan -- all the key posts in the country, public and private, would be occupied by active and retired

members of the military to “get rid of every single threat to the secular order of the state.” “The plan will be based on an objective to clean up all state and public posts [of individuals suspected of posing a threat to the secular order of Turkey] and return Turkey to its dynamism of 1923. All the assets and financial resources of individuals and groups suspected of involvement in acts of reactionaryism will be confiscated, and necessary steps will be taken to freeze their financial resources abroad,” stated the document.

The subversive document, the Sledgehammer Security Operation Plan, was drafted in 2003, shortly after the AK Party came to power. The masterminds of the plan were retired Gen. Çetin Doğan, the then-commander of the 1st Army, retired Former Air Forces Commander Gen. İbrahim Fırtına and retired Gen. Ergin Saygun.

Taraf claimed on Wednesday that the coup plan -- a nearly 5,000-page document -- was agreed at a military meeting attended by 162 active TSK members, including 29 generals. According to the plan, the military was to systematically foment chaos in society through violent acts that would lead to a military takeover.

A return to 1923 would mean almost paralyzing daily life in Turkey, according the plan. The document suggested that the armed forces would take full control of state institutions, private hospitals, drugs warehouses, customs houses and shopping centers after the military takeover. The headquarters of some newspapers would also be raided by the security forces.

“No rights or freedoms are absolute or limitless. When the case is the survival of the secular state, the right to inform the public and freedom of the press is not without limit, either. All written and visual press organs will be taken under control, and the publications of press organs that side with the AK Party will immediately be halted,” read the document.

The armed forces also planned to take into custody and then arrest at least 200,000 individuals accused of reactionary activities in İstanbul after the coup. The total number of detainees around Turkey was estimated to reach 16 million, the plan stated. According to the document, individuals who stood against the coup would be taken into custody and brought to large sports facilities for interrogation. Among those facilities were the Burhan Felek sports complex and Fenerbahçe Stadium. The suspects would be questioned by security forces there and then would be sent to prisons. If the prisons were unable to accommodate all the arrestees, then military barracks would temporarily be turned into jails.

The coup plan stated its objective very clearly: “The AK Party government will immediately be thrown out of government and the existing structure of reactionaryism will be destroyed. A previously determined group will be swept to power, and the authority of secular state will be restored.” The plan also said all “official and unofficial patriots” would be used to overthrow the AK Party government. “Those who resist the detentions and arrests and those who resort to plunder and damage the national wealth will face the harshest practices of the armed forces,” noted the plan.

Among the “official patriots,” the document cited a long list of jurists, bureaucrats and civil servants who would cooperate with the TSK in the event of a military coup. Among the “unofficial patriots” were journalists and members of civil society organizations.

The document also revealed that all key state posts would be occupied by members of the military. “Members of the military will be responsible for the implementation of civil services until the state structure is restored. For this reason, all key state posts will be occupied by military staff. Those staff will be active members of the military. If they are not adequate in number to fill the state posts, then retired members of the military will be called to duty,” stated the coup plan.

The names of former Naval Forces Commander Adm. Özden Örnek -- the author of controversial diaries which revealed that four force commanders devised plans in 2004 to stage two military coups -- retired Brig. Gen. Süha Tanyeri and retired Col. Fikri Karadağ are also frequently mentioned in the plan.

Munitions buried underground part of coup plan

The mystery of the large caches of munitions that have been unearthed during excavations as part of the probe into Ergenekon, a criminal organization accused of working to topple the AK Party, is most probably related to the Sledgehammer coup plan.

The plan read that munitions buried underground would be distributed to members of the military in accordance with the plan to stage the coup. Many types of munitions have been unearthed since the start of the Ergenekon probe in June 2007, when hand grenades were discovered at a house in İstanbul's Ümraniye district.

Ergenekon is accused of intending to create chaos in the country by using the munitions, which would result in the overthrow of the government.

Ergenekon's munitions are not restricted to those unearthed during excavations. Unidentified individuals have been abandoning weapons and munitions in isolated locations throughout the country since the discovery of munitions buried underground in 2007 after raids on Ergenekon suspects' homes revealed maps and other evidence pointing to weapons caches.

The coup plan also suggested that public pressure on the AK Party would be increased through economic problems and a financial crisis.

"Economic operations to be carried out by friends of the TSK will drive the country into a financial bottleneck in the national and international arena. Massive protests and rallies will be organized against the AK Party government. Public opinion will be shaped in such a way that it will expect the armed forces to do the necessary [a coup] after news of acts of reactionaryism, student protests, soldiers killed in clashes, economic crisis and unsolved murders," stated the document.

Simultaneous acts of violence by al-Qaeda, PKK

According to the subversive plan, bloody and shocking acts by al-Qaeda and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) would trigger massive protests by civil society groups and universities that would accuse the AK Party of failing to provide security for the people of Turkey.

The plan showed that the TSK was to use the terrorist acts not only as a "means" but also as a "guarantee" of achieving its objectives.

The massive protests would lead to the declaration of martial law in the country, which would topple the AK Party government. The plan has raised the question of whether the TSK had a hand in the simultaneous bombings in İstanbul in 2003 that killed more than 50 people and injured as many as 700. The bombings targeted the HSBC Bank headquarters and a nearby synagogue. Al-Qaeda terrorists claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Gov't would be replaced by 'National Agreement Government'

The Sledgehammer coup plan also mentioned the TSK's plans to establish an administration that would replace the AK Party government.

The existing government would be replaced by a "National Agreement Government," which would include a large number of active and retired members of the military. Taraf announced that it would make the names of those members of the military public in today's edition of the newspaper.

"The vacant positions [in the Cabinet] will be occupied by our fellow soldiers. Our retired colleagues will take over state posts and bureaucratic positions after the overthrow of the AK

Party government. ... All civil servants who are known to support movements of reactionaryism and separatist activities and who are known to be implicated in corrupt activities will be replaced, with no exceptions, by retired or active military staff who are trustworthy and loyal to contemporary values," noted the document.

The document also suggested that the police force was to be brought under the control of the military, that the National Intelligence Organization (MİT) would be restructured and that the new organization would be headed by an army general on active duty.

The coup plan in addition aimed to replace the recitation of the call to prayer (adhan) in Arabic with the Turkish version: "All gains of the republic, which have been eroded till now, will be restored once again. The adhan will be recited in Turkish and the damage to Turkish culture caused by Arabs and Kurds will be repaired."

The call to prayer was first recited in Turkish in 1932 upon a circular by the Directorate of Religious Affairs and continued through 1950. The adhan returned to its original version after the Democrat Party's (DP) victory in the 1950 general elections.

Turkish military rejects coup claims

Friday, January 22, 2010

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

The military says no unit of the Turkish Armed Forces has ever been involved in any illegal activity and never will be. The legal advisor to the General Staff says if individual mistakes were made, competent legal authorities would do what is necessary to address the matter

The military rejected all coup allegations Friday, saying that the Turkish Armed Forces, or TSK, has never been engaged in any illegal activity.

"No unit of the TSK has ever been involved in any illegal activity and never will be," said Brig. Gen. Hıfzı Çubuklu, the legal advisor of the General Staff.

Çubuklu said if individual mistakes were made, competent legal authorities would do what was necessary to address the matter. He emphasized that the TSK would, as before, continue its activities in the future in line with the relevant laws.

The latest developments have sparked the first formal press briefing from the military in five weeks. Earlier this month, the General Staff announced that it would discontinue the regular press meetings it had been holding since 2008. In December, the General Staff led tours for press members, but had not given formal briefings.

A 26-day search at the General Staff's Special Forces Command headquarters, conducted by Judge Kadir Kayan of the Ankara High Criminal Court, ended Wednesday. Judge Kayan had carried out his search of top-secret military documents in the forces' two "cosmic rooms," where documents pertaining to state or military secrets are archived, as part of an investigation into an alleged assassination plot against Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç.

"According to information written in the search minutes, it is possible for us to say that the Ankara Special Forces Command has no other activity outside its duty and task," Çubuklu said.

"However, the principle of safety pertaining to some top-secret state plans has been violated. The plans in question, which were drafted and developed after many years of effort in line with the existing rules, have lost their validity. Therefore, these plans will be canceled."

In regard to the search of the cosmic rooms, Çubuklu said the TSK had no reason to hesitate and nothing to hide and explained that the military did not object to the search by a civilian judge

because it did not want to give the upper hand to commentators in media outlets who say “things are covert and documents and information are being kept secret.”

He said the search of the cosmic rooms was carried out at the judge’s insistence and following the delivery of a new court verdict.

The military official also gave a chronological account of the process regarding the claims of an assassination plot against Arınç. As part of the investigation into these allegations, eight soldiers were detained, but later released. Many “exaggerated, distorted news and commentaries appeared in the media” during that period, Çubuklu said, adding that the objective was to create and strengthen a negative perception of the TSK and spread it throughout society.

“How the event has evolved appeared in the visual media. The most important element here is the coverage of the event in some visual media,” Çubuklu said, referring to the media coverage of reports about tracking the judge who searched the cosmic rooms. “Again, a news agency turned up at the site Dec. 19 before everyone, recorded the images and distributed them to the media.”

The official said the developments throughout the entire process clearly demonstrated the TSK’s respect for the law, and that the latest events showed that the armed forces has never been involved in any illegal activity.

Another claim about the alleged plot was published in daily Taraf, which wrote that the military had plotted to provoke Greek fighter jets into shooting down a Turkish military jet. According to the daily, which claimed to have obtained 5,000 pages of documents and tapes, the alleged “Sledgehammer” plan was designed to portray the ruling party as unable to protect the public and to justify a takeover in 2003.

In a statement Thursday, the military rejected these claims, saying the documents quoted by the paper were part of a military training seminar and were never meant to be carried out, nor part of a conspiracy.

General Staff Secretary-General Ferit Güler said Friday that the military statement regarding the allegations was clear enough. He said the name of the exercise, which he did not reveal, was not the one quoted in the media. Repeating Thursday’s statement, Güler condemned the claims, saying, “I am wondering what the matter is here that cannot be understood.”

Legal Adviser Says Civil Court Cases on Soldiers Should Be Heard In Military Courts

Friday, 22 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Civil court cases on soldiers should be delivered to military courts, a top legal adviser to the military in Turkey has said after the country's highest court had overturned a law that would have allowed for the members of the army to be tried in civilian courts.

"Cases [involving military personnel] currently under [civil] prosecutors' probe or [civil] court trial need to be sent to military courts after due assessment," Gen. Hifzi Cubuklu told a press meeting on Friday.

Turkey's Constitutional Court annulled unanimously on Thursday the law which would have allowed civilian courts the power to prosecute military personnel accused of crimes against national security, constitutional violations and attempts to topple the government.

The law was passed by the Turkish parliament last July and it was challenged by Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party, which has appealed to the Constitutional Court asking for annulment.

The top court's decision might affect several ongoing investigations into alleged plots against the government.

Turkish military to try its own, rules top court

Friday, January 22, 2010

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

Turkey's top court has annulled legislation allowing military personnel to be tried by civil courts, a decision likely to deal a blow to investigations of alleged coup plots against the government. The Constitutional Court on Thursday unanimously canceled a government-initiated law that enabled civilian courts to try military personnel, saying it infringed Article 145 of the Constitution.

That article sets out the rules covering the functioning of the military judiciary, stipulating that military courts are in charge of hearing cases about crimes committed by military personnel within the military domain, or crimes committed by military personnel in the course of duty. The ruling came one day after civilian prosecutors completed an almost one-month-long search of top-secret military documents at two "cosmic rooms" belonging to the General Staff's Special Forces Command as part of an investigation into an alleged assassination plot against Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç. Such rooms are where documents pertaining to state or military secrets are archived.

Legislation restricting the powers of the military courts, a long-standing EU demand, was passed in a late-night session in Parliament during the last week of June 2009 as part of an amendment to the Code of Criminal Procedures, or CMUK, by last-minute proposals from ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, deputies.

The legislation granted civilian courts the right to try military personnel accused of constitutional crimes such as coup attempts, threats to national security and forming illegal or terror organizations – even if no civilian is involved and the crime was entirely committed in the military zone.

The law also paved the way for civilian courts to judge commanders whose names are mentioned in the "coup diaries," purportedly penned by former Navy Commander Özden Örnek, as well as suspects in other alleged coup plots.

Decision will affect ongoing cases

The main opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP, applied to the top court to annul the law in July 2009, arguing that it contradicts the Constitution.

The top court's decision is likely to affect the ongoing investigations of alleged coup plots against the AKP, including three alleged attempts – known as Sarıkız (Golden Maiden), Yakamoz (Seasparkle) and Ayışığı (Moonlight) – between 2003 and 2005, and the Ergenekon case. The latter is a controversial investigation into an alleged gang accused of aiming to topple the government by creating turmoil in society.

The decision will also affect the ongoing probe regarding another alleged anti-government plan that purportedly aimed to take down the AKP, along with a religious movement led by Fethullah Gülen. The plan, which allegedly bore the signature of Col. Dursun Çiçek, was recovered during a search conducted at the office of a suspect detained in the Ergenekon probe.

The ongoing investigation into an alleged assassination plot against Deputy Prime Minister Arınç will likewise be influenced by the court decision. Civilian Judge Kadir Kayan of the Ankara

High Criminal Court on Wednesday completed an extended search of the General Staff's "cosmic rooms" as part of this probe.

This week, daily Taraf published alleged secret army plans to foment civil unrest by bombing mosques and staging raids on a military museum, and to detain 200,000 people in football stadiums after seizing power. According to the daily, which claimed to have obtained 5,000 pages of related documents and tapes, the alleged "Sledgehammer" plan was designed to portray the ruling party as unable to protect the public and to justify an army takeover in 2003. In response to the allegations, the army said the reports were an exaggeration of contingency plans for a national emergency.

With the court decision, the files are expected to be sent to the military prosecutors. Three of the country's most senior retired generals are also currently on trial, accused of plotting a coup in 2003.

Military, government conflict

The decision is also likely to create conflict between the government and the Turkish Armed Forces, or TSK. The government Friday expressed its dissatisfaction with the decision, with AKP deputy leader Huseyin Çelik telling private channel NTV in an interview Friday that he is "not happy" with the Constitutional Court's decision. "I don't think the Turkish public liked it either," Çelik said.

According to Çelik, army officers should be tried in civil courts for offenses such as plotting coups. He described the verdict as a setback "just when Turkey is trying to become more democratic" and declined the question on whether the government will seek to change Article 145 of the Constitution. The government is expected to announce proposed constitutional amendments next month.

The army declined comment Friday, saying it respects the court's decision. It said, however, that ongoing cases that concern military personnel and are currently being handled by the civilian courts should be returned to the military courts in line with the decision.

'Decision to create legal chaos'

Legal experts meanwhile warned that the decision would create chaos.

"The decision will create chaos between the civilian and military courts in terms of the ongoing cases," constitutional law expert Ekrem Ali Akartürk of Yeditepe University told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review. "All cases will require delicate examination to identify which case falls into the responsibility of the military and civilian courts. The problem will also emerge at the stage of transfer of the cases to the related court as the courts are likely to make copies of the documents already in their hands."

Saying that "things were wrong from the beginning," Akartürk said: "The legislative power made the first mistake by introducing such a law without sufficient examination in legal sense and the Constitutional Court made the second mistake by handling this case so late. It should have at least ordered a stay of execution thus far for the law, even if it had needed further time to make its decision on annulment of the law."

Turkey sets new date for Presidential Cycling Tour

Wednesday, 20 January 2010 17:25

TIME TURK

The 46th Presidential Cycling Tour in Turkey is set to run between April 11 and 18, 2010, Turkish Cycling Federation said Wednesday.

----- The 46th Presidential Cycling Tour in Turkey is set to run between April 11 and 18, 2010, Turkish Cycling Federation said Wednesday.

The race schedule was earlier set for April 21-28.

The federation said details of the race remained unchanged as the tour began in Istanbul in a prologue stage before riders arrived in Izmir by plane. The final stage will take place in Antalya.

The tour will complete 8 stages and 1,247 kilometers and the riders will arrive in Fethiye on 15 April 2010 for stage 5 of the race after a 207km ride starting from Pamukkale near Denizli.

The stage will take the tough mountain road from Denizli via Cameli climbing to over 1,600 metres and then descending via Uzumlu and then into Fethiye for the stage finish.

Riders will then leave Fethiye and head south for the finish in the town of Finike.

The tour will be broadcast live on Turkey's state-run television network, TRT.

Daryl Impey of South Africa won last year's competition ahead of Davide Malacarne of Italy and David Garcia Dapena of Spain.

New Sarıgül movement worries left-wing parties

Thursday, 21 January 2010 15:27

Today's Zaman

The Turkey Movement for Change, led by Şişli Mayor Mustafa Sarıgül, which has not yet formally organized as a political party, has already caused serious concern and unease among left-wing political parties, particularly the Republican People's Party (CHP)

The timing of the formal establishment Sarıgül's movement as a political party will depend on when the CHP holds its congress, expected to take place between April and May. The CHP is now planning to postpone the party congress so as to stop potential transfers to the new party. It also hopes for snap elections so the new party will not have time to prepare properly for the elections.

In 2005, Şişli Mayor Sarıgül lost a bid for CHP leadership to long-time party leader Deniz Baykal by just 61 votes. Sarıgül was subsequently expelled from the CHP, reportedly over a disciplinary matter. His new movement, which has already gained a great deal of popularity, is a threat that other leftist parties cannot ignore. Sarıgül organized a rally on Jan. 17 in İzmir, a traditional stronghold of the CHP, and announced that former CHP leader Hikmet Çetin had also joined the movement. Şükrü Sina Gürel, a former Democratic Left Party (DSP) foreign minister, has also joined Sarıgül's new movement.

Sarıgül has attracted important figures not only from the left but also from the right into his party. Some liken Sarıgül to a new Cem Uzan, whose Young Party (GP) won 7 percent of the vote in the 2002 general elections, in which the True Path Party (DYP), the Motherland Party (then ANAP, later ANAVATAN), the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and the DSP were left out of Parliament. Uzan's party is widely accepted as having played a crucial role in making the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) a single-party government in that year's elections. However, Sarıgül and his team do not like the parallel drawn between them and Uzan's party. Sarıgül's first target is to bring his new political party to the opposition, taking over a position the CHP has been enjoying for years.

Political analysts seem to believe that Sarıgül can do it and that the likelihood of his success will increase if the CHP continues to commit political mistakes. The CHP's popularity among voters has eroded since the party began defending suspects in the trial of Ergenekon, a clandestine organization charged with plotting to overthrow the government, and staunchly opposing judicial

and constitutional reform. The party has also turned its back on its previous democratic stance regarding the Kurdish question since being voted in as the opposition party. All these will help Sarıgül's party gain strength, analysts note. However, how long this rise will continue will depend on Sarıgül himself. If the party refuses to adopt democratic discourse, it is not likely to become a permanent player in the Turkish political scene. In other words, it will indeed repeat Uzan's feat of splitting the votes of the left in the next election and then disappearing. Sarıgül's aides use every opportunity to remind him of this and urge him not to succumb to obstacles. Another warning Sarıgül frequently hears from his allies and friends is that he should make a point not to base his party's policies on the CHP.

Another advantage Sarıgül has is that he already has some grassroots voters in regions where the CHP does not have any support. The Alevi and Kurdish votes the CHP has lost in recent years are more than likely to go to Sarıgül's party. CHP leader Baykal is aware of the situation and has called on the government to hold early elections so the CHP can enter the next elections before Sarıgül's party is prepared or even established. Baykal, who is expected to be the only candidate for CHP leadership in this spring's party congress, will certainly cause some anger among party deputies. Heartbroken deputies denied seats in party organs are a CHP tradition after every congress. These individuals might also leave and move to Sarıgül's party. Sarıgül himself wants to complete his party's formalization after seeing what happens at the CHP congress. In the face of this, the CHP seeks to postpone the congress until fall 2010.

DSP can't stop Sarıgül exodus

The DSP has also been having a hard time due to the new party in the offing. Former DSP Chairman Zeki Sezer -- who had to resign under pressure from DSP founder and wife of its former leader Raşan Ecevit -- and Sarıgül have close links. Many in the DSP expect to see Sezer in Sarıgül's party. However, the DSP elected Masum Türker to party leadership rather than Alemdar Yalçın, Ecevit's favored candidate. Ecevit then set up the Democratic Left People's Party and made journalist Hulki Cevizoğlu its leader. However, Cevizoğlu resigned from his post last week. Ecevit is more than likely to lose her new party members to the DSP and Sarıgül's new party. Many DSP members say Sarıgül's ascent is not due to anything he has done but due to mistakes of CHP and DSP administrations that have come one after another.

Sarıgül to try out new model

Some say that in addition to having been able to enlist among his movement's ranks some of the most important figures on the left, Sarıgül's success has to do with a new party model he has in mind. Sarıgül would like to consider a political party that has a separate leader and a separate prime ministerial candidate, like the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). Çetin appears to be Sarıgül's candidate for party leadership, while Sarıgül himself appears to seek prime ministerial candidacy.

In addition to Çetin and Gürel, some of the important politicians who are in Sarıgül's team include Faruk Loğoğlu, Onur Kumbaracıbaşı, Halit Toraman and former CHP deputies Hasan Aydın, İsmail Değerli, Muharrem Toprak, Züheyir Amber, Hüseyin Özcan Mehmet Tomanbay and Bülent Tanla. Other individuals include İsmet İnönü's grandson Hayri İnönü, Hakan Dalokay, son of Ankara's legendary mayor Vedat Dalokay, former Çankaya Mayor Doğan Taşdelen, former minister Mehmet Moğoltay, Seyfi Doğan, Kazım Sönmez, who is responsible for organizing the party's Alevi base, and 18 former DSP ministers.

Some of the important figures Sarıgül has recruited from the right include former Public Works Ministry Undersecretary Sabri Özkan Erbakan, the nephew of defunct Welfare Party (RP) leader

Necmettin Erbakan, and former ANAP minister Yüksel Yalova

Davutoğlu congratulates Today's Zaman on third anniversary

Wednesday, 20 January 2010 13:05

Today's Zaman

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has congratulated Today's Zaman on the third anniversary of its establishment by kindly paying a visit to the daily's Ankara office amid his hectic schedule dominated by thorny foreign policy issues and consecutive visits

Today's Zaman was launched on Jan. 16, 2007 with the aim of presenting a clear picture of Turkey to the Anglophone world. It is currently published in hard copy and online, with around 3.5 million page views on average, mostly by international readers visiting the newspaper's Web site daily.

"Today's Zaman has filled in a huge gap," Davutoğlu said during his visit to the office on Monday evening. He was accompanied by his private secretary Gürcan Balık from the Foreign Ministry and media consultant Osman Sert.

While praising the newspaper in regards to both its "print quality and content" as well as the proficiency of its language use -- which is provided thanks to its professional copy-editors -- Davutoğlu said: "I don't know if there is a certain measure of years to determine whether a newspaper is sufficiently mature or not. But Today's Zaman has already surpassed that threshold if it exists."

Davutoğlu, known for his deep compassion for children, chatted with two sons of Today's Zaman's Parliament Bureau Chief Ali Aslan Kılıç, Alpaslan and Alperen, and cut Today's Zaman's modest birthday cake with Alperen.

Today's Zaman staff, joined by fellow colleagues from sister media bodies Turkish Zaman daily, Cihan news agency and Aksiyon weekly journal, enjoyed Davutoğlu's conversation about city culture and city history, as he explained how he associated the characters of cities with their relationship with civilizations.

The foreign minister, a well-regarded professor of political science and international relations who was the prime minister's chief foreign policy adviser from 2002 until he was appointed to his current post in May, is known for policies which reflect a deep understanding of history and political impact, requiring today's journalists covering Turkish foreign policy to have a full background knowledge of world and Turkish political history.

There is a saying in Turkish which explains a tradition: A guest doesn't pay a visit with empty hands. Before leaving Today's Zaman office to prepare for yet another visit abroad, as he was scheduled to head for Riyadh on Tuesday morning with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Davutoğlu offered a fine silver plate decorated with İznik glazed tiles (çini) to Today's Zaman Ankara Bureau Chief Abdullah Bozkurt as a remembrance of his visit.

Parliament Passes Full Time Employment Bill for Health Workers

Friday, 22 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkish Parliament on Thursday passed a bill requiring a full workday for university and health personnel.

Under the bill, publicly known as "Full Time Law Draft", instructors in Medical Faculties of the

universities, will also work full time.

The law says instructors working in universities would not be able to work in other places but in other universities for money or free of charge.

The Full Workday Law prohibits doctors working at public institutions from working at their own private practices or those of other private institutions. It also introduces a performance evaluation system for faculty members who work at university hospitals, to match the system currently in place at state hospitals. While it foresees a partial rise in overtime rates, it prohibits medical school faculty members from working at private institutions. It does, however, pave the way for members of medical school faculties to work at other public hospitals under the Health Ministry.

The enacting of the bill would also mean that university hospitals would no longer be able to charge patients extra fees for certain procedures and surgeries. The bill would in addition outlaw the practice of allowing faculty members to work at foundations and associations.

Currently, top doctors at university hospitals frequently work half-days at the hospitals and half days at their own private clinics -- where they earn the bulk of their income.

Throughout the country, doctors joined strikes organized by the Turkish Doctors Union (TTB) and 10 other health organizations to protest the bill that would require a full workday for doctors employed by universities and state hospitals, as opposed to the current half-time system.

PM rejects civil fascism claims

Friday, January 22, 2010

ANKARA – Hürriyet Daily News

Rejecting the claims of “civil fascism” or of “authoritarian government,” Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan admitted that they have failed in explaining their policies to the people in the first years of their government.

“We are making self-criticisms on this point. At the beginning [of our government], there were those who failed to understand us. And perhaps we may not have been explicit enough to them. But it’s been seven years. The point Turkey has reached now is obvious to everyone,” Erdoğan said Friday in a party meeting here.

Some commentators and academics have argued that the current government’s way of ruling the country was not much different from a “dictatorship” and called the process “civil fascism.”

Recalling that the government reduced the tenure of Parliament from five years to four and that the president will be elected through popular vote Erdoğan said, “I want to ask now: If we were seeking an authoritarian way why would we reduce our term? Why would we transfer the authority to elect the president from the Parliament to people?”

Criticizing the opposition parties and media for injecting artificial fear to the people, Erdoğan recalled that they have governed for the last seven years and they have taken care of it on the basis of democracy and the rule of law.

“I openly say that we will remain against those who will try to grab the will of the people and we’ll face any difficulties in this end,” Erdoğan stated.

The governments are elected through elections and leave their posts as a result of elections Erdoğan recalled and said that any institution, including the government, has to see that the power it has today is not forever.

GEO-STRATEGIC ISSUES

VISITS

Turkey's Tel Aviv ambassador in Ankara

Saturday, 16 January 2010 12:12

Time turk

Turkish Ambassador in Tel Aviv Oguz Celikkol said regarding Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon's inappropriate attitude towards him that it was an incident which would be included in books of history and diplomacy.

Celikkol arrived in the Turkish capital of Ankara on Saturday and told reporters at the airport that diplomatic crisis between Turkey and Israel has ended with the letter of apology from Israel.

"I came to Ankara for Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak's visit to Turkey," he said.

Israel apologized over a crisis which erupted after Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon summoned Turkish Ambassador in Tel Aviv Oguz Celikkol 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.

Turkish FM meets Serb President in Belgrade

Saturday, 16 January 2010 12:09

Time TURK

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu was received by Serbia's President Boris Tadic in Belgrade on Friday.

Davutoglu is in the Serbian capital Belgrade to attend a tripartite consultation meeting of Turkey, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia.

The meeting was closed to press.

Following the meeting, officials of the Turkish foreign ministry said that Davutoglu and Tadic discussed several projects carried out between the two countries, including a highway project in Serbia, infrastructure works in Sanjak region and a possible cooperation between Turkey's flag carrier Turkish Airlines (THY) and Serbia's national air carrier JAT Airways.

The two parties have also agreed to open a "Center for Islamic Culture" in Belgrade, said foreign ministry spokesman Burak Ozugergin.

Davutoglu invited Tadic to the summit of heads of states of South-East Europe to be held in Turkey and they discussed developments in Bosnia. Tadic reaffirmed Serbia's commitment to Bosnia's territorial integrity and political unity, Ozugergin said.

Later in the evening, Davutoglu will attend a dinner to be hosted by his Serbian counterpart Vuk Jeremic. Following the dinner, Davutoglu will depart from Serbia.

Senior Romanian official meets Mercan in Turkey

Wednesday, 20 January 2010 14:12

TIME TURK

Corletean said that political and economic relations between Turkey and Romania were "excellent".

Romanian Senate's Foreign Policy Committee Chairman Titus Corletean met with Murat Mercan, chairperson of the Turkish Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, on Wednesday in the Turkish capital of Ankara.

Speaking at the meeting, Mercan said relations between Turkey and Romania had developed over the last years, adding that relations between the countries' parliaments should also be improved.

Corletean said on his part that political and economic relations between Turkey and Romania were "excellent," adding that Turkey was one of the biggest trade partners for Romania.

Turkish Minister in Brazil to hold talks

Wednesday, 20 January 2010 17:33

TIME TURK

Turkey's industry and trade minister travelled Wednesday to Brazil to hold a series of talks. Turkey's industry and trade minister travelled Wednesday to Brazil to hold a series of talks. As part of his visit to the southeastern Brazilian city of Sao Paulo, Turkish Industry & Trade Minister Nihat Ergun will meet with Brazil's Minister of Development, Industry & Trade Miguel Joao Jorge Filho on January 22.

Within the framework of the gathering, the two officials are expected to sign a memorandum of understanding on encouragement of commercial relations and investments between Turkey and Brazil.

Ergun is scheduled to return to Turkey on January 25.

Erdogan Returns To Turkey From Saudi Arabia

Thursday, 21 January 2010 15:51

TIME TURK

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has returned to Turkey from Saudi Arabia on Thursday.

Erdogan had talks with Saudi Arabian officials and also met with Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Prof. Dr. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu in Jeddah. Mrs. Emine Erdogan, State Minister Zafer Caglayan, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek, and Energy and Natural Resources Minister Taner Yildiz have also returned to Turkey in Prime Minister Erdogan's jet.

President Gul Receives Indian Minister

Thursday, 21 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkish President Abdullah Gul met with Indian Minister of Parliamentary Affairs Pawan K. Bansal in Ankara on Wednesday.

The meeting at the Cankaya Presidential Palace was closed to press.

Earlier in the day, Gul also had a meeting with Robert Wexler, former U.S. congressman and president of U.S. think tank "Center for Middle East Peace".

Turkey's Environment Minister Meets with Indian Minister for Water Resources

Friday, 22 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkey's environment minister and India's minister for water resources held talks in the Turkish capital of Ankara on Thursday.

Speaking to reporters prior to his meeting with Indian Water Resources Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal, Turkish Environment & Forestry Minister Veysel Eroglu said that the trade volume between Turkey and India grew gradually.

Eroglu also said that Turkey desired to improve its cooperation with India.

Delivering a speech, Bansal said that he was happy to hold talks with his Turkish counterpart. Noting that the delegation accompanying him during his visit comprised of representatives of different political parties from the Indian parliament, Bansal said they all attached great importance to their talks in Turkey.

Mauritania's President Arrives in Turkish Capital

Friday, 22 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Mauritania's President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz arrived in the Turkish capital of Ankara on Thursday.

Aziz, the first ever Mauritanian president visiting Turkey, is set to meet with Turkish President Abdullah Gul.

Bilateral relations and cooperation opportunities between Turkey and Mauritania, as well as regional and international matters will be on the agenda of Aziz's talks, officials said.

Pm Erdogan Receives Syrian Assistant Vice-President Nazif

Friday, 22 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan received Thursday Syrian Assistant Vice-President Muhammad Nazif in Ankara.

Erdogan's meeting with Nazif took place at the Prime Ministry and lasted around half an hour.

The meeting was closed to the press corps.

Lebanese Chief of General Staff Kahveci Due to Turkey

--Friday, 22 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

The Chief of General Staff of Lebanon, General Jan Kahveci, will pay a visit to Turkey.

Turkish Military Attache in Beirut, Colonel Ali Tas, conveyed the invitation of Chief of Turkish General Staff Gen. Ilker Basbug to Kahveci.

Kahveci accepted the invitation with pleasure, said sources.

The date of Kahveci's visit is yet to be determined.

Turkey and Lebanon signed a military cooperation agreement during the visit of Lebanese Prime Minister Sa'ad al-Hariri to Turkey last week.

TURKEY AND ISRAEL

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 on 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

'Israel should understand that it is no longer possible to maintain its relationship with Turkey by counting on influencing the Turkish General Staff through the channels of the Pentagon and the US-based Jewish lobbies,' an expert has said

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.

Eyes on Barak visit to Turkey after envoy spat in Israel-Turkey ties

Sunday, 17 January 2010 17:02

Today's Zaman

The inviolability of an ambassador is a universally accepted principle which is expressed both in traditional forms, such as through popular sayings, and in official forms as part of contemporary diplomacy.

“The person of a diplomatic agent shall be inviolable. He shall not be liable to any form of arrest or detention. The receiving State shall treat him with due respect and shall take all appropriate steps to prevent any attack on his person, freedom or dignity,” says Article 29 of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. In 422 B.C. Sophocles expressed the idea that led to the phrase “Don’t shoot the messenger.” Shakespeare also touched on this in “Henry IV, Part II” (1597-98) and in “Antony and Cleopatra” (1606-07), while the Turkish idiom “elçiye zeval olmaz” can be translated as “the envoy should not be harmed.”

Turkish Ambassador to Israel Oğuz Çelikkol, who has had a 35-year diplomatic career with senior posts in Iraq, Syria and Greece, has already been “harmed” by the Israeli deputy foreign minister’s unprecedented diplomatic rudeness televised earlier this week, and additional damage has been done to the already strained relationship between Turkey and Israel, although the former received a desired and satisfactory official apology for the incident later in the week. Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak is scheduled to arrive in the Turkish capital this morning for a one-day official visit in an atmosphere poisoned by the latest diplomatic spat. While in Ankara, Barak, who will be accompanied by more than 15 members of the Israeli media, will have talks with both his Turkish counterpart, Vecdi Gönül, and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu.

On Monday, Israel’s deputy foreign minister, Danny Ayalon, summoned Çelikkol to complain about a Turkish television drama that portrayed Israeli diplomats as the masterminds of a child

abduction ring. Ayalon invited media crews to cover the start of the meeting in Jerusalem -- the subject of which was not conveyed to Çelikkol beforehand, with the ambassador assuming that it would be a courtesy visit for which he had made a request earlier -- 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 that his behavior toward the envoy was inappropriate.

But Turkish President Abdullah Gül 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."

Barak is expected to convey positive messages concerning the future of bilateral relations during talks with Turkish officials. Yet it is likely that the coalition partner Labor Party leader's call will fall on deaf ears with regards to his coalition partners, -- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is the leader of the hawkish Likud Party, and Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who is the leader of the far-right Yisrael Beiteinu and the architect of the diplomatic scandal carried out by Ayalon.

The delay in issuing a letter of apology to the Turkish ambassador stemmed from concerns that it might result in a coalition crisis with Lieberman, the Israeli daily Haaretz reported earlier this week, citing senior sources in Netanyahu's office.

The fact that Barak will be accompanied by a large media contingent is interpreted as a sign of Barak's willingness to convey his messages concerning the significance of the relationship with Turkey to the Israeli people and the coalition partners as fast as possible and in a straightforward and clear manner.

Whether Barak's messages will be echoed in Jerusalem is still a subject of curiosity, as the main obstacle to healing the relationship has not changed -- with Ankara believing that Israel's deadly three-week offensive in Gaza that killed more than 1,300 Palestinians and damaged or destroyed over 50,000 homes in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip with the declared goal of "self-defense" actually killed the peace process.

The revival of the peace process requires a strong will on the Israeli side, and even if Barak's presence in Ankara provides nice photo opportunities, there seems to be a long way ahead for the emergence of such a strong will.

Özlem Tür, an assistant professor at Ankara's Middle East Technical University (ODTÜ) and an expert on Middle Eastern affairs, believes that Israel had assumed that Turkey's criticism of its actions were aimed at gaining popularity in Arab countries and increasing domestic public support.

"But now they comprehend that Turkey's policies have been dominated by a sense of upholding justice in the region," Tür told Sunday's Zaman. When asked why Israel dared isolate itself to this extent by insisting on its policies, Tür said, "They will feel sorry about not having Turkey as an ally, but at the end of the day they will perceive their isolation as an existential challenge

which they can still survive.”

A new world where extremism won't pay off

Monday, 18 January 2010 09:08

Today's Zaman

Last week the tension in Turkish-Israeli ties reached a peak. What remains of the tension that attracted the attention of the entire world?

How did politicians, jurists and, more importantly, citizens on the street respond to this question? Many people with differing political views who shared their assessments with Cafe Capital had interesting approaches. The statement that stood out to me the most, as the headline indicates, termed the situation an entry into a period where extremism won't pay off.

Another interesting point was that the majority of people expressed difficulty in understanding why people who have been subject to fascist acts would victimize others by using the same methods. A friend of mine who served in Israel for many years provided an answer to the question of “Why does Israel, which lost many people under the Nazis' state terror, kill innocent Palestinians?”

The crux of the answer was extremism -- the extremism in propaganda, the extremism in affecting people by causing pain and keeping it fresh and the extremism in fictionalized propaganda, from instilling the mental foundation in children to influencing the man on the street. Every type of argument is used just to prevent people from having different views. Train wagons that were used to transport people to death camps are even put on display on the highest hills of the city so they can be seen by anyone on the street.

This extremism, which until recently yielded results, opened the way to new extremist acts and was manifested in the form of bombs falling on innocent women and children, sparking outrage from the world.

Every form of extremism has an inevitable cost. This process did not begin with the “one minute” incident at Davos. The countless number of warnings and condemnations from the UN were a consequence as well. But with the lack of regard to warnings, a growing reaction has formed in the universal public conscience. After all, isn't being condemned in the public conscience the biggest punishment for mistakes and crimes that are not regretted?

Israeli leaders need to take the pulse of humanity, not just the Muslim world. Will they find any country or society that approves of the Gaza massacre that occurred one year ago?

The reaction shown to the TV series “Ayrılık,” broadcast on TRT, as well as the reaction to Turkey's decision to exclude Israel from the Anatolian Eagle military exercise were both products of extremism. While the cost of extremist acts that went unpunished accumulated in the public consciousness, some politicians became extremely self-confident. The only explanation for Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon's desire to belittle Turkish Ambassador Oğuz Çelikkol is that he was blinded by his extreme self-confidence.

The mistakes of a state do not tie down the people of that country. Opposing the bombs that kill innocent people is not anti-Semitism. The people on the street who understand the personality of the crime blame Israel's mistakes on the entity making the mistakes, not on the people. The sorrow one feels for innocent people does not change depending on religion and nationality. If a peaceful life is truly desired, then foregoing extremism could truly inspire hope.

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A first in IMF history

The announcement by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that a critical phase has been completed in reaching an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has left the opposition uneasy. An influential member of the Republican People's Party (CHP) said he would not speak “on the record” until the agreement was completed and the details were revealed. Speaking off the record so as not to be quoted talking about a subject that isn't yet clear, the official asked, “Do you think Erdoğan will share the economy's performance, which he sees as a success, with the IMF?”

When asked whether he thought it will be successful, our backstage conversation continued with his response: “It is not important if we think it is successful or not. What's important is that we as the opposition are not able to explain the failure to the public. When economic problems fell behind on the agenda, Erdoğan started to explain the performance in the economy as a success and influenced the public.”

The IMF's image is not very positive in the Turkish society's subconscious. Despite the global crisis, not signing an agreement with the IMF has a positive effect on public opinion. While an agreement has not been reached in the last few years, announcements by the government that “problems have been solved” and an agreement “is being reached” or “will be reached” have positively affected the markets.

The fact that an agreement was not reached despite the insistence of some media organizations, banks and especially the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (TUSİAD) was also seen as sign of success. Furthermore, if in 2008-2009 people were given the impression that an agreement was being signed out of necessity, the expected benefits would not have taken place. In this respect, the more it was delayed the more the effect would be positive because it would suggest that an agreement was not reached because Turkey was obliged to.

“Agreements are made with the IMF to, in the words of the prime minister, squeeze throats. An agreement that won’t squeeze a throat would be a first for IMF. Then Erdoğan will be a hero.”

Ayalon pours more oil on fire, threatens to expel envoy

Monday, 18 January 2010 09:10

Today's Zaman

The Israeli official who sparked a diplomatic crisis with Turkey last week said on Saturday that the country’s ambassador could be expelled if Turkish TV dramas continue to depict Israeli security forces as brutal.

Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon made that point a day before Defense Minister Ehud Barak flew to Turkey on Sunday for the first visit by an Israeli official since the feud erupted last Monday. The visit was scheduled before the row but has been closely observed, especially because the quarrel was just the latest in a series of confrontations between the once-close allies. Ayalon summoned the Turkish ambassador last week to reprimand him over a TV program that showed Israeli agents kidnapping a child and shooting an old man. He was forced to apologize after Turkey threatened to recall its ambassador.

He seated Turkish Ambassador Oğuz Çelikkol on a sofa lower than his own chair and wouldn’t shake his hand in televised images of the meeting.

Ayalon told Channel 2 TV on Saturday that his intent was not to humiliate Çelikkol. However, he said Israel was right to make it clear to the Turks that there would be a “price” for what he said amounted to trampling upon the dignity of the Jewish state.

Asked what Israel would do if another TV segment to which they objected were to be shown, Ayalon replied, “Maybe we would summon the ambassador; maybe we would expel their ambassador.”

The same threat would apply to ambassadors from other nations that treat Israel similarly, he added -- echoing the attitude of Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who has instructed Israeli diplomats not to “grovel” before their host countries. Turkey responded coolly to his remarks. “Since the effects of the crisis sparked by this person and the reactions of both our country and his are known, I don’t think there is need for any further comment,” Turkey’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Burak Özügergin said.

Upon his arrival in Ankara for preparations for Barak’s visit, Çelikkol said the diplomatic crisis with Israel was over after Turkey received the official apology. Yet, the veteran diplomat, who has a diplomatic career spanning 35 years, also underlined that the incident at the Knesset was choreographed like a movie.

Calling the incident “a setup,” Çelikkol told reporters the meeting was portrayed as a courtesy meeting and that he was not informed beforehand that it was about Israel’s uneasiness over a TV series aired in Turkey.

Çelikkol said Ayalon communicated Israel’s uneasiness over the issue during the meeting and that he did not notice anything unusual until the meeting was over. He added he understood everything was a setup when he learned from a reporter that, in response to a photojournalist’s request during the meeting to take a photo of them shaking hands, Ayalon asked them in Hebrew whether they had noticed Çelikkol was sitting in a lower armchair in front of a table with only the Israeli flag on it.

Çelikkol said he would have left the room immediately had Ayalon said this in English.

Expressing gratitude for Turkey’s support extended to him over the incident as well as the Israeli

media's principled stance concerning the issue, Çelikkol explained how Israeli people on the street approached him warmly when he went out with friends for coffee on Friday.

“This situation is not a situation in which an ambassador is summoned and told off. In this case, there is a game being played behind the ambassador's back. This should be seen as a very rare incident in diplomatic history and one which will be remembered in the history books of diplomacy.”

As Prime Minister Erdoğan said, if an agreement that doesn't “squeeze Turkey's throat” is reached, its positive effects will be huge. The opposition's anonymous executive made an important statement in reference to Erdoğan's remark and said

CHP's Öymen: Israeli caucus in Parliament should survive

Tuesday, 19 January 2010 09:01

Today's Zaman

Republican People's Party (CHP) Deputy Chairman Onur Öymen has said it would be very hard to re-establish a Turkish-Israeli friendship group in Parliament if it were abolished.

“The friendship group will be abolished if all deputies resign from the group. Its abolishment would mean the closure of channels of dialogue between Turkey and Israel. Such channels should be wide open during times of [diplomatic] crisis. It is easy to abolish a parliamentary friendship group, but it is very hard to re-establish it,” Öymen told Today's Zaman.

The total number of members in the Turkish-Israeli friendship group was 316 before Israel's deadly offensive on Gaza began in late 2008. The offensive drew ire among Turkish deputies, with an overwhelming majority resigning from the friendship group. The group now has seven members, all deputies of the main opposition CHP.

“A parliamentary friendship group, which is supposed to create an atmosphere for dialogue between two countries, should not be turned into an issue of show. Meetings between governments should be conducted between parliaments, as well,” Öymen noted.

The CHP deputy chairman also recalled that Israel's offensive in Lebanon in 2006 sparked a similar mass protest in Turkey's Parliament. Almost all members of the Turkish-Israeli friendship group had resigned in a show of protest against Israel's offensive. There were 263 members in the group at the time.

Nursuna Memecan, a Justice and Development Party (AK Party) deputy and the former head of the Turkish-Israeli friendship group, said the friendship between the two countries would not end with the abolishment of the group.

“The reason for the resignations from the friendship group was Israel's Gaza offensive. Deputies showed their reaction and resigned from the group. I hope the group will be more active if relations between Turkey and Israel improve,” Memecan added.

There are currently around 100 friendship groups in Parliament. Among these groups, the most popular ones are the Turkish-Cuban, Turkish-US, Turkish-Azerbaijani and Turkish-German friendship groups.

Long-way ahead for full repair of relations with Israel

Tuesday, 19 January 2010 09:00

Today's Zaman

In line with established traditions of Turkish diplomacy, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak was received on Sunday with a warm welcome by Turkish officials who were open-minded and frank in their messages to the veteran Israeli politician.

But the full restoration of ties depends on the receptive attitude of Barak's coalition partners toward these messages, with Ankara conditioning a return to normal bilateral relations on 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.

"Ankara is well aware that Israel has a government whose mind is extremely confused," a senior Turkish diplomat told Today's Zaman after Barak's talks with Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, reflecting vigilance over the fact that Barak's call for being reasonable may eventually fall on deaf ears with regard to his coalition partners -- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is the leader of the hawkish Likud Party, and Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, leader of the far-right Yisrael Beiteinu and the architect of the latest diplomatic scandal carried out by Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon.

Talks between Davutoğlu and Barak were described by Turkish diplomatic sources as an "expanded tête-à-tête" and took around two-and-a-half hours, one hour longer than planned. All joint dossiers between Israel and Turkey involving regional and bilateral affairs were discussed during the meeting, which was the first such senior-level meeting between the two sides for a considerably long period of time, which is why it lasted longer than planned.

Barak, speaking after talks with his Turkish counterpart, Vecdi Gönül, issued a conciliatory note, saying it was "proper and right" to leave the ups and down of the two countries in the past.

Nevertheless, Israeli Foreign Minister Lieberman on the same day suggested in Jerusalem that Israel has emptied out its "arsenal of gestures" to get the Palestinians to the negotiating table.

"Since the establishment of the government we have made a large number of gestures," he said.

Bearing in mind that the two messages Davutoğlu conveyed to Barak were that Israel should end the tragedy in Gaza and avoid impulsive statements concerning bilateral relations, it can easily be assumed after Lieberman's Sunday remarks that there is still a long way to go before that phase in relations can be reached.

Following his talks with Davutoğlu and Gönül, Barak, speaking with a small group of journalists at the embassy residence, dismissed allegations that anti-Semitism is on the rise in Turkey and downplayed the criticism of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who had leveled harsh remarks against Israel for its Gaza offensive.

"I do not see signs of anti-Semitism in Turkey, unlike other countries in the world," Barak said, recalling that Turks had always helped Jews, including during the Spanish Inquisition and the Nazi regime in World War II. "Jews are accepted here [in Turkey]," he said.

Asked if he was concerned by Erdoğan's continuing criticism of Israeli policies in the Palestinian territories, especially in Gaza, on which Israel has imposed an embargo, Barak said he understood Erdoğan's position. "He speaks frankly, openly and in a transparent manner to our face," the Israeli defense minister said, stressing that "you cannot put a question mark on Turkey's judgment."

As Barak was speaking with journalists, Erdoğan, ahead of his departure for a visit to the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, said he was satisfied with Barak labeling the treatment a mistake and said Turkey would not pursue the issue any further.

Barak, meanwhile, also said Erdoğan's criticism stands in sharp contrast to what Barak described as an "unjust" report issued by a "Jewish judge." Barak was referring to Justice Richard Goldstone, who authored the United Nations report on the Gaza conflict, which found strong

evidence of human rights violations committed by Israeli forces.

While downplaying Turkey's objections and concerns over issues in occupied Palestinian territories, Barak said he hoped Turkey would understand Israeli motives in policies pursued by the current government. "We try to protect our citizens, which is our prime responsibility," he stressed. Nevertheless, the Israeli defense minister signaled that the Israeli government understands Turkey's position in the region. "We obviously want Turkey to be more pro-Israel. But you need to take a look at the whole picture in the region," he underlined.

"We tried to prepare the ground with the hope of starting a new chapter with less friction," he said when evaluating the feelings in the meetings he had in Ankara. Stressing that no one can predict the future in the Middle East, he noted, "I will do my best not to see any breakup in ties with Turkey."

Barak was the first Israeli official to visit Turkey since the diplomatic feud that erupted last Monday when Israel's deputy foreign minister, Ayalon, summoned Turkish Ambassador to Israel Ahmet Oğuz Çelikkol to complain about a TV show. The ambassador, who was refused a handshake, was forced to sit on a low sofa while Ayalon explained to local TV stations that the humiliation was intentional. Outraged, Turkey threatened to recall its ambassador, forcing Ayalon to apologize.

At a joint press conference following his talks with Barak, Gönül, meanwhile, said Turkey wanted to cooperate with Israel and called the two countries "neighbors" because of their shared interests.

"As long as we have the same interests, we work together to fix common problems. Also we are allies, we are strategic allies as long as our interests force us to be so," Gönül said.

Turkey doesn't need Israel anymore, Israeli general says

Thursday, 21 January 2010 15:27

Today's Zaman

The strategic ties between Israel and Turkey are not at the same level they were a decade ago, as the latter is no longer dependent on close cooperation, Israel's military intelligence chief has said. The comments by Maj. Gen. Amos Yadlin to the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee reflected wider concern in the Jewish state following a high-profile visit to Turkey by Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak on Sunday that was meant to help mend the relationship after a sharp diplomatic row.

"Beyond the specific current tension, one needs to realize that the distancing is more fundamental and relates to strategic issues and common interests between Israel and Turkey," Yadlin was quoted as saying on Tuesday by Ynetnews, an English-language Israeli news portal, during a security briefing to the committee members.

"There are still common strategic issues between Israel and Turkey, but it's not the same strategic closeness that existed in the past. In the past Turkey acknowledged joint interests, which strengthened the relationship. For example, in the 1990s, the Turks regarded Syria as an enemy. There was a joint enemy. However, over the years Turkey and Syria resolved their differences, and Turkey doesn't need Israel's closeness anymore," Yadlin elaborated.

"In the past they had an interest in securing their Syrian border and therefore their relations with Israel were strong. In the past Turkey strove to come closer to the West, beyond joining NATO," he said.

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 that has been since last winter, when a three-week offensive by Israel in the Gaza Strip left about 1,400 Palestinians dead, most of whom were civilians. Despite acquiescing to demands from Turkey and apologizing for the insult to its ambassador last week, analysts said it is not yet clear whether Israel will embrace this new paradigm set by Turkey, which says a return to normal in bilateral ties depends on 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.

"They wanted to become a member of the European market, and they thought that relations with Israel would promote them in the American market as well. They got a cold shoulder from the Europeans and couldn't achieve their goals. In light of this, they changed their policy and are now in the midst of a process of distancing themselves from the secular approach towards a more radical direction," Yadlin argued.

"They are currently in the midst of a fundamental process of moving further away from the secular Atatürk approach, closer to a radical approach," he claimed.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk founded the modern secular state on the ruins of Ottoman Muslim theocratic rule in the 1920s. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan insists that he remains loyal to Atatürk's legacy but secularist conservatives suspect him of ambitions to found a religious state, an allegation he denies.

Turkey, a member of the NATO defense pact, has a history of military cooperation with Israel and of mediating for the Jewish state with the Arab world. But ties have been shaken by a series of harsh and public criticism from both sides, culminating last week in the televised reprimand in Jerusalem of Turkey's ambassador.

TURKEY AND PALESTIAN

Erdoğan: Muslim leaders' response to Gaza 'pitiful'

Tuesday, 19 January 2010 10:22

Today's Zaman

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's meeting with the chief of the Jeddah-based Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) which is scheduled to take place tomorrow will offer an opportunity for Erdoğan to voice his uneasiness over Muslim leaders' inaction. While departing from Istanbul for a four-day visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia late on Sunday, Erdoğan was asked by a journalist to assess the Muslim world's stance concerning Israel's devastating offensive on Gaza last winter and its ongoing blockade of the impoverished enclave.

In response, Erdoğan clearly decried Muslim leaders' inadequate response to Palestinian suffering in the Gaza Strip as "pitiful."

"Let's not mean the people when saying the Muslim world. If we deal with the issue in regards to the administrations, those administrations have failed to show the reactions that the world's Muslims expected from them. This has been a pitiful aspect of the matter," Erdoğan said, noting that he would discuss the issue during his visit to Jeddah where he will meet Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, the secretary-general of the OIC, a group of 57 Muslim-majority nations.

As of Monday, Erdoğan was in Abu Dhabi where he delivered a keynote speech at the opening session of the 3rd World Future Energy Summit (WFES). Later in the day, he was expected to hold talks with UAE Emir Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahayan and Crown Prince Sheikh

Mohammed Zayed Al Nahyan.

Today, Erdoğan will proceed to Riyadh to hold talks with Saudi King Abdullah and other senior officials before wrapping up his visit with talks in Jeddah on Wednesday.

Last January, Erdoğan walked out of a meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, after a heated exchange with Israeli President Shimon Peres, telling him, "When it comes to killing, you know very well how to kill." His remarks were referring to Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip last winter, in which Erdoğan accused Israel of committing crimes against humanity by killing more than 1,300 Palestinians.

The Davos walkout was a decisive moment for the Arab media and public opinion, which led to them giving Turkey as well as their own countries and leaderships another look.

Earlier this month, Riyadh-based King Faisal Foundation (KFF) announced that Erdoğan, "whose achievements have set an example of judicious leadership in the Islamic world," won the 2010 King Faisal International Prize (KFIP) for service to Islam.

According to the foundation, Erdoğan has pioneered a major campaign that placed Turkey among the world's leading countries, economically and industrially. "His unyielding position on various Islamic and global issues, particularly the rights of the Palestinian people, has gained him the respect and admiration of the entire Islamic world and the international community at large," the foundation said.

TURKEY AND SYRIA

Syrian Ambassador: "Turkey, Syria Are Strategic Partners"

Thursday, 21 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Syrian ambassador to Turkey said on Wednesday that Turkey and Syria were strategic partners. Delivering a speech in the meeting of the International Strategic Research Organization (USAK), Syrian ambassador in Ankara Nidal Kabalan said the two countries could work together in several areas.

There has been a great improvement in relations between Turkey and Arab world in the recent period, Kabalan said.

If the European Union accepts Turkey as its full member, the union will benefit from it, he said. In regard to Israel-Syria negotiation process mediated by Turkey, Kabalan said Turkey was conducting this process successfully.

Thursday, 21 January 2010

TURKEY AND USA

Barak seeks to contain damage to ties with Turkey

Saturday, 16 January 2010 12:22

TIME TURK

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak had a lengthy meeting with Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu on Sunday as part of a mission to mend relations with Turkey after a diplomatic spat between the two allies that led to Israel being forced to apologize for it

Turkish Red Crescent team arrives in Haiti's capital

Turkish aid organization (Turk Kizilayi) team arrived in Port-au-Prince capital of Haiti which was hit by a devastating earthquake on January 12.

A statement by the Turkish Red Crescent said on Saturday that a relief team comprising of experts and psychologists arrived in Haiti's capital and started to serve there.

The team began distributing aid materials like water, milk, biscuits and infant food to Haitian people.

Three military cargo planes of Turkish Air Forces carrying doctors, search-rescue team, two check-up devices, 20 tons of medicine and medical equipment departed from Etimesgut Military Airport for Haiti.

The 7.0-magnitude quake, Haiti's worst in two centuries, struck on Tuesday, January 12.

U.S. Special Representative Says U.S. Has Coordination with Turkey in Afghanistan & Pakistan

Friday, 22 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke said on Thursday that the U.S. had coordination with Turkey in Afghanistan and Pakistan issues.

Speaking in a session at U.S. Congress, Holbrooke said that the U.S. had developed strong relations with a group of regional countries including Turkey regarding Afghanistan and Pakistan issues in the past one year.

Turkey, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, China and Russia were those regional countries, he noted.

Turkey was a regional actor which had a critical importance and helped the U.S., Holbrooke said and stated that the U.S. and Turkey were sharing the same strategic targets.

Holbrooke said that Turkey had some uneasiness over Turkmen minority in Afghanistan, but it had a big influence both in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Friday, 22 January 2010

TURKEY AND IRAQ

Train service between Turkey and Iraq to be launched on Saturday

Saturday, 16 January 2010 12:18

TIME TURK

Train service between Turkey and Iraq will begin as of February 16, Saturday.

Turkish Railways (TCDD) and Iraqi Railways (IRR) officials who got together in Ankara on January 14 and 15 agreed to launch train service between Gaziantep and Mosul.

The first run will take off today from Mosul to Gaziantep and the second will be from Gaziantep to Mosul on January 18.

There will be scheduled train voyages from Mosul every Tuesday at 12:00 p.m., and from Gaziantep every Thursday at 9:00 p.m.

The service fare for the 18 hour ride will be between 25-35 Euros.

TURKEY AND IRAN

Turkey's Pegasus to start flights to Iranian capital

Thursday, 21 January 2010 15:46

TIME TURK

The flights will be held from Istanbul's Sabiha Gokcen International Airport on Thursdays and Sundays

Turkish Pegasus Airlines will begin its Istanbul (Turkey)- Tehran (Iran) flights on Thursday. The flights will be held from Istanbul's Sabiha Gokcen International Airport on Thursdays and Sundays.

Pegasus Airlines was established in 1990 as a joint venture between Aer Lingus, Silkair Investment and Net Holding in Istanbul.

Pegasus has scheduled international flights to Amsterdam, Athens, Basel, Berlin, Brussels, Dusseldorf, Krasnodar, Copenhagen, Cologne, Lefkosa (Nicosia), London, Munich, Stuttgart, Tehran, Vienna and Zurich.

TURKEY AND GREEK CYPRUS

Bardakoğlu expresses support for Halki Seminary reopening

Monday, 18 January 2010 09:02

Today's Zaman

The head of Turkey's Religious Affairs Directorate, Ali Bardakoğlu, has said regarding debates surrounding a Greek Orthodox seminary closed in 1971 that he believes the issue will be resolved within the framework of religious freedom.

Bardakoğlu said in an interview with the NTV news channel that as a Muslim and the head of Turkey's Religious Affairs Directorate he supports everyone's religious freedom. "We should act ethically and be principled on this issue. Our ancestors opened the Halki Seminary in İstanbul. I have always been in support of the religious freedom of all religious groups in our country," he said.

Established on Oct. 1, 1844 on Heybeli Island -- or Halki in Greek -- in the Sea of Marmara, the Halki Seminary was the main school of theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church's patriarchate in İstanbul until its closure by Turkish authorities in 1971. The İstanbul-based Greek Orthodox Patriarchate has long complained about the status of the seminary, with Patriarch Bartholomew saying its reopening is of vital importance for the survival of the Greek Orthodox clergy.

Touching upon another controversial issue surrounding religious freedom in Turkey, Bardakoğlu said that a former Roman Catholic church in Tarsus, which was confiscated by the state in 1943 and is now a museum, should be turned back into a house of worship.

Rather than remaining a museum, St. Paul's Church should be reopened as a church, Bardakoğlu said. "Let churches remain churches and mosques, mosques. People should be able to openly express their religions or irreligiousness. Atheists should also be able to live freely in this society. This does not mean that we approve of atheism. We should also demand the same freedoms for Muslims.

Bardakoğlu was also asked his opinions on the government's Alevi initiative, which aims to examine the role of Alevis in Turkish society and better enfranchise this group. "We have to erase the concept of 'other', since we have always been together. We support this initiative, which means taking steps [on this issue] to the very end. We should do this in every field," he said.

Turkish Cypriot President Receives Un Official Downer

Thursday, 21 January 2010 15:58

TIME TURK

President Mehmet Ali Talat of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) received UN Secretary General's Special Adviser on Cyprus Alexander Downer on Thursday.

Taye Brook Zerihoun, the special representative of the UN Secretary General in Cyprus, accompanied Downer during the meeting.

Following the meeting, Downer said that it was one of their regular meetings, and they made preparations for the second round of intensified talks between Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders which would begin next week.

Noting that the second round would be an important part of negotiation process, Downer said that he also held a meeting with Greek Cypriot leader Demetris Christofias yesterday.

On January 11, Talat and Christofias launched the first round of intensified talks in hope to overcome obstacles that hindered progress during 60 meetings over the past 16 months.

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 the Treaty of Guarantee.

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.

PM Erdoğan expresses disappointment over Orams case

Friday, January 22, 2010

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made a phone call Friday to his British counterpart Gordon Brown, expressing his concerns that a U.K. court's ruling will be misused to damage the ongoing peace negotiations in Cyprus.

The two leaders also discussed bilateral and international issues including Cyprus, Afghanistan and Africa.

Both prime ministers agreed to encourage Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders to find a solution for the long-divided island. Erdoğan warned Brown that the Orams case would likely make the ongoing negotiations to reunify the island more difficult.

"Though I respect judicial independence, the U.K. court's decision disappointed me," Erdoğan told Brown, according to sources.

Brown replied: "I understand your reaction, but it is impossible to intervene in the independence of the judiciary." The British leader also affirmed that his country would continue to support Turkey's European Union membership bid.

The Orams case centers on British couple Linda and David Orams, who purchased and built a house on a plot of land in Lapithos that belonged to Greek Cypriot Melitis Apostolides. Apostolides has not been able to return to his property since 1974. However, in 2004, he secured a ruling from the Nicosia District Court ordering the Orams to demolish their house, vacate the land and pay him back rent. But the ruling was not enforceable in the north of the island and Apostolides' lawyers took the case to the British High Court in London in hopes that an EU law could be enacted.

The court turned for clarification to the European Court of Justice in Luxemburg, which, after deliberation, backed the Nicosia court's decision.

British court ruling alarms north Cyprus property owners

Thursday, January 21, 2010

NICOSIA - Agence France-Presse

Foreign property owners in Turkish Cyprus have expressed alarm over a British court ruling that has ordered a couple to tear down a villa built on disputed land and pay compensation to the owner.

"It's very bad news for everyone... What can they do, pack up and leave?" asked Marian Stokes, an Irishwoman who lives in the northern port town of Kyrenia.

Tuesday's ruling by the Court of Appeal in London that the British couple must demolish and abandon their holiday home in northern Cyprus came as "a great shock," said Stokes, the founder of a property group that advises potential buyers in Turkish Cyprus. "The foreigners have done nothing wrong," she added. "They've done everything by the rules. They went to a lawyer and got advice; the title deeds were stamped by the government."

The landmark court ruling requires David and Linda Orams to hand the land they bought in 2002 back to Meletios Apostolides, the original Greek Cypriot owner, and pay him damages.

Apostolides' family, like thousands of others, fled to the south of the island in 1974 when Turkish troops invaded the north in response to an Athens-engineered Greek Cypriot coup aimed at uniting Cyprus with Greece.

Many of the abandoned properties were distributed among Turkish Cypriots who had left behind assets in the south and who often subsequently sold them on to foreigners, mainly Britons.

Apostolides launched a court action in Nicosia in 2005 that was followed by a string of subsequent legal hearings amid disagreements related to the case.

Around 8,000 Britons live in the north of the Mediterranean island and "it would be ridiculous to bring 8,000 cases to court," said Morton Coles, chairman of the British Residents in Northern Cyprus Society. "The only way to be sure that no one will ask for the land people buy in the north is to have a pre-1974 title deed from a British expatriate or a Turkish Cypriot," he added.

"A resolution of the property issue, for both Turkish and Greek Cypriots, can only come about as part of a comprehensive settlement."

A Briton living in Kyrenia, who requested anonymity, said he did not know what he would do in light of the court ruling: "We have to see what the Orams do... then we will decide if we stay or leave the country." But he said it would not be easy for the Orams to knock their house down, as

ordered by the court, “because they have to get a demolition permit from the Turkish Cypriot government.”

Another Briton with a house in the north of the island criticized the greed of the property agencies and the ignorance of the buyers. “Most expats are not aware of the property problem in Cyprus and are not interested in finding out,” he said, adding that they just accept what the estate agents tell them.

Greek Cypriots to sue tourists staying at hotel in Northern CyprusA lawyer says the Greek-Cypriot owners of a hotel in Turkish Cyprus will sue tourists who stayed there for trespassing. Constantis Candounas says his clients chose legal action after a British court this week issued a key ruling against a U.K. couple who bought land in Turkish Cypriot north. Candounas said Thursday that the refugees from Kyrenia would file summons in a Cypriot court against 60 tourists known to have stayed at the northern coastal town's Dome Hotel over the last year. He said action would also be taken against the Dome Hotel's Turkish Cypriot operators. Cyprus was ethnically divided in 1974, when Turkey intervened after a coup aimed at union with Greece.

As well as affecting the expatriate community, the ruling could have worrying consequences for northern Cyprus, where, according to the Greek Cypriot government’s statistics, as much as 78 percent of the land was owned by Greek Cypriots before 1974. Property is one of the most complex and divisive parts of the Cyprus issue.

The Greek Cypriot side is expected to use the ruling to support its stance and proposals in ongoing U.N.-backed talks aimed at reunifying the Mediterranean island this year. But the Turkish Cypriot manager of an estate agency in Kyrenia said foreigners should not assume that all title deeds issued by the government of northern Cyprus are fakes and will inevitably create problems. “To potential buyers, we say that they take the risk if they buy someone’s property without these pre-1974 deeds,” the manager said. “Some clients buy thinking that there will be a solution and the case will be settled.”

The manager pointed out that Turkish Cypriots living in the south before 1974 have also been dispossessed, including her father, who applied to a Greek Cypriot court in 2008 to recover his land, in Limassol on the south coast. “His case was dismissed because he had to stay six months in the south before applying,” she said.

Greek Cypriots have submitted around 1,500 property claims to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, according to Greek Cypriot lawyer Achilleas Demetriades.

TURKEY AND ARMENIA

Political will can shed light on Dink murder case

Tuesday, 19 January 2010 14:52

Today's Zaman

Three years after Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink was fatally shot outside his office by an ultranationalist teenager, the investigation into his murder has stalled as the suspected perpetrator and his immediate accomplices have been put on trial,

While the anniversary of Dink's murder is being commemorated today with a series of ceremonies in Turkey and abroad, Dink's lawyers, domestic and international rights organizations and activists express their frustration that the murder investigation has not been

progressing. There is a lengthy list of suspicious irregularities in the investigation, including deleted records and hidden files suggestive of an attempted police cover-up.

“Much of the evidence indicates that the murder could have been prevented,” said Deniz Tuna, one of the family lawyers. “We filed lawsuits indicating that security forces should have been tried for manslaughter because they caused Dink's death from negligence, but they are continuing to be tried only for negligence,” she told Today's Zaman.

Dink was editor-in-chief of the bilingual Agos daily until he was killed on Jan. 19, 2007.

Lawyers representing the co-plaintiffs in the Dink trial have long alleged that the murder was the doing of Ergenekon, a clandestine group charged with plotting to overthrow the government. In the latest hearing they also petitioned the 14th High Criminal Court to contact the prosecutors investigating Ergenekon to request a copy of the documents that describe the organization's schemes against religious minorities in Turkey.

At the last hearing of the Dink trial in October of last year co-plaintiff lawyer Fethiye Çetin stated that Dink's murder, along with that of an Italian priest in 2006 and the 2007 slaying of three Christians in Malatya, was part of an operation carried out by Ergenekon.

Çetin also said that the acts of some Ergenekon suspects in turning Dink into a target for ultranationalists were very “open.” She recalled that when Dink was facing charges under Turkish Penal Code (TCK) Article 301, which then criminalized “insulting Turkishness,” some of the people who are in jail now as alleged Ergenekon members brought crowds of protestors and even attacked Dink and his supporters as they entered and left the courtroom.

Indeed, this is what co-plaintiff lawyers Çetin and Tuna point out in their “Third Year Report on Hrant Dink's Murder,” referring to a devious plan called the Cage Operation Action Plan, which aimed to intimidate Turkey's non-Muslims and assassinate prominent figures. The plan, revealed during the Ergenekon investigation, was allegedly designed by a group of members of the Naval Forces Command.

Lawyer Tuna said that all the indications point to Dink's murder being part of a plan. “There is a willpower and a determination [outside of] the court, and this is what needs to be exposed,” she said.

Asked by Today's Zaman who could expose it, she said, “the government.”

“The security personnel were informed beforehand about the assassination plot and did not take steps to stop it. They are being protected by certain authorities in an attempted cover-up. We are talking about the state's security forces: the gendarmerie, police and intelligence agencies. Therefore, it is the government which is supposed to demonstrate the political will to make progress in Dink's murder.”

She also explained that an inspection board under the Prime Ministry had started an investigation in response to a petition by Dink's wife in April 2007. The investigation requested that some intelligence and security forces personnel in Trabzon be investigated, and the board approved this report at the end of 2008.

“We don't know the result of the investigation in Trabzon. We requested to be joint attorneys in those cases but were not allowed,” Tuna said, adding that they were prevented from doing this under Law 4483, which relates to the judicial process for trying public officials.

“What we need is a government initiative to show the necessary will in order to solve the problems in Dink's murder which relate to the bigger picture,” she said.

The report prepared by Tuna and Çetin concluded that it is impossible to shed light on Dink's murder using the methods employed thus far.

“As it is impossible to believe that the murder is the work of three to five youths who have nationalistic feelings, it is also impossible to believe that an organized structure which has illegal powers of authority and influence within the intelligence units and the gendarmerie could have committed the murder by using those youths. From the General Staff to the judiciary, from government spokespeople to the security units, from the media to paramilitary forces, all legal and political actors have responsibility in Hrant Dink’s murder, by not preventing the murder and not exposing the real perpetrators.”

Turkey says Armenian top court’s ruling on protocols not acceptable

Wednesday, 20 January 2010 13:04

Today's Zaman

The Turkish Foreign Ministry has stated that there are preconditions which contradict the letter and essence of the Armenian-Turkish protocols in the Armenian Constitutional Court’s decision approving the protocols signed between the two countries last ye

The statement released by the Foreign Ministry Monday evening said: “The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Armenia declared its decision of constitutional conformity on the protocols between Turkey and Armenia signed on Oct. 10, 2009 with a short statement on Jan. 12, 2010. The Constitutional Court has recently published its grounds of decision. It has been observed that this decision contains preconditions and restrictive provisions which impair the letter and spirit of the protocols.”

Additionally, the Foreign Ministry statement said: “The decision undermines the very reason for negotiating these Protocols as well as their fundamental objective. This approach cannot be accepted on our part. Turkey, in line with its accustomed allegiance to its international commitments, maintains its adherence to the primary provisions of these protocols. We expect the same allegiance from the Armenian government.”

Turkey and Armenia signed two protocols in Zurich on Oct. 10 last year relating to the establishment of diplomatic relations and the development of bilateral relations between the two countries, including the opening of their common border. The Armenian Constitutional Court ruling found the two protocols to be “in conformity with the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia.”

According to sources from the Turkish Foreign Ministry, the Armenian top court’s reference to Article 11 of the Armenian Declaration of Independence is problematic, as this has been perceived as a “precondition” by the Foreign Ministry.

The same source said that the Foreign Ministry will issue another statement on Tuesday to make Turkey’s concerns clearer, but it did not come out as Today’s Zaman went to press.

The Armenian court states that the protocols “cannot be interpreted or applied in the legislative process and application practice of the Republic of Armenia as well as in the interstate relations in a way that would contradict the provisions of the preamble to the RA Constitution and the requirements of Paragraph 11 of the Declaration of Independence of Armenia.”

Article 11 of the Armenian Declaration of Independence of Aug. 23, 1990 refers to Eastern Anatolia, in Turkey, as Western Armenia and as such holds that this area is part of Armenia. Since the Armenian constitution recognizes as a basis “the fundamental principles of the Armenian statehood and national aspirations engraved in the Declaration of Independence of Armenia,” it likewise accepts the characterization of Eastern Anatolia as Western Armenia and Turkey is concerned that this might translate into the advancement of territorial claims.

The second of the two protocols signed in Geneva stipulates that the two sides agree to “implement a dialogue on the historical dimension with the aim to restore mutual confidence between the two nations, including an impartial scientific examination of the historical records and archives to define existing problems and formulate recommendations.” It does not specifically mention the massacres of 1915.

Another aspect which may not be acceptable to Turkey could be the fourth paragraph, as mentioned in a story on Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s RFE/RL Web site.

Paragraph four of the preceding argumentation concludes that the mutual obligations undertaken by the two countries “are, under the principles of international law, exclusively of a bilateral nature, and cannot concern, or by various references be attributed to, any third party or the relations with such third party of the signatories of the protocols.”

That formulation has been construed in Yerevan as a rejection of the argument, repeatedly made in recent months by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, that ratification of the protocols by the Turkish parliament must be contingent on concessions by Armenia in the Karabakh peace process; specifically, the withdrawal of Armenian forces from seven districts of Azerbaijan they currently control.

On the other hand, an expert in Armenia said that the Constitutional Court’s decision doesn’t contain any clause that contradicts the Armenian-Turkish protocols.

Constitution analyst Vardan Poghosyan said that the Constitutional Court’s decision only clarifies how the tenets in the protocols should be interpreted. “Overall, it’s evident that the Constitutional Court’s decision doesn’t include any preconditions or stipulations whatsoever, but only clarifies how the tenets of the signed Armenian-Turkish documents should be interpreted,” he said as quoted by Armenia’s Tert.am.

The top court’s approval of the protocols came amid fierce protests by opponents. The nationalist Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutiu) threatened that it will seek to depose President Serzh Sargsyan if the protocols are ratified by the Armenian parliament.

Turkish official says Armenia court ruling harms protocols

Thursday, 21 January 2010 15:44

TIME TURK

The Constitutional Court's decision has hurt the process, Mercan said.

Chairman of the Turkish Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, Murat Mercan, said Thursday Armenian Constitutional Court's decision on the protocols signed by Turkey and Armenia was against the spirit of the protocols.

Speaking to reporters, Mercan reminded that Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu told his Armenian counterpart Eduard Nalbandian that the Armenian government should clarify the decision of the Constitutional Court and display the necessary political will.

The decision of the Armenian Constitutional Court was against the spirit of the protocols. The Constitutional Court's decision has hurt the process, Mercan stressed.

We will make a decision on the matter once legal experts of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs complete their works, Mercan said.

As the representative of Turkey and the Turkish people, I want to mention tha0

Normalization with Armenia at risk, says PM Erdoğan

Thursday, 21 January 2010 15:24

Following Ankara's initial reaction to a ruling by the top Armenian court on protocols between the two countries expected to pave the way for the normalization of relations, the Turkish and Armenian foreign ministers have exchanged views, but the issue re Armenia's Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian called his Turkish counterpart, Ahmet Davutoğlu on Wednesday to express concern and seek clarification over a statement released on Monday evening by the Turkish Foreign Ministry. Davutoğlu told Nalbandian that Armenia's constitutional court's Jan. 12 decision contains unacceptable preconditions, underlining that Turkey has adhered to the spirit of the protocols signed between them on Oct. 10 in Zurich last year and expects the same from the Armenian side.

The Turkish foreign minister also added that right after the documents were signed, a public awareness campaign was launched in Turkey and the protocols were sent to Parliament, whereas Armenia has not yet submitted the documents to its legislature.

Prior to calling his Turkish counterpart, Nalbandian had issued a statement saying, "I hope that with such a statement the Turkish side is not attempting to justify its continuous efforts in laying down preconditions and covering up its needless delays in the ratification process."

According to the Turkish Foreign Ministry's statement on Jan. 18, the Armenian constitutional court's "grounds for decision" over the conformity of the protocols to their constitution "contain preconditions and restrictive provisions which impair the letter and spirit of the protocols" and "undermine the very reason for negotiating these protocols as well as their fundamental objective."

Burak Özügergin, the Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesperson, told Today's Zaman that Armenia has taken the heart out of the protocols and created a new, restrictive situation. He further explained that on the one hand, the court had ruled to approve the protocols, which call for the establishment of a joint commission of historians to better understand past events, but on the other it refers to the Declaration of Independence of Armenia.

Paragraph 11 of the Declaration of Independence states, "The Republic of Armenia stands in support of the task of achieving international recognition of the 1915 Genocide in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia."

"Then why establish a commission of historians?" Özügergin said.

In the fifth paragraph of the Armenian court's ruling it says that the protocols "cannot be interpreted or applied" in a way that would contradict the provisions of the preamble to Armenia's constitution and the requirements of paragraph 11 of its Declaration of Independence. Armenians say 1.5 million Armenians were killed during a systematic campaign in eastern Anatolia, while Turkey rejects the claims of genocide, saying the killings came as the Ottoman Empire was trying to quell civil strife and that Muslim Turks were also killed in the conflict. The protocols do not specifically mention the massacres of 1915 but stipulate that the two sides agree to "implement a dialogue on the historical dimension with the aim to restore mutual confidence between the two nations, including an impartial scientific examination of the historical records and archives to define existing problems and formulate recommendations."

Özügergin pointed out another issue of concern for the Turkish side -- the main limitations the Armenian court has placed on the protocols in that the court made all clauses of the protocols conditional on the implementation of two main obligations: "establish diplomatic relations" and "open the common border."

Turkey closed its border with Armenia in 1993 in solidarity with fellow country Azerbaijan

during the fighting over the breakaway mountain region of Nagorno-Karabakh, where Christian ethnic Armenians threw off Muslim Azeri rule with Armenian support in the early 1990s.

The Turkish spokesperson said they had therefore made these two actions a necessary prerequisite for the fulfillment of all other obligations to be undertaken by Armenia and Turkey. "This is against international agreements," he said.

Joining the criticism, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that the court's reference could harm efforts to end a century of enmity.

"The process will be damaged if it [the court's decision] is not corrected," he said at a news conference in Saudi Arabia during a state visit.

Turkey had not taken the protocol to its Constitutional Court, Erdoğan said: "We took it directly to our Parliament without making changes. We didn't employ a mediator on the text. We didn't carry out any read-between-the-lines operations. This is proof of our sincerity. Armenia has tried to change the text."

Meanwhile, Harut Sassounian, a writer at the Armenian Weekly, commented that the constitutional court has limited some of the damaging aspects of the protocols.

"Of course, it would be far more preferable if parliament were to reject these protocols outright. Regrettably, this is unlikely, as parliament is dominated by pro-government deputies. If rejection is not a possibility, the president of Armenia and the parliament should at least consider specific reservations or changes to these protocols in line with the constitutional court's decision," he wrote.

On the other hand, Sergey Minasyan, deputy director of the Caucasus Institute, told NEWS.am that the court's ruling should be only be viewed in a legal and domestic context.

Mensur Akgün, director of the Global Political Trends Center (GPoT) -- a research unit at İstanbul Kültür University, said that the Armenian judiciary's ruling on the protocols was a political one.

"In our part of the world, the judiciary likes to interfere in politics," he told Today's Zaman.

"Although Turkey has rightful concerns, we can also say that Yerevan has played into Ankara's hands."

Armenian Constitutional Court's Decision against Spirit of Signed Protocols, Mercan

Friday, 22 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Chairman of the Turkish Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, Murat Mercan, said Thursday Armenian Constitutional Court's decision on the protocols signed by Turkey and Armenia was against the spirit of the protocols.

Speaking to reporters, Mercan reminded that Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu told his Armenian counterpart Eduard Nalbandian that the Armenian government should clarify the decision of the Constitutional Court and display the necessary political will.

The decision of the Armenian Constitutional Court was against the spirit of the protocols. The Constitutional Court's decision has hurt the process, Mercan stressed.

We will make a decision on the matter once legal experts of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs complete their works, Mercan said.

As the representative of Turkey and the Turkish people, I want to mention that our committee will take into consideration the sensitivity of the Azerbaijani people while approving the protocols. We are carefully watching the developments, Mercan noted.

Asked if the protocols would be withdrawn from the Turkish parliament, Mercan said that there was no practical difference between holding the protocols at the Turkish Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee and the Turkish government's withdrawal of the protocols.

It is up to the Turkish government. The government will make a decision, Mercan also said.

Turkey to convey legal assessment to pressure Armenia

Friday, January 22, 2010

ANKARA-Hürriyet Daily News

Ankara is working on a legal assessment to be sent to Yerevan and third parties to emphasize that Armenia's Constitutional Court violated international law by conditionally affirming the two countries' protocols.

Foreign ministers Ahmet Davutoğlu and Edward Nalbandian signed historic protocols in October to establish diplomatic relations and open land borders between the two countries.

Armenia's court published a ruling affirming the constitutionality of the protocol Monday. The text, however, angered Ankara because it stipulated that the agreements must not violate a part of the Armenian Declaration of Independence that calls for the recognition of the 1915 deaths of Armenians as "genocide."

According to the protocol, the sides will form committees to solve bilateral disputes. Turkey has said a joint committee of historians should investigate the 1915 killings thoroughly rather than politically terming the events a "genocide."

"The wording and spirit of the protocols should be protected. Any limitation or efforts at partially approving [the document] is against the essence of the protocols," said Davutoğlu on Friday during a joint conference with his Jordanian counterpart, Nasser Judeh.

Davutoğlu phoned Nalbandian to express his worries and urge him to display a stronger political will. The minister had earlier discussed the verdict at a meeting with President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

"We began with a vision of normalizing relations with neighboring Armenia and worded the protocols in this manner," said Davutoğlu. "We continue to be loyal to the wording and spirit of the protocols and back it with a strong political will."

In their telephone conversation, Nalbandian argued the court ruling had no affect on the protocol's conditions, according to Davutoğlu, who said, "We need to hear clearer and stronger remarks."

The minister said he would make calls Friday to his U.S. and Swiss counterparts, urging them to pressure Armenia to uphold the basics of the normalization protocols. "We will convey our legal assessments and our worries to the related sides."

He outlined the importance of continuing the process without any legal failures so as to reach a comprehensive normalization. "But the existing picture shouldn't be changed. All aims including the planned commissions should be approved in total."

Diplomatic sources said Turkey would soon convey its legal assessments and suggestions by calling on Armenia not to renege on the agreement or add stipulations to the protocols.

"You cannot pick and choose. Then what we've agreed will be different than what you've approved," one anonymous diplomat said.

Turkey's forthcoming text will cite the protocols, saying they are binding in their entirety according to international law.

Nalbandian, meanwhile, accused Turkey of giving him ultimatums, saying: "If Turkey is not ready to ratify the protocols, continues speaking in ultimatums, setting preconditions and obstructing the process, then I do not deny that negotiations will break down."

TURKEY AND SAUDI-ARABIA

Erdoğan calls for lifting visa requirements with Saudi Arabia

Wednesday, 20 January 2010 13:06

Today's Zaman

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has suggested that Turkey and Saudi Arabia should lift visa requirements for travel between the two countries.

"We [Turkey] have lifted visa requirement with Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. We are working to lift visa requirements with Russia. Why not do the same with Saudi Arabia?" asked the prime minister on Tuesday during a speech he delivered at a luncheon attended by Turkish and Saudi businessmen in Riyadh.

Turkey and Lebanon signed an agreement to lift visa requirements for their nationals in a bid to boost trade, tourism and economic cooperation in early January. Syria, Jordan and Libya abolished visa requirements for Turkish nationals in deals concluded last year.

"There is no shift in Turkey's foreign policy. Our efforts to boost cooperation with Syria are not less important than our efforts to boost cooperation with Bulgaria. We will side with Iraq in its difficult times as we did for Georgia. Our commercial activities with Jordan and Libya are as important as those with Russia. We attach as much importance to cooperation with Saudi Arabia as we do our bid to join the EU. No one should invent different meanings for all these," Erdoğan remarked.

The Turkish prime minister also called on Saudi businessmen to expand their investments in Turkey, recalling that Turkey was among the 14 countries whose ratings were recently upgraded by international credit agency Moody's Investors Service. Moody's upgraded Turkey's rating from Ba3 to Ba2 earlier this month.

Erdoğan also expressed the bond he felt with the Saudi public. "We may be speaking different languages. The roughly 3,000-kilometer distance between our countries does not eliminate the fact that we are brothers, friends and relatives. History has made us brothers. Our beliefs, common culture and common traditions made us brothers. ... We will construct the future of this region together," he stated.

He also extended his thanks to Saudi Arabia for granting him the 2010 King Faisal International Prize (KFIP). Erdoğan was bestowed the prize for his service to Islam.

TURKEY AND JORDAN

Turkey, Jordan to work together for regional peace and stability

Friday, January 22, 2010

ANKARA-Hürriyet Daily News

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and his Jordanian counterpart, Nasser Judeh, agreed Friday to establish a high-level, strategic cooperation council and mediate between rival Palestinian groups.

President Abdullah Gül's recent visit to Jordan has had a positive effect on bilateral relations, Davutoğlu said, noting recent visa exemption and free trade agreements.

Turkey, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon have also agreed to establish a de facto customs union through the new free trade and visa arrangements.

“Turkey is exerting efforts that would form the basis of permanent peace and stability in the region. A strong economic cooperation zone will be created in the Middle East as a result,” Davutoğlu said.

The ministers also discussed the Israeli-Arab conflict and factional Palestinian strife. “We discussed how to contribute for a compromise between Palestinians. Turkey and Jordan are ready to do whatever is needed for regional peace and stability,” he said.

Judeh, meanwhile, said, “The Palestinian question lies at the heart of the Middle East problem and the Arab-Israeli conflict.” Praising Turkey’s regional role, Judeh said he agreed completely with Davutoğlu’s remarks.

East Jerusalem is “a red line,” and any one-sided action, including excavations in the vicinity of the Temple Mount or the construction of new settlements, will cause severe tension since both Muslims and Christians see it as a special place, Judeh said.

TURKEY AND EUROPEAN UNION

Gov’t delays new constitution, focuses on EU reforms

Tuesday, 19 January 2010 09:02

Today’s Zaman

The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government has decided to take up the preparation of a new and civilian constitution in 2011 following the general elections, placing a priority on European Union reforms for now, Today’s Zaman has learned.

The government, which has seen that passage of a new constitution through the current Parliament will not be possible because of the opposition parties blocking the government’s plans, wants to carry out its plans for a new constitution after the general elections of 2011. Until the elections, the government wants to work on the enactment of EU harmonization laws that do not require a constitutional change.

The allocation of seats in Parliament following the general elections of 2007 has made it difficult for the government to push ahead not only in constitutional changes but also in EU laws. The Republican People’s Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) continue to oppose a new constitution as well as many of the EU harmonization laws. Taking this into consideration, the AK Party, which has 337 seats in Parliament, wants to push for EU laws by using its parliamentary majority.

Taking important steps toward Turkey’s EU goal with eight harmonization laws in 2003, the government declared that 2010 would be “EU harmonization year,” having only enacted one harmonization law in 2009.

In 2009, a law that allowed members of the military to be tried in civilian courts in peace time was the only legal amendment that was enacted in line with EU harmonization laws.

Upon advice from Turkey’s chief EU negotiator, Egemen Bağış, the government decided to allocate one week of every month to EU harmonization laws. The EU process will continue to be one of the agenda items in the first Cabinet meeting of every month.

At a press conference on Friday, Interior Minister Beşir Atalay said that 2011’s general elections would be a referendum for a new constitution.

A bill proposed by the AK Party’s parliamentary group deputy chairman, Bekir Bozdağ, which aims to reduce the waiting period before a referendum can be put to public vote from 120 to 45

days, will supposedly turn the 2011 elections into a referendum on a new constitution. The bill will come to Parliament this week.

Since the CHP and MHP continue to oppose constitutional amendments, the government decided to postpone amending the Political Parties Laws, the Ombudsman Law, the Election Law and laws that will change the structure of the Constitutional Court and Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) to 2011.

Two harmonization packages in 2010

The government plans to work on two harmonization packages in 2010, one of which will be about freedom of expression and thought while the other concerns laws regarding the government's Kurdish initiative, which aims to resolve Turkey's long-standing Kurdish problem. Laws that will expand the freedom of the press will be made in the first package as well as amendments in the Turkish Penal Code (TCK) and the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) Law. The Human Rights Presidency, which operates under the Prime Ministry, will be turned into a Human Rights Council which will include representatives from nongovernmental organizations and human rights associations. Separate councils will be established to fight discrimination and ill-treatment by the security forces.

Freedom of expression training not enough for judicial officials

Tuesday, 19 January 2010 08:57

Today's Zaman

More than 13,000 Turkish judges and prosecutors have been trained in European Union-funded programs costing millions of euros, but Turkey still lagged behind other countries when it came to freedom of expression in 2009.

Within the framework of an agreement between the EU and the Justice Ministry, 8,500 judges have been trained on the European Convention on Human Rights and European Court of Human Rights. An agreement with the United Kingdom provided training on human rights for 4,500 judges and prosecutors, while another 375 were educated on that topic in a project with the Netherlands. Since 2006, 150 high-level security personnel have been trained in the topic of freedom of expression. Moreover, more than 100 judges and prosecutors were trained at Bahçeşehir University.

The Justice Ministry had all the rulings of the European court translated into Turkish and put them in the judiciary regulations bulletin. Under the Project to Support Human Rights Reform in Turkey, the Justice Ministry had 450 judges and prosecutors and 180 inspectors trained on the European court rulings. About 60 inspectors even went to Strasbourg to observe the court at work.

Judiciary personnel were expected to be careful in their decisions regarding freedom of expression, but last year's figures show a different picture as there were more than 4,000 court cases brought against journalists in 2009. That development prompted the government to broaden the context of freedom of expression.

According to the figures from the Human Rights Association (İHD), there were 387 convictions last year in conflict with freedom of expression. There are 36 journalists whose cases continue and who are under arrest.

Among those convicted are Star daily columnist Şamil Tayyar and Taraf correspondent Mehmet Baransu. Tayyar received a 20-month suspended prison sentence in the waning days of 2009 over his book on Ergenekon, titled "Operasyon Ergenekon" (Operation Ergenekon). The

sentence will be dropped if Tayyar does not commit a crime in the next five years.

Baransu, who exposed a suspected military plot named the Cage Operation Action Plan, which outlined plans to assassinate non-Muslim community leaders, testified to prosecutors at the Kadıköy courthouse on charges of violating the principle of confidentiality of an ongoing judicial process and was transferred to the İstanbul 5th Criminal Court of Peace for arrest. The reporter was later released by the court.

Tayyar and Baransu are not the only journalists facing charges for covering stories like Ergenekon; Justice Ministry data show that around 3,000 journalists face charges for covering the Ergenekon case.

Publications of 31 newspapers and periodicals were stopped and 66 books were pulled off the market last year. Additionally, 4,662 Web sites were banned.

Parliament approved the long-awaited amendment to Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code (TCK) criticized by rights groups, activists and the European Union for limiting free speech, so filing cases under that law was possible only with permission from the Justice Ministry. There were a record number of cases brought under Article 301, but thanks to that amendment, many were prevented from being carried out by the Justice Ministry.

2008 figures related to freedom of expression are not favorable, either. There were 12 newspapers and periodicals banned and 29 journalists were brought to court under Article 301.

Turkey Rapidly Makes Up Economic Difference With Eu Member Countries, Babacan

Thursday, 21 January 2010 15:55

TIME TURK

Turkish State Minister Ali Babacan said on Thursday that Turkey was rapidly making up economic differences with the European Union (EU) member countries.

Babacan on Wednesday evening attended a dinner hosted by Joan Clos Metheu, ambassador of Spain to Turkey. Spain currently acts as the EU rotating president.

Speaking at the dinner where ambassadors of EU countries to Turkey also attended, Babacan said a significant progress was achieved in Turkey's purchasing power parity and gross domestic product datum.

"Turkey on the one side improves in economic sense, and on the other side deals with poverty successfully thanks to the social policies it has been implementing," Babacan said and noted that Turkey was in a better position when compared to other countries in distribution of income and dealing with poverty.

Referring to new arrangements that took effect in social security area, Babacan said everybody under the age of 18 were taken within the scope of health insurance and jobless people who are above 18 made use of health system through a green card.

Babacan said Turkish government attached importance to democratic move, earmarked 17 percent of the investment budget to Southeastern Anatolia (GAP) project and aimed to conclude GAP project till 2013. "Investments will boost in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia region, and the region will become rich with the democratic move process and better security conditions," he said.

Babacan said global problems still continued, and pointed to a closer cooperation among countries for the solution of the problems.

"G-20 is a good platform for solution of global problems. Turkey, being a member of G-20, contributed to solution of problems," he added.

Babacan also reiterated Turkey's determination for EU membership.

Commenting on Turkey's economy, Babacan said cautious policies were underway anticipating all risks.

He said budget deficit, which was high for years, dropped 1.8 percent in 2008.

"Thanks to the reforms, Turkish banking system achieved a strong structure prior to global crisis," he noted.

Babacan said according to the estimations of International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Turkey was expected to be the most rapidly growing country in 2010 among the EU member countries.

Babacan said, because of Turkey's young demographic structure, approximately 500 thousand people joined labor market every year and positive developments were seen in employment market.

PM bitter towards EU for keeping Turkey at its door for five decades

Thursday, 21 January 2010 15:26

Today's Zaman

In strongly worded remarks Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan expressed deep disappointment on Wednesday over the way Turkey has been treated by the European Union, calling the treatment "unfair."

Erdoğan, who visited Abu Dhabi and Riyadh earlier this week, went from the Saudi capital to Jeddah on Tuesday night for talks with Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, the secretary-general of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

Speaking at a joint press conference following his talks with İhsanoğlu, Erdoğan was asked whether "Turkey's attitude towards Arabs, which has recently shifted in a positive direction, would change if Turkey becomes a member of the EU," the Anatolia news agency reported.

"We have an unchanging principle," Erdoğan said, quoting a verse from the Quran which says, "Pursue, then, what is exactly right [in every matter of the religion] as you are commanded [by God]."

"We have put forth our stance in the Middle East as a humanitarian position which stems from our own values," Erdoğan said, in apparent reference to Turkey's harsh criticism of Israel since last winter when a three-week offensive by Israel in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip left about 1,400 Palestinians dead, most of whom were civilians.

"We made our stance in Georgia clear as well, and we will do the same if such a thing happens in another place in the world," Erdoğan stated, highlighting that Turkey had defended Georgia's territorial integrity during its brief war with Russia in the summer of 2008.

"The EU will never change this [stance]. We consider the EU a political club but not a Christian club. There has been no other country that has been kept at the EU's door for 50 years. The EU has not acted fairly here."

Shortly after the creation of the European Economic Community in 1958, Turkey made its first application to join in July 1959. On Dec. 17, 2004, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations with Turkey, and on Oct. 3, 2005, the EU opened accession talks with Ankara, an EU candidate since 1999.

The EU suspended accession talks on eight out of 35 chapters in 2006 due to Turkey's refusal to open its ports and airports to traffic from Greek Cyprus.

France, which opposes Turkish accession to the EU, is unilaterally blocking talks on five

chapters that it says are directly related to accession. Greek Cyprus, for its part, announced last month that it would veto the opening of talks on five other chapters due to the continued failure of Turkey to open its ports and airports to its ships and planes. Turkey says it will not open its ports and airports unless the EU keeps its 2004 promise to allow trade with Turkish Cypriots. While addressing a joint meeting of Turkish and Saudi businesspeople in Riyadh on Tuesday, Erdoğan focused on Turkey's multidimensional foreign policy, saying this policy was based on solidarity.

"When we show interest in Palestine or in Gaza, we are doing this not because we are Muslims, we are doing it because we are human beings, and this is a humanitarian duty for us," Erdoğan said, in an apparent response to arguments that Turkey has been moving towards the Muslim world and shifting away from its alliance with the West.

"There is a very grave tragedy going on in Haiti," he said, referring to the devastating earthquake after which Turkey has decided to donate \$1 million for humanitarian assistance. "Haiti is 95 percent Christian. Won't we extend our hand to them in this case? Won't we send our urgent rescue teams?"

PM plays down visa expectations

Erdoğan, who on Tuesday suggested that Turkey and Saudi Arabia eliminate visa requirements for travel between the two countries, on Wednesday dampened expectations among the Turkish public, which hoped for free travel to Saudi Arabia during the Muslim pilgrimage season.

Turkey and Lebanon signed an agreement to abolish visa requirements for their nationals in a bid to boost trade, tourism and economic cooperation in early January. Syria, Jordan and Libya removed visa requirements for Turkish nationals in deals concluded last year.

In response to a question on the issue, Erdoğan made clear on Wednesday that progress could be maintained concerning diplomats and businesspeople.

The abolishment of visa requirements with Saudi Arabia in a similar way to how it has been done with Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Libya is not possible, Erdoğan said, adding that "we hope that this happens, too, in the future."

Hungarian State Secretary Says Budapest Supports Turkey's Eu Membership

Friday, 22 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Dr. Jenő Faller, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in charge of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, said on Friday that his country supported Turkey's European Union (EU) membership.

In an exclusive interview with the A.A. correspondent, Faller said relations between Turkey and Hungary were in good level both in commercial and in political sense.

Faller said Turkey was an old friend of Hungary, noting that, "Hungary will act as the rotating EU President in 2011. Hungary will continue to support Turkey's EU membership. I recommend you to make use of Hungary's experiences."

"Of course Turkey has place in the EU. Turkey's accession process has started. EU membership process also continued for a long time for us. We have met conditions of the EU. This criteria contributes to internal development of the countries. We appreciate reforms fulfilled by the Turkish society," he said and expressed Hungary's readiness to present all technical and political support for Turkey's EU membership.

Faller said more than 300 Turkish companies were active in Hungary, noting that more than 300

million USD Turkish investments were in question.

Faller said Hungary also attached high importance to participation of Turkey to Nabucco project, and added that bilateral investments between the two countries could rise.

Faller listed energy, automotive, environment and agriculture technologies as probable fields of cooperation.

Immigration Must Be 'Priority' Issue in EU-Turkey Ties

Friday, 22 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

The fight against illegal immigration must become a "priority issue" in the European Union's ties with Turkey, an EU candidate country, French Immigration Minister Eric Besson said Thursday. "This topic clearly must become a priority issue in the relations between the European Union and Turkey," he said at a news conference at an informal meeting of interior ministers from the 27-nation bloc.

"The situation in the Aegean Sea has become intolerable. The Greeks are under intolerable pressure. Turkey has clearly become a transit country and we need it to play the game," he said. Turkey is considered the main transit country for illegal immigrants from Asia. They arrive on the Turkish coast, and from there make their way to the Greek islands, the gateway to the European Union.

The EU has pushed Turkey to crack down on organized human trafficking rings and to agree on taking back the illegal immigrants who departed from its territory.

Besson said the EU must make the issue a priority in its EU entry talks with Turkey.

EU officials will raise the topic with their Turkish counterparts at a meeting on Feb. 19 in Ankara, the EU's outgoing justice and security commissioner, Jacques Barrot, said.

"It would be a mistake to stigmatize Turkey," he told Agence France-Presse in an interview.

"Turkey must be considered as an important partner. It has a role to play in the region and we must let it decide what kind of relationship it has with the EU," he said.

"In any case, we must open the possibility of a very strong partnership [with Turkey]."

Turkey Not To Allow Any Gmo's Import against EU Standards

----Thursday, 21 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkish Agriculture & Rural Affairs Ministry stated on Wednesday that it would not allow import of any genetically modified organisms which were not appropriate to EU standards. The ministry recalled that a regulation on import, processing, export, control and supervision of genetically modified organisms was put into effect on October 26, 2009.

The regulation caused debates and was not understood clearly in media, non-governmental organizations and science world in Turkey as of the enforcement of the regulation, and thus, several articles of the regulations were changed on November 20, 2009, noted the ministry. Following legal process, final change on the regulation was made on January 20, 2010, and accordingly, import of genetically modified organisms which were not appropriate to EU standards would not be allowed, added the ministry.

Genetically modified foods are foods derived from genetically modified organisms. Genetically

modified organisms have had specific changes introduced into their DNA by genetic engineering, using a process of either Cisgenesis or Transgenesis. Critics have objected to GM foods on several grounds, including safety issues, ecological concerns, and economic concerns raised by the fact that these organisms are subject to intellectual property law.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Turkey, Russia lifting barriers to shuttle trade

Monday, 18 January 2010 09:11

Today's Zaman

Turkey and Russia have decided to remove a large part of previously erected obstacles to the shuttle trade. Today's Zaman has learnt that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, shook hands last week to provide mor

As a modern type of caravan trade, Russians were transporting goods in suitcases to sell them in certain marketplaces in Turkey and were purchasing Turkish products to sell in their own markets on their return. However, citing the lack of necessary regulations in terms of quality and national standards and the possibility that this trade was causing an increase in the unregistered economy, Russia introduced excessive duties on this trade and also changed baggage limits from 50 kilos to 35 kilos in 2004 to restrict it. In addition, the restrictions included limiting the value of merchandise in a Russian's suitcase to a maximum of \$1,000 from the previous \$10,000. As a consequence of the mutual talks between the two prime ministers, Russia agreed to remove some of the restrictions in an attempt to raise the trade volume between the two countries to the desired level of \$100 billion in five years. The volume of the shuttle trade, in this context, is likely to increase to \$15 billion by 2010 and \$25 billion by 2012 from its current levels of around \$6 billion. Considering the two countries are planning to abolish visas by May of this year, reaching \$15 billion in the suitcase trade seems likely. The shuttle trade was around \$10 billion before the Russian's imposition of restrictions, but afterwards it shrank to \$3 billion

Today's Zaman also learned from anonymous sources that the commerce ministers from Turkey and Russia will meet in the coming days to have further discussions on the details of this issue. The ministers will try to rework the current restrictions. It was learnt that they will increase the maximum value of goods in suitcases from \$1,000 to \$3,000 and the baggage limit to 100 kilos. The shuttle trade between Russia and Turkey hit its peak in 1996 with \$8.8 billion. In 1997, it was sharply down to \$5.8 billion and in 1998 it fell further to \$2.2 billion as a consequence of an economic crisis that shook Russia.

Restrictions brought about by amendments to the Russian customs law in 2004 caused Russian tradesmen to utilize opportunities in China. However, this change in direction didn't last long as Russian merchants realized that the lack of quality of Chinese goods was damaging their sales. As a result, those who had previously made good profits in the suitcase trade started to petition the government to make concessions in their strict policy against the shuttle trade with Turkey. A similar process was also experienced in Turkey. Following the falling numbers of suitcase traders from Russia because of the restrictions, Turks started to conduct more trade with people from the Turkic republics, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. Currently, merchants from 40 countries participate in the shuttle trade in Turkey.

Türk-İş holds 'democracy and rights' demonstration

Monday, 18 January 2010 09:11

Todays Zaman

The Confederation of Turkish Labor Unions (Türk-İş) held a demonstration under the banner “Democracy and Rights Meeting for Bread, Peace and Freedom” in Ankara yesterday in protest of the government.

Workers affiliated with Türk-İş, some members of political parties and civil society organizations supporting the workers gathered at the Ankara train station early yesterday. The group headed along Talat Paşa Street to Sıhhiye Square. Five hundred and sixty buses brought workers from across Turkey to Ankara for the demonstration, which started in Sıhhiye’s Abdi İpekçi Park.

Speaking at the demonstration, Türk-İş head Mustafa Kumlu thanked all the participants for supporting them despite the adverse weather conditions. “There are some who are disturbed by our demonstrations. Instead of being disturbed, bring solutions. We express our opinions and adopt a stance. What those governing the country need to do is lend us their ear and be sensitive concerning our demands. If they ignore them, the responsibility then belongs to those who insist on [repeating] their mistakes, not to the workers,” Kumlu said.

He also brought up the issue of the workers dismissed from Turkey’s alcohol and tobacco monopoly, Tekel, who have been protesting against the government. Members of the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers’ Unions (DİSK), the Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions (KESK) and the Turkish Union of Engineers and Architects’ Chambers (TMMOB) as well as some student unions and women’s organizations also took part in the demonstration. The participants held banners in protest of the government which read: “The victors will be the workers who stand firm” and “We will sell those who sell us.”

Easyjet Increases Number Of Its Routes To Turkey To Eight

Thursday, 21 January 2010 15:55

TIME TURK

The EasyJet, one of Europe's airline companies offering its passengers cheap flights, increased number of its destinations in Turkey to eight

The EasyJet Airlines said in a statement on Thursday that it would commence direct flights between London's Gatwick Airport and Antalya International Airport on May 30, 2010.

The Gatwick-Antalya flights will take place three times a week on Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Seats are on sale from January 21 which fares from 38.99 euro.

The other routes of the EasyJet to Turkey are London Gatwick-Istanbul, London Luton-Istanbul, London Stansted-Bodrum, London Stansted-Dalaman, Bristol-Bodrum, Liverpool-Bodrum and Basel-Istanbul.

Established in 1995, the EasyJet is a British airline company operating domestic and international scheduled services on nearly 500 routes between 104 European and North African airports. The airline primarily offers low cost point to point services but sometimes operates full service charter flights on behalf of other companies. The company served more than 46 million passengers last year.

IMF anchor may lead Turkey to grow by some 5 percent

Thursday, 21 January 2010 15:28

Todays Zaman

Turkey is expected to enjoy 4.3 percent growth this year with an anticipated 200-basis-point hike in benchmark interest rates through the end of the year, but a long-awaited stand-by deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) could revise these predi

İş Investment released its latest report on expectations for the Turkish economy in 2010, at a press conference yesterday in İstanbul. According to the report the Central Bank of Turkey is expected to increase interest rates starting in September 2010 due to a substantial deterioration in the inflation outlook.

The government raising commodity prices, mostly energy, to increase revenue along with weak fiscal performance will also add risk to the inflation outlook, the report stated. According to İş Investment, inflation is expected to push policy rates up from their historic low of 6.5 percent by around 150-200 basis points by the end of the year and increase by 450 basis points by 2012. Despite this, İş Investment believes this increase can be delayed or implemented to a lesser degree if a possible IMF stand-by deal is signed.

The report says Turkey does not need a deal with the IMF for financial reasons; however, it finds the deal necessary as an “anchoring” position. “If the government can convince people that it will stick to the Medium Term Economic Program, we favor an IMF-free Turkey. But the program is not beefy enough to be a medium-term anchor on its own,” said Burcu Ünüvar, a senior economist with İş Investment. Such an IMF agreement may also bring about a credit upgrade, carrying Turkey to an “investment grade league,” she added.

After contracting by between 5.7 and 6.2 percent in 2009, the economy will enjoy a moderate expansion this year due to a recovery in inventory cycle and improvement in domestic spending, the report said. The predicted growth rate for this year is 4.3 percent; however, Ünüvar added that this rate could rise to around 5 percent with an IMF deal. She, however, stressed that it would take at least two years for the Turkish economy to reach its 2007 peak.

İş Investment predicts the value of the İstanbul Stock Exchange (İMKB) to increase to the 61,000-point level by the end of 2010. This figure is expected to reach around 66,000 points with an IMF agreement, which can lower Turkey’s risk premium by some 1 percent. Emre Sezan, head of equity research at İş Investment, said the Turkish banks’ outstanding earnings performance of last year is estimated to be some 49 percent of total İMKB earnings and added that they expect companies in the export industry to generate the lion’s share of this year’s total earnings

Tusiad Is No Interest Group," Association'S New Head

Thursday, 21 January 2010 15:57

TIME TURK

Umit Boyner, the newly elected chairperson of Turkish Industrialists' & Businessmen's Association (TUSIAD), said on Thursday that TUSIAD was not a group of interests, but the most effective pressure group in Turkey.

Delivering a speech after the election of TUSIAD's new board members at the association's 40th general assembly meeting in Istanbul, Boyner said, "TUSIAD is Turkey's most effective, intellectual and independent non-governmental organization".

Briefing the participants on TUSIAD's plans for the upcoming period, Boyner said the new board of directors would prepare a program for the term 2010-2011, which would be made public in February.

Boyner said TUSIAD's new program would be more matter-focused and would comprise of measurable criteria.

Pointing to the transformation process Turkey has been going through for the last 10 years, Boyner said competition would become harder in the world after the global crisis.

"At this point, we will focus on issues such as preventing the perception of infrastructure sectors like energy and communication as sources of public income, carrying out an effective and sincere fight against unrecorded economy and improving innovation capacity," she said.

Commenting on Turkey's EU membership process as well, Boyner said the "2014 full membership target" expressed by the government in 2007, was no longer discussed.

"We do not accept those who turn this target and Turkey's EU membership into an almost imaginary and laughable bid, while it is possible to complete the technical adaptation process to the *acquis* in a couple of years," she said.

Boyner also said, "any approach which is not carefully planned and which is lack of a strategic unity, can trigger polarization in a society. Unfortunately, we have become people suspecting everybody and everything instead of trying to resolve our problems altogether. We do not talk to each other, we do not listen to each other. Instead of seeking for truths, we develop conspiracy theories. We are tired of this tension. We all want a more prosperous Turkey."

"Although 30 years have passed from the establishment of September 12th regime, the Constitution prepared by that regime is still valid. We think that the 10 percent election threshold should be invalidated first. We also complain about the Election Law and the Political Parties Law, which turns our political parties into oligarchic bodies and prevents them from establishing organic ties with different segments of the society. It is hard to understand these faults in our system," she said.

Boyner said that a powerful democracy was the pre-condition for a more prosperous society.

"We are going to prepare a new program for the period of 2010-2011. We will share it with both TUSIAD members and the public opinion in February. We want to further develop our cooperation with non-governmental organizations," Boyner added.

Turkey Eager To Boost Commercial and Industrial Relations, Ergun

Friday, 22 January 2010 12:03

TIME TURK

Turkish Industry & Trade Minister Nihat Ergun said on Friday that Turkey was willing to boost commercial and industrial relations with Brazil.

Ergun, currently in southeastern Brazilian city of Sao Paulo to attend a series of meetings, said both countries accelerated efforts to organize reciprocal visits, ensure circulation of goods and establish partnerships.

Referring to the high potential of the two countries, Ergun said, "Turkey is located in a region in the middle of Europe, Asia and Africa. It is an important center from where you can reach markets of more than 50 countries with a 3-hour flight. Brazil is also like Turkey. Development levels of Turkey and Brazil are alike."

Ergun said actual 1.7 billion USD trade volume between Turkey and Brazil should be boosted, "trade volume should be increased to 10 billion USD soon," he added.

Ergun will meet with Brazil's Minister of Development, Industry & Trade Miguel Joao Jorge Filho on January 22.

Within the framework of the gathering, the two officials are expected to sign a memorandum of

understanding on encouragement of commercial relations and investments between Turkey and Brazil.

Ergun is scheduled to return to Turkey on January 25.

Turkish Stock Market Opening

Friday, 22 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkish stock market opened at 54,534.21 points on Friday.

The Istanbul Stock Exchange (IMKB) National-100 index was down 766.97 points at the beginning of the first session over to the closing of the second session on Thursday.

Money in Circulation Up

Friday, 22 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Money in circulation increased 24.4 million TL to 36.686 billion TL Thursday.

36.662 billion TL was in circulation on Wednesday, January 20 according to Turkish Central Bank figures. (1 USD = 1.485 TL)

Turkish Stock Market Down In First Session

Friday, 22 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkish stock market dropped 1.55 percent at the end of first session on Friday.

The Istanbul Stock Exchange (IMKB) National-100 index fell 857.98 points over Thursday's closing.

The index closed the first session at 54,443.2 points.

Turkey's Tourism Sector Grows in 2009 despite Global Recession

Friday, 22 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Tourism sector in Turkey grew in 2009 by 2.81 percent despite a global economic recession which forced the global tourism industry to shrink by 4.3 percent, an official report has said.

Over 27 million foreign tourists visited Turkey in January-December period last year, said the report released by Turkish Culture and Tourism Ministry on Friday.

Nearly 4.5 million German tourists visited Turkey in 2009 and Russia was the second country to send biggest number of tourists to Turkey with 2.6 million which was followed by Britain with 2.4 million visitors.

The report said according to figures of a world tourism organization, the number of tourists globally dropped to 880 million from 920 million in 2009.

2010 To Become Recovery Year for Tourism Sector

Thursday, 21 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

2010 would be the year of recovery for tourism sector, chairman of a leading tourism

confederation said on Thursday.

Turkish Hoteliers' Federation (TUROFED) chairman Ahmet Barut told the A.A correspondent that Turkey's tourism sector was affected by global economic crisis less than other countries. Barut said 27 million tourists visited Turkey and the country obtained 21 billion U.S. dollars in revenues in 2009.

"Impacts of economic crisis will also be felt this year but the Turkish tourism sector will keep growing," he said.

"Our goal is to attract 28 million tourists to Turkey in 2010 and obtain an income of 22 billion U.S. dollars," Barut said.

Turkish December tourist arrivals rise 12.4 pct from year ago

Friday, January 22, 2010

ANKARA – Bloomberg

HURRIYAT

The number of foreign tourists visiting Turkey rose 12.4 percent in December from a year earlier.

About 1.2 million visitors arrived in the month, up from 1.1 million in the same month of 2008, the Tourism Ministry in Ankara said on its Web site on Friday.

In the whole of 2009, arrivals rose 2.8 percent from a year earlier to 27.1 million, the ministry said.

IMF non-deal could result in stock correction

Friday, January 22, 2010

ISTANBUL – Bloomberg

HURRIYAT

Turkish stocks face a potential 10 percent decline over the next three weeks if the country fails to agree on an International Monetary Fund loan before then, according to Taaleritehdas East Asset Management.

The country is waiting for a response from the IMF to proposals that may lead to a new loan accord, newspapers reported on Wednesday, citing Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said on Jan. 11 that Turkey will resolve talks with the IMF within "days or weeks."

"If the government meant to sign an accord, it should do so relatively soon," said Ari Metso, who helps oversee 1.2 billion euros (\$1.7 billion) as Chief Executive Officer of Taaleritehdas. "After that the market won't believe it" and stocks may "easily" retreat 10 percent, he said in an interview in Istanbul on Thursday.

Istanbul Stock Exchange's benchmark ISE-100 index closed Thursday at 55,301 points, the highest level since Dec. 31, 2007. The index has gained 1.9 percent since the start of the year. A drop of 10 percent from a 12-month peak constitutes a "correction," according to a common definition.

Turkey's economy is recovering from a contraction of 6 percent last year, according to government estimates. Turkey needs external financing "for growth purposes," not to help the country manage any economic crisis, central bank Governor Durmuş Yılmaz said on Wednesday.

Deal would be boost to stocks:

An agreement on a loan, under negotiation since May 2008, would help propel Turkish stocks 30 percent from current levels, said Metso, who manages a 43 million-euro Turkish equity fund, the Taaleritehdas Lydian Lion fund. It returned 119 percent in euro terms last year, beating a 97 gain on the main ISE-100 share index.

“Turkey will sign an accord with the IMF,” said Metso. “The rhetoric that we have been hearing from government officials during the last few weeks has been very positive.”

The political cost of tying economic policy to IMF demands would outweigh the financial advantages for Erdoğan as he starts his campaign for re-election next year, Ahmet Akarlı, a London-based economist at Goldman Sachs Group, said in a telephone interview earlier this month. Turkey’s \$2 billion bond sale at the start of this year shows the government is able to raise the funds it needs from investors, he said.

Meanwhile, the IMF said it remains in “preliminary talks” with Turkey about the conditions for a possible loan package.

“We are having close and productive discussions with Turkey,” Caroline Atkinson, director of external relations at the Washington-based fund, said in a press conference in Washington on Thursday. “These are about what would be the key elements of a program and the situation remains as it was: that if the authorities wish to request a program, we can go and have further discussions.”

She added that the IMF has not “had a mission fielded or requested” from Turkish officials to negotiate details of a loan program.

Atkinson also said the IMF board will vote Jan. 27 on a \$100 million loan to earthquake-devastated Haiti that will have no interest payments until 2012. “Rapid financial support, we believe, is an important element to address those human costs,” she said.

Central Bank chief to represent Turkey at Davos

Friday, January 22, 2010

ISTANBUL - Daily News with wires

HURRIYAT

Turkish Central Bank Gov. Durmuş Yılmaz will attend the World Economic Forum in Davos, while the country’s top politicians opt to stay away.

Yılmaz will attend the event next week in Switzerland, Cihan Aktaş, spokesman for the Central Bank, told Bloomberg on Friday.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stormed out of the summit last year, saying, “I am finished with Davos” following a row with Israeli President Shimon Peres in the public forum. The two clashed over Israel’s military assault against Gaza.

Erdoğan said on Jan. 11 that he would not attend this year’s meeting, followed by Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan’s announcement on Jan. 14 that he would not attend either. A day later, Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek told reporters a trip to the Gulf made him drop his plans to attend.

Erdoğan’s public support in Turkey surged after he walked out of the debate with Peres, according to poll data published in February.

The theme of the Geneva-based forum’s 40th conference, held in the Swiss ski resort of Davos, is to challenge decision-makers to “rethink, redesign and rebuild” the global economy after the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.

About 1,400 executives from 1,000 companies and more than 30 heads of state or government are scheduled to attend the five-day summit, which begins Jan. 27. Yılmaz will depart to Davos after releasing the bank's inflation report on Jan. 26.

SOCIAL ISSUES

Turkey also needs museums to confront its past

Sunday, 17 January 2010 16:58

Today's Zaman

Turkey needs to establish a museum to remember and confront the military coups d'état in its history, representatives of several civil society organizations have said.

Recently a new museum was established in Chile to remember the country's 1973 coup. The museum exhibits the belongings of coup victims and many documents from that period. Asked by Today's Zaman whether similar museums and exhibition halls should be established in Turkey, activists and human rights advocates largely agreed.

They argued that such a museum is critical for Turkey. They suggested different locations for such a museum, most often former prisons, but some suggested opening a museum just across the street from Parliament as a stark reminder of the vitality of civilian politics. Some of them suggested that a Turkish coup museum should include special departments devoted to the press and women during coup periods.

Şebnem Korur Fincancı, chairperson of the Turkish Human Rights Foundation (TİHV), recalled that in Chile perpetrators of the coup faced trials for their crimes and only after that was it possible to establish a museum.

"In Turkey, yes, of course, we need a museum like the one in Chile, but first of all we need to bring the perpetrators of the coups to justice, like Chile did. We should change the Constitution, which does not permit us to do that; after that, we should establish such a museum, or even multiple museums," she said.

Selçuk Candansayar, chairman of the Individual and Social Mental Health Association, said that such museums have several functions and one of them is to urge to society to act within the boundaries of morals and ethics.

"Such museums not only prevent people from forgetting their past, they also teach us what to remember, why it must be remembered and how to remember it. They are also very helpful for mourning, which is necessary for mental health," Candansayar said.

Aytekin Yılmaz, chairman of the Confronting the Past Association (Yüzleşme Derneği), underlined that unlike many Latin American countries, which had only a single coup d'état in their history, Turkey has experienced several coups and this is why Turkey is late to establish such a museum.

When it comes to where to establish such a museum, Yılmaz and other civil society representatives suggested that a coup museum be established at Diyarbakır Prison, which was once considered one of the 10 worst prisons in the world. But experts also underlined that establishing such a museum in Diyarbakır would not be enough, and there should be more museums in other cities.

They suggested that Mamak Prison in Ankara and Metris Prison in Istanbul, both infamous for torture during coups d'état, be repurposed into museums. In addition, Fincancı suggested

establishing another museum right in the courtyard of Parliament or across the street from it, to remind deputies of the importance of democracy. Doğan Tılıç, a writer for the Birgün daily and a lecturer in media studies at several universities, said it would be a good idea to turn the house of Kenan Evren, the leader of the coup in 1980, into a museum, pointing out that his house in Marmaris is currently for sale.

He added that in such a museum there should be a section devoted to the press during coups. “Media research points something out: If there is no media support for a coup, it is impossible for it to be successful. This is true in Turkey. So I suggest that we should display the articles of the writers who supported coups; at least such a move will introduce a feeling of shame in some of the columnists who are still writing today and presenting themselves as democrats,” Tılıç said. Another civil society representative who thinks that special displays are needed in a museum like this is Hülya Gülbahar from the Association for Education and Supporting Women Candidates (KA-DER).

“It would not be out of place to establish a display addressing women and coups d’état. Women were victimized by the coups, there is no single woman who was detained or arrested during these periods who was not sexually harassed or assaulted,” she said.

Gülbahar added that especially during the Sept. 12 coup, all women’s associations were closed down and their archives were burned.

“We are still suffering from it; our memories as the women’s movement in Turkey were almost destroyed totally, but still there are many objects to be put in this museum, especially from the struggle of the women’s movement against coups,” she said.

Regardless of their suggestions, civil society representatives think that there are many objects to be exhibited in such a museum, including the belongings of people who were killed, books that were burned during the coups, photographs showing the brutality of the coups, video-recorded memories of the victims of torture and documentaries about the coup perpetrators.

“There are so many things to put in such a museum, even a large museum will not be enough,” Yılmaz said.

Looking to quit smoking once and for all?

Thursday, 21 January 2010 15:38

Today's Zaman

Cigarette prices have risen sharply with the arrival of the new year, and thanks to new laws and regulations put into place over the last year, the ban on cigarette smoking in public places in Turkey has been largely successful.

Nowadays, smoking on mass transit vehicles and in closed public places is banned. And with recent hikes in prices, even smokers who have been addicted for years are looking for ways to rid themselves of this addiction. Of course, there are many different methods used by smokers when they do finally start on the journey of trying to give up cigarettes. But experts also warn that if you really want to be successful at this, you should make sure you give up smoking under the advice and guidance of your doctor. This is because often, when a smoker decides to give up cigarettes, he or she does so only to re-start later. And after a few rounds of failure at quitting, the smoker loses hope and says “I guess I can no longer do this,” at which point he or she becomes enveloped once more in a cloud of cigarette smoke.

One of Turkey’s most prominent anti-smoking centers is located at Hacettepe University’s preventative oncology department’s anti-smoking unit. There are thousands of cigarette addicts

who have come here to curb their habit. Professor Ismail Çelik notes that people are behaving more knowledgeably these days than in the past when it comes to quitting smoking. He also says that prior to the ban on smoking in public places, the center was only open once a week for services, but now it is open twice a week. He says that with increasing demand, the center will be open more days a week if necessary.

All right, but which method will this center use to get you to quit smoking? The first thing you should know is this: As long as you don't want to quit smoking, no one is going to make you quit. Which is why your first promise needs to be to yourself before you head out to get help. You will find therapy that relies on medicinal support as well as therapy that uses psychological support here. When you first arrive at the center, the doctor will ask you to provide some basic information, such as how long you have been smoking and since what age you have been smoking. After this, you will be asked to write down what it is you hope to gain from quitting smoking. Then you will have your actual medical check-up, which is the final step before the construction of a personal program based on your level of current smoking habit, personal health and personality. Çelik notes that the medicine-supported aspect of the therapy lasts for three months and that after that people come to the center for routine check-ups and follow-ups. He adds, "We use patches and gum as well as medicine employed in anti-depressant therapy." There is another important reason -- aside from your health, of course -- that has added recent urgency to quitting smoking: the price of cigarettes. One pack of cigarettes has risen to TL 7, which means that for addicts, especially those making minimum wage, smoking has become prohibitively expensive. One week's worth of cigarettes has become extraordinarily expensive, and if you add this to the cost you will pay for all the health problems these same cigarettes might cause, this is enough to make anyone think twice.

If you can stop smoking for one year, you are free from addiction

If someone who used to smoke is able to stop for one year, his or her body is 100 percent cleansed of nicotine. Both doctors and therapists say that if they can get someone to stop for a year, it means the therapy has been one hundred percent successful. At the same time, if someone who has quit for a year starts up again after a year, the reasons for starting again are neither physical nor mental. It is basically the same thing as if someone who never smoked started smoking.

Of course, there are countless methods put to use in the struggle to get people to quit. Some of these are hypnosis, electric stimulation, herbal, ozone and acupuncture, to name just a few. Emre Çiçek, who is an aesthetics doctor based in İstanbul, asserts that people can stop smoking after just one session of acupuncture. Here is how he describes this method: "Our patients need to have stopped smoking 24 or 72 hours before coming to us. But I can get them to quit permanently at the first session. There are two more support sessions afterwards. Quitting smoking is something that calls for psychological support. With acupuncture, our first aim is to make the nicotine in the body active. When people are quitting, they need to feel that nicotine. We make the nicotine in the body active by using gold and silver needles."

Çiçek goes on to describe the other stages of the acupuncture therapy, noting that each body has a "sympathetic nervous system," and that: "This system helps people feel more active, more alive. When this system is really in action, people feel the need for more nicotine. We block this system and thus reduce the sensation of need for cigarettes. We also speed up the metabolism, thereby helping rid the body of toxins from the cigarettes faster. We speed up the working of the lungs, so they are cleansed faster."

Here's the way, if you say, 'Now is the time to quit!'

Another method to consider is called MORA therapy. In this method, rather than classic uses of medicines, cessation of smoking is achieved through information sent through electromagnetic vibrations. Therapy is thus achieved as the patient's body absorbs these vibrations into its own energy. The body is actually healing itself. The electromagnetic waves that spread throughout the body's meridians naturally balance with information provided from outside the body, and the result is that the body's perceived need for nicotine is reduced and balanced.

And, of course, there are always the most natural ways known to help people quit, ways that depend on some elements you might even have ready in your own home. Some people swear by mint, rosemary or even cloves and turmeric. Of course, these herbs may be better as support elements rather than your main course of action.

Snow is coming to Istanbul to stay

Friday, January 22, 2010

ISTANBUL - Daily News with wires

HURRIYAT

According to weather forecasts, the snowfall expected to affect the Edirne, Çanakkale, Tekirdağ and Kırklareli provinces of Thrace on Friday evening will reach Istanbul on Saturday morning. The snowfall will get heavier Saturday evening on the European side of the city and extend to the Anatolian side in the late hours, covering all of Istanbul in snow. The snowfall is expected to continue Sunday and Monday as well.

Weather temperatures are expected to drop in Istanbul, not rising above 0 degrees Celsius for three days starting at midnight Saturday. The weather temperature is expected to rise above 0 degrees only after noon Tuesday.

Meteorology officials also said tsunami-like waves of up to 7 meters are expected to hit the western Black Sea shores of the city near the northern Bosphorus entrance at Kilyos and Demirciköy.

According to forecasts, winds of 50 knots will cause the weather system to reach a speed of up to 113 kilometers per hour and create larger-than-average waves. The winds will begin to gain strength Friday after midday before transforming into gale-force winds.

Bad weather causes black outs, water and gas outages

Saturday, January 23, 2010

ISTANBUL
Daily News with wires

HURRIYAT

The heavy snow and high speed winds have been affecting Istanbul this weekend, causing black outs as well as related natural gas and water outages.

Istanbul Municipality Disaster Coordination Center, or AKOM, has issued a statement advising Istanbul residents to turn off their combi boilers during black outs.

Heavy snow resulted in several large black outs around Istanbul on Saturday due to an outage in the Bosphorus energy lines. Parts of Istanbul did not receive electricity for up to 50 minutes. Although the malfunction in the energy lines have been fixed, AKOM is advising people to turn off combi boilers during black outs.

According to the statement from AKOM, when electricity comes back on it can create a surge that can blow the fuse on regulators. Repairing the blown fuse requires units to respond to the

call but due to large demand it can take several hours for these teams to show up. In order to avoid large scale problems it is necessary that people turn off their boilers, according to the AKOM statement.

Electrical outages may also result in water and natural gas outages, the statement said.

There have been several ferry cancellations due to heavy rains. Istanbul Sea Busses, or IDO, cancelled the following routes Bandırma/Yenikapı 18:30, Bostancı-Yenikapı/Bandırma 18:00, Bandırma/Yenikapı-Bostancı 15:30, Kabataş-Kadıköy-Bursa 13:00, Bostancı-Yenikapı/Armutluk-Armutlu 10:30, Yalova/Pendik 9:30, Pendik/Yalova 9:30, Yalova/Yenikapı 09:00, Bursa-Kadıköy-Kabataş 09:00, Yenikapı/Bursa 07:30, Bursa/Yenikapı 07:30.

High velocity winds, reaching 85 kilometers an hour, tore down 10 trees, blew off 23 rooftops, toppled seven telephone and electrical posts. Firefighting units have responded to these calls.

COMMENTARY

[JTW Interview] Turkey-Russia Relations: What Next?

Thursday, 21 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kamer Kasim, expert at the International Strategic Research Organization (USAK) and IR Lecturer at Abant İzzet Baysal University, discusses the recent developments in Turkish-Russian relations.

1) What kind of joint projects will Turkey and Russia be working on in the near future?

As we have witnessed in recent years, relations between Turkey and Russia have improved significantly; however, we see that these improvements have not extended much outside of energy and economics. In 1984, cooperation began on the energy issue. Following the Cold War era, a new type of relations began between the two states. The atmosphere allowed Turkey and Russia to cooperate on regional issues as well. Of course this cooperation was not completely without competition, especially in the political sense due to Russia having difficulty in accepting the independence of the new republics that sprang up in the Caucasus region.

This has created some problems but despite those, cooperation in the energy field has continued and Turkey chose the Blue Stream Pipeline to obtain Russian natural gas. Sixty-five percent of Turkey's natural gas now comes from Russia and currently, Russia wants a second pipeline to go through Turkey; the second Blue Stream pipeline project. In recent years, energy projects have become discussed more and Turkey now wants a Russian oil pipeline to pass through Turkey; the Samsun-Ceyhan pipeline. This has now become a condition that Russia should accept if they want a second gas pipeline to flow through Turkey.

As we can see, there is overdependence on Russian natural gas, 65% is a huge number and that does not put Turkey in a very comfortable position. Turkey wants to diversify its supply sources for natural gas but it also wants to continue its partnership and cooperation with Russia. For this reason, Turkey and Russia continue to negotiate over the Blue Stream II pipeline and also Turkey's possible support of the Russian proposal for the South Stream pipeline. Turkey continues to push for the Samsun Ceyhan pipeline to further Ceyhan's importance in world oil markets.

Another project between the two that was discussed is the possible construction of a nuclear power plant in Turkey. Russia wants its own companies to build it and both sides addressed this at Prime Minister Erdogan's visit to Russia last week. They have reached a level that both sides may reach a final agreement this year about the construction of the nuclear power plant.

2) How can Turkey and Russia work together to promote regional stability?

Turkey and Russia are both regional powers in the Black Sea and Caucasus; both countries working together are important for stability in the region and in finding a solution to frozen conflicts within it. In order to have political success with this, both countries need to make compromises; however, we are far away from reaching this point because Turkey and Russia have a divergence of interests regarding those conflicts. In fact, even in Prime Minister Erdogan's last visit, Putin stated that there is no connection between the Nagorno Karabakh (NK) issue and the opening of the Turkish Armenian border. This clearly demonstrates their difference of opinion on a critical issue in the Caucasus and on one of the most important. This creates problems because Turkey has openly stated that before the border between Turkey and Armenia opens, the Nagorno Karabakh conflict should be solved and an agreement should be reached for the withdrawal of the Armenian troops from those occupied territories. Unless this occurs, Turkey will not ratify the protocols that were signed last year on October 10th. This was Turkey's clear policy and has been a major issue for them. Turkey expects Russia to put pressure on Armenia for a solution because any kind of deal regarding the conflict must include a troop withdrawal from the Armenian side. It is only with Russian pressure that Armenia will do this because without that pressure, it is too risky for Armenian politicians, including Sarkissian to pull those occupying troops out. Russia is probably the only country that can put that kind of pressure on Armenia to convince the government to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. If Turkey and Russia reach some sort of compromise about the issue, both countries will be serving the stability of the region and it will lead to political cooperation between them because at this point, although there are talks about a strategic partnership in their relations, the two states are far from that due to their political differences which have prevented both sides from establishing concrete political cooperation.

One other issue that has prevented regional cooperation is the situation in Georgia. After the Russian invasion in August 2008, Russia recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and this created a new, tense situation in the Caucasus. Turkey generally supports stability and the territorial integrity of its neighbors but right now, it supports a solution to this troubling issue. The future of Russian politics regarding its relations with Georgia will affect Turkish-Russian cooperation in the Caucasus. Aside from energy cooperation, they can contribute to the stability there, but in order to do this, Russia must respect the sovereignty of all regional countries.

3) How does the EU react to Turkey's strengthened energy cooperation with Russia since they are trying to incorporate alternative routes to Russian gas?

Turkish-Russian cooperation in the energy field and in the last two years especially, has opened up ways for Turkey to possibly support the South Stream project. As we know, Europe supports Nabucco which will carry natural gas from Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and other states' to Europe through Turkey. Many claim that both projects cannot be realized together, only one can continue because there is not enough natural gas for both projects. Some Europeans argue that the Nabucco project should also be Turkey's priority because Turkey is dependent on so much of Russia's natural gas. They believe that any project that will bypass Russian gas will benefit Turkey as well so it should support Nabucco. Turkey does support Nabucco; however, Turkey thinks of other alternatives as well regarding recent cooperation with Russia. Turkey has given strong signals to the Russian side that it will support the South Stream project and allow the pipeline to pass through its territorial waters.

What could be affecting Turkey's decision right now is that the EU did not act unitarily in terms

of the Nabucco project. Many EU countries claim that they support Nabucco, but they could not implement a unitary and supportive policy towards the supply countries like Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. They did not give much attention to the needs of those countries. This is why these two important supplier countries have begun to look towards Russia for support. This has also damaged the future of the Nabucco project. I believe the Russia-Georgia war had a negative effect on the opinion of these supplier states because during this time and afterwards, despite EU criticism towards Russia, Russia followed its own policy, recognizing the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This gave signals to Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan that the EU may not be trusted in terms of political issues. For them, the Nabucco project is not only an economic issue but a political one as well. This policy of the EU also affected Turkey's own policies towards Nabucco and the South Stream project.

Additionally, the negotiation process for Turkey's accession has not been going well, particularly in terms of the energy issue. The EU's policy has almost pushed Turkey to cooperate more with Russia. It is difficult for any Turkish citizen to understand that while EU companies work with Russians on the South and North stream projects, the EU tells Turkey not to support South Stream Project but to support Nabucco. It is clear that there is no unitary EU position regarding the Nabucco project. Different EU countries and companies have different interests. In that environment, Turkey has also chosen to diversify its policies regarding those energy projects. While Turkey gave strong signals that it supported the South Stream project, authorities have openly stated that Turkey also still support Nabucco; however, the future of that project very much depends upon the EU's and US' decisiveness on the issue.

4. What are your thoughts on the lifting of visa requirements for Turkish and Russian citizens? Recently, Turkey has mutually lifted the visa regime with several countries. The general idea with this policy is to ease the movement of Turkish citizens so that people can visit and travel throughout these countries in addition to increasing trade relations to help businesses. Compared to the other countries that Turkey has lifted visas with, Russia will be a special case due to its huge population of 142 million people.

Many Turkic people live within the Russian Federation as well, and at present, thousands of Russian tourists visit Turkey every year. If they are lifted mutually, we should expect more tourists and business ventures. This will definitely increase the trade between the two which will benefit Turkey since there is a trade imbalance in Russia's favor currently. For example, in 2008, trade volume was \$38 billion; however, Turkey's exports to Russia were a mere \$6.5 billion, while Turkey's import was 31.5 billion dollars. In 2009, we saw a drop in trade due to the economic crisis, leaving the volume at \$22 billion. So, as we can see, despite a big trade volume this does not directly correlate to healthy trade relations. In the future, if we talk about Turkish and Russian cooperation, then Russia must first start importing more products and goods from Turkey and Turkish products should have easy access to Russia. Lifting the visa regime and these restrictions will contribute to this. This current large trade deficit in favor of Russia cannot continue and more and more people in Turkey will start to question Turkey's overdependence of Russian natural gas and trade imbalances between the two countries.

Alight problem that could arise to this visa lift though, is the possibility of a refugee influx due to the volatile nature in some parts of the Russian Federation, specifically in Chechnya and Ingushetia, where conflicts might resurface once more.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kamer Kasim is expert at the International Strategic Research Organization (USAK) and IR Lecturer at Abant Izzet Baysal University

Interview by Stacy Maruskin (JTW)

Thursday, 21 January 2010

Yes to Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia, but What About Turkey?

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Ercument Tezcan

Tuesday, 19 January 2010

The European Union lifted the visa requirements for Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia on December 19, 2009. At this point, it would be appropriate to first take into consideration how the visa requirements for these countries began, and then the process of lifting the requirements should be discussed.

The EU approved the list of third countries that would be subject to visa requirements with regulatory statute number 2317/95, dated September 25, 1995. Macedonia, Albania, Serbia and Montenegro were not on the list in the annex of the regulatory statute. After the Amsterdam Treaty came into effect, this regulation was replaced by regulation number 539/2001 (ATRG, L 81, 21.3.2001); therefore, with the exception of Croatia, all the Western Balkan countries were included in the negative list (liste negative) of countries which would be subject to visa requirements.

While the issue is regulated by the aforementioned legal arrangements, the Salonika Strategy or Salonika Agenda, which was adopted June 21, 2003 in order to make the Western Balkan countries closer to the EU, put a new face on things.

Thus, even though this decision concerning the countries listed above seems brand new, it is possible to lean the beginning of this on the Salonika Agenda of 2003. Within the context of the application of the agenda, the EU first made agreements with these countries on simplifying the visa requirements and readmission in 2007. After these agreements, with the November 6, 2007 declaration (see also COM (2007) 663) concerning the enlargement strategy, the Commission announced that they intended to take concrete measures for the simplification of the visa requirements towards these countries and that a new dialogue process would be started with each of these countries and new road maps would be presented. This offer of the Commission was positively received by the Council of Ministers on January 28, 2008, and henceforth another declaration related to the topic was established on March 5, 2008 (see also, COM (2008) 127). Furthermore, the visa agreements made came into effect on January 1, 2008.

Then, in the same year, the Commission initiated a dialogue and prepared road maps for each country. There are four points emphasized in the road maps: 1- Reliability of the documents, 2- Prevention of illegal migration, 3- Public order and security, 4- Foreign Affairs. It should be stated that the last part is taken into consideration in terms of free movement of persons. Yet, if a more general evaluation is made, it can be said that the road maps contain a better established asylum system, strict protection of minorities, increased cross border cooperation, approval of more effective legislation considering the struggle against organized crime and corruption.

The first evaluation made by the Commission considering whether the countries applied these points in the road maps was presented to the Council of Ministers in November 2008. The second evaluation was made on June 12, 2009. After that, the Study Group under the Council of Ministers made a positive evaluation. The Council, in its first evaluation, determined that Macedonia fulfilled all the criteria. In the next level, it stated that the other two countries also satisfied the criteria.

In this issue, following the countries' fulfillment of the criteria, the EU Commission offered to

lift the visa requirements towards these three countries on July 15, 2009 (Commission document number 2009/0104 CNS). Jurally, this procedure towards these countries becomes concrete with the change in the regulation number 539/2001 mentioned above. To clarify, these countries were removed from the negative list (list-I) annexed to the regulation. But, this removal necessitated a change in the regulation. This offer of the Commission was first conveyed to the European Parliament for consultation. The Parliament approved its decision on the offer with 550 yes, 51 no and 37 abstention votes in November. However, in its decision the Parliament generally implied that in case Albania and Bosnia Herzegovina fulfill the criteria stated by the Commission in the road map, it would be appropriate to lift the visa requirements towards these countries as well.

Hence, the Parliament roughly offered three changes concerning the Commission's offer: The first is the shifting of Albania and Bosnia Herzegovina from annex I of the regulation number 539/2001 (annexe-I) to annex II (annexe-II) like the other three countries. The Parliament especially emphasizes the necessity of not discriminating against these countries. The second change is that if the criteria are not satisfied (that is, when there are setbacks), there will be a suspension of the visa exemption. According to this, the Commission should determine reference criteria and also determine whether they have been applied by each country. Then, the evaluation of the Commission should also be approved by the Council of Ministers. The Commission evaluation considering Albania and Bosnia Herzegovina should be made at the beginning of 2010. Finally, the last change offer is related to Kosovo. The Parliament, at this point, offers the Commission to start dialogue with this country within its limits of authority concerning the prevention of a discrimination against the citizens of the country within the framework of the application of the Salonika Agenda of 2003, and it also offers the representation of a road map as was done with the five countries.

As it was stated above in detail, the visa exemption decision towards these countries was approved by the Council of Ministers (with the offer of the Netherlands) in a decision taken in the meeting of Ministers of Justice and Internal Affairs on November 30, 2009 after consulting the Parliament. Therefore, the visa requirement for these three countries was lifted on December 19, 2009. Yet, it does not mean that the citizens of these three countries can reside within the EU. It only includes the right to reside for a maximum of 90 days within a six-month period in countries that are part of the Schengen System (including Norway, Sweden and Iceland, but not including the U.K. and Ireland). Of course, it also requires having a biometric passport.

Regarding Foreign Minister Davutoglu's criticism considering the issue, if we consider the issue in terms of EU-Turkey partnership law, indeed it is possible to see that the member states started the visa requirements following the Additional Protocol. And it is already registered by the Court of Justice and became inoperative because of the Standstill rule. However, as it is a judicial process, there is a case by case condition. That is to say, it is not systematic and general; it is necessary to file a suit and then to win it, etc. If it is ever not exactly the same situation, there is not the right of quotation of the case either. Similarly, the same awkward situation continues within the framework of the Customs Union as well. The goods have the mobility without visa requirements, but the lorry driver who will carry the goods has to obtain a visa, the boss who produces it also needs to get a visa, etc., etc.

At this point, the situation can be seen as slightly improved since the Mehmet Soysal decision of the Court of Justice in 2009. That is, there can be exemption from visa requirements in terms of the production of services. Yet, is not it weird that none of the member states have turned a hair after the decision? The countries like Germany, which seemingly took a step, did not do anything

more than make things difficult. That is, things are more difficult now. When the documents necessary for visa exemptions are seen then it will be clearly seen that the things are deteriorating.

Actually, Davutoglu touched on a raw nerve. It is certain that there is a double standard here. That is to say, while permanent derogations for the free movement of persons for Turkey is placed on the agenda, on the other hand, the visa requirements are being lifted for other countries, some of which are not even candidates. And heaven knows why the leaning on the Salonika Agenda started recently. More interesting for us is that the process progresses at a dizzying speed.

What is more, within the same context, the condition of Bosnia Herzegovina and Albania, which are not supplied with the same opportunity, also supports it. That is, I wonder if these countries are kept out of this application just because they are Muslim. But, the declaration of the EU Commission states that these countries have not fulfilled the requirements above, and if they fulfill them, the same decision can be made for these countries in 2010 as well. At the meeting in which the environment article was opened, Mr. Rehn in his reply to Mr. Davutoglu said similar things about it. But, in our opinion, the main thing that scares the EU is the possibility of a huge wave of asylum-seekers coming from Turkey. Actually, most of the European authorities seriously think that this is possible. If we take a look at the countries for which the visa requirement has been lifted, we will see that this possibility is quite low. Besides, what Rehn wants to say in a way is exactly this: we can think of removing the visa requirements if Turkey becomes safe in terms of asylum, migration, struggle against illegal migration, etc. Yet, heaven knows why the Commission is still thinking and has not yet taken action. It acts according to the situation. Moreover, we think that Turkey having lifted visa requirements with countries towards which the EU is skeptical, such as Syria and Libya, may establish another problem also. When we look at the issue from this point of view, it is possible to say that Turkey's stance is different from that of the EU as it happens in many issues like this.

Turkey's Reaction to the Western Approach on the Iranian Nuclear Crisis

Thursday, 14 January 2010

Arzu Celalifer Ekinci

JTW

Columnist

HURRIYAT

For more than six years the United States and western allies have been pressing Iran to halt its nuclear enrichment program, which Tehran insists is for civilian purposes. Despite the emergence of hope for a solution to this crisis by the October 1st Meeting in Geneva, an escalation has been witnessed, specifically in the recent weeks. Both Iran and western countries have determined deadlines and an aggressive approach has been adopted on both sides.

Although the Obama administration shows a willingness for an engagement policy, they are also discussing new sanctions to be applied towards Iran. But as usual, it is not very easy to take such a measure within the Security Council due to the disagreement among the veto holders of the Council. The first crack came from the Chinese side explaining that it will not support new sets of sanctions at the moment since there is still some room for diplomatic solutions. There will be new round of p 5 + 1 meetings at the end of this month in which they will try to come to a consensus on new sanctions. In a statement, the U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, said the

U.S. remains interested in engaging with Iran, even as it considers ways to pressure Tehran through sanctions. She also added that since there is a small group of decision makers in Iran, the best way to pressure Iran to come clean on its nuclear ambitions is to impose sanctions aimed at the country's ruling elite[1]. While not mentioning any name, it seems that she indirectly meant The Revolutionary Guard Corps which is already subject to sanctions by the United States. But it can be said that maintaining the unity among p5+1 will not be that easy.

Another alarming declaration came from Head of U.S. Central Command, General David Petraeus, saying that the US has developed contingency plans in order to deal with Iran's refusal to curb its nuclear program. Although he stated that he thinks there is still some time to engage Iran in diplomacy, he also stressed that "it would be almost literally irresponsible if CENTCOM (United States Central Command) were not to have been thinking about the various 'what ifs' and to make plans for a whole variety of different contingencies." [2]

Actually, Petraeus' statement was thought provoking for the countries of the region, and Turkey was one of those countries who reacted to the recent pressure over Iran's nuclear program. Turkey's Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, criticized major powers for pressuring Iran while tolerating Israel's assumed nuclear arsenal. From the beginning Turkey's position on the Iranian nuclear crisis is clear. It always reiterates that Turkey is against the development of nuclear arms by any country in the region, it supports the peaceful nuclear program of Iran, it asks Iran to be more transparent and flexible to solve this crisis and it urges the western countries to use diplomatic tools rather than the coercive measures that may also harm the countries of the region. The Turkish Prime Minister's reaction to the latest statement from the head of CENTCOM is understandable in that sense because the statement came from an official who is also the head of both fronts in Afghanistan and Iraq. This statement is more serious than any previous ones. It shows the back-up plan of the U.S. Government for another possible front, and this for sure is something that can cause disconcert for the countries of the region.

Turkey's concerns about the possibility of another front to be opened near its territories and harsher sanctions that can affect its interests are a strong driving force behind its efforts as a facilitator in the crisis. Actually, Iran, despite some internal disagreements on the issue, recently said that it would accept the swap formula[3] on Turkish soil which is a welcome development. Turkey spent a lot of effort for the realization of this formula as a solution since the end of last year. Nevertheless, today we are speaking about the same vicious circle: once again sanctions and once more remarks relating to a military attack. This is the main reason behind Turkey's reaction to skirmish statements that may lead to another conflict in the region. But in that between a few words can be said in relation to the method used by the Turkish Prime Minister for criticizing the western approach. It is for sure that as a country of the region, Turkey has the right to criticize the unfair and biased policies, but this should be done in a diplomatic way, in good timing and on an appropriate platform. Otherwise, it could be interpreted in a way that may harm the sense of your aim and policy both within your country and outside. While Erdogan mention that "We convey this message all the time to our Iranian counterparts to ease the tensions. We tell all sides that the problem could not be solved through any means other than diplomacy and peaceful negotiations," [4] and say "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," [5] the words that remain in the mind are those criticizing the West as being unfair in asking Iran to stop its program and does not care about Israel's nuclear weapons. There is no doubt that he is right about the necessity of fair policies, but especially when speaking or dealing with some chronic problems the words should

be chosen diplomatically; rather than use statements that can be interpreted as political tricks in order to gain support from the public opinion or those that could avoid the real picture. It is better to use more effective and constructive tools in order to contribute to a solution. Consequently, Turkey, with its multidimensional foreign policy has an ambitious goal of “zero problems with neighbors” and tries to play the mediation game in major regional problems. Keeping in mind that allies also have the right to criticize each other, it is also important to remain calm and select the correct words which could not avoid the real picture and harm your constructive efforts. Last but not least, Turkey as a state with its unique character of having good relations with all sides should be more careful to keep the balance and if it aims to play the mediation role for a stabilized region, a difficult task in itself, it should be more careful. Taking into consideration the sensitive character and mindset of the countries of the region, more constructive and effective tools will be required rather than just criticizing; otherwise all efforts spent will remain fruitless.

Israel in a Vortex of Anger

Monday, 18 January 2010

Ihsan Bal

Head of Security Studies

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It can be said that Israel is experiencing its most difficult days since its establishment in 1948. The shame created in the West by Jews, who were subjected to the Nazi Holocaust during the Second World War, constituted a great credit in the establishment and support of the state of Israel.

Certainly, in the formation of this credit, the worldwide Jewish intellectuals that established the state of Israel, scientists and artists had also important contributions. The widespread Anglo-Saxon support, which sees the support for Israel as a duty, and international institutions including the UN, prevented the condemnation of Israel or the implementation of international sanctions against this state. However, in our day, it can be said that Israel does not have the right to move comfortably anymore. Since its establishment, Israel, which has been notably disobedient to international law, should become aware of the reality that it rapidly uses up the tolerance given to it.

Israel needs to take the responsibility for its policies and to think about learning lessons. Declaring every criticism against Israel to be an act of anti-Semitism, or overcome criticism by recalling the Holocaust, does not help to solve anything. Every state is responsible for its implementations. However, the approach of ‘Israel has always excuses’ does not only start to damage Israel, but also the Jews, spread around the world. As a matter of fact, the public opinions in Europe indicate that huge antipathy towards Israel is raising. We are in a period in which a strong wind is blowing in the opposite direction even in the streets of the West. Despite this, it is impossible that Israel continues being to be unable to think clearly like a driver in a wrong lane who blames everybody coming from the opposite direction. Turkey is one the most important balancing factors urging Israel to behave more rationally in its region and to abandon its policies that imperil Jews around the world. Turkey, which has opened its territories to persecuted Jewish people throughout history and has recognized Israel’s existence since its establishment, has the right to state clearly the realities of this state. The statement by the Israeli government that ‘Turkey is the last country to give a lesson to us’, is not only an unfortunate

declaration from this perspective but also ignores the philosophy of Turkish-Israeli relations. Rather, Israel should approach Turkey's criticism from the perspective that "a friend is cruel to be kind."

Nobody can turn a blind eye to Turkey's good intentions and efforts to contribute to regional stability as an indirect mediator in the negotiations between Syria and Israel in 2007-2008. Despite this positive effort, the statement that 'Turkey is the last country to criticize Turkey' is only attributable to Lieberman who is known for his radical attitude. Turkey comes first amongst the countries that have the right to criticize Israel. The reasoning for this situation should be sought in history, for the Turks do not have any bad records towards the Jews and are not pursuing any hidden agenda in the Middle East.

In order to understand who is in the right lane in Turkish-Israeli relations, it is enough to look at the reality that Israel comes first in the list of the countries that seriously pose a threat to world peace, even in the eyes of the Western world from which Israel receives a great deal of support, while Turkey has favorability ratings of 75% in the streets of the Middle East. Therefore, as soon as possible, it would be beneficial for Israeli officials to give up arguing with Turks and to keep their ears cocked towards Turkish advice. The Israeli officials who attempt to score points in the domestic arena with criticism against Israeli policies will not help solve any problems through peculiarities such as the latest Ambassador crisis. Wayward egoist politics will not only isolate Israel, but will also become a fuel for much feared anti-Semitic movements.

A friend is cruel to be kind; maybe this friend is Turkey.

Monday, 18 January 2010

From the Bosphorus: Straight - Disingenuous diplomacy in Turkey, Armenia

Thursday, January 21, 2010

HURRIYAT

The diplomatic effort to "normalize" Turkish-Armenian relations, the long set of incomplete steps that began with a football match played in Yerevan last year, would appear all but lost. The political straw set to break the back of this diplomatic camel: language in a brief by the Armenian constitutional court that salutes the ever-problematic word "genocide."

As readers know, this is a description of the death and destruction attending the collapse of the Ottoman Empire that we do not accept. The reasons for our rejection of the term are many, and well known. But we also realize and respect the historical weight of the asymmetrical trauma experienced by the Armenian people and understand why the symbolism of this word is at the core of Armenian identity.

So despite the convergence of opinion by historians, we know a consensus on the lexicon to describe this history will remain elusive. This is precisely why we so strongly favor the interaction, exchange and communication that opening the border and establishing basic diplomatic relations would promise.

We also are well aware of the formidable pressures that come to bear on Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Armenian President Serge Sarkisian. The Armenian diaspora that basically funds the day-to-day operation of Armenia (through, for example, a \$100 million infrastructure check from U.S. financier Kirk Kerkorian) is for the most part passionately opposed to this accord. Similarly, nationalist settlement in Turkey has fused with the extreme opposition of Azerbaijan, which has many points on which it can apply pressure in Turkey – chief among them energy.

Politicians from both sides are all over the map on this issue, often disingenuously so. For example, the Armenian side is correct when it argues that the language of the constitutional court brief – which approved the forwarding of the now-famous protocols for parliamentary ratification – is extraneous to the binding legal process. It is, but it is also a sop to the opposition in the Armenian parliament who will exploit it in ways easy to imagine.

Erdoğan is right when he argues that Armenia imposed an intermediary step in the approval process, namely the court’s review. That Turkey did not require similar judicial review is evidence of our sincerity, Erdoğan says. But this intermediate step, a relic in Armenian law carried over from its Soviet-era constitution, is a requirement in the ratification process of all international treaties and accords. More disingenuousness.

These protocols are in the deep interests of both Armenia and Turkey. Failure at this point would have recriminations we do not want to even ponder, particularly as it would relate to an American president spiraling downward in the polls as we approach that nettlesome date of April 24.

What to do? Let’s at least suspend the disingenuousness.

Does the Turkish military make plans to kill Turkish people?

Friday, January 22, 2010

Mustafa AKYOL

HURRIYAT

Have you taken a look at the recent exposure about the amazing adventures of Turkey’s Dr. Strangelovish generals? It is a must-see.

What I am referring to is the action plan called “Balyoz” (Sledgehammer) that the liberal daily Taraf published a few days ago. The extensive document, whose full name is the “Sledgehammer Security Operation Plan,” was apparently drafted in 2003, a little after the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, came to power.

This was a popularly elected government that most generals disliked – as they probably still do today. Hence they brainstormed together to save the nation from its mistake. And, quite patriotically, they planned a road map for a military coup that would, allegedly, cost the lives of some innocent citizens. (Don’t be surprised: Collateral damage has never been an obstacle to the heroic efforts of our mighty military.)

Against ‘reactionary forces’

The masterminds of the plan, reportedly, were retired Gen. Çetin Doğan, the then-commander of the 1st Army, retired Former Air Forces Cmdr. Gen. İbrahim Fırtına and another retired general, Ergin Saygun. According to Taraf, their scheme was devised at a military meeting attended by 162 active military members, including 29 generals.

One bold idea was to stir up chaos in society through violent acts so that a military takeover would be justified. Options included bombing an Istanbul mosque during the Friday prayer, which would provoke the Islamic masses and lead them to a clash with security forces. In the face of this “Islamist uprising,” the military would roll its tanks, and save the country from the incumbent “reactionary forces.”

Another option was intentionally bringing down a Turkish warplane on the Aegean, putting the blame on Greece, and thus creating tension between the two countries – something that would show the dovish government as weak, and, again, lead to the military’s ascendance.

The Sledgehammer document also included creative solutions about the media. Some 36 journalists, mostly liberal columnists, were listed as “those to be arrested.” One of them is Cengiz Çandar, whose column I hope you enjoy in these pages. (Personally, to be honest, I was a little disappointed to be out of the list. But then I recalled that I wasn’t writing at all when this document was drafted, i.e., in 2003. I am just hoping to show up later in updated versions.) On the other hand, there was another list of 137 journalists that the generals put under a category of “those who can be helpful.” I am sure you must have heard at least some of them before. What the generals ultimately wanted to do with all this, apparently, was “a return to 1923.” That year marked not only the beginning of the Turkish Republic, but also the coming of the “single party” dictatorship of the Kemalist ideology, during which Turkey had not the slightest touch of democracy and political freedom.

So, the main goal of the generals was to restore a bygone dictatorship. (Well, what else can you do with a military coup, right?) What needed to be done the day after was also nicely planned. “All the assets and financial resources of individuals and groups suspected of involvement in acts of reactionaryism will be confiscated,” a paragraph from the document reads, “and necessary steps will be taken to freeze their financial resources abroad.”

In other words, the junta would steal the money of all citizens and institutions that it deemed too Muslim.

So, at the end of the day, some citizens would be killed, others would be arrested (and God knows how they would be treated in military prisons), and many others would be financially crushed.

All for the sake of saving the Turkish nation – from its own religious beliefs and political choices.

All internal enemies

There are many other details of the Sledgehammer plan, and you can read them in the press.

The military’s response, so far, has been bizarre. The man under the spotlight, retired Gen. Çetin Doğan, first spoke to a Web site and said, “It is the job of the Turkish Armed Forces to protect Turkey from external and internal threats.” He also noted, “The military of course has plans against the internal threats ... which include [religious] reactionism.”

Later he only rejected parts of the plan, such as mosque bombings and bringing down warplanes. The General Chief of Staff, too, made an ambiguous declaration. It did not deny the existence of the plan, but argued that it was only about “foreign threats” and “martial law.” It also said, “nobody with conscious and reason can accept the allegations,” but did not address the fact the “allegations” just came from what is apparently written on the military document.

Of course, the “allegations” will remain as allegations until they are proven to be true by a court. But what court? Yesterday, the Constitutional Court, an ideological ally of the military, annulled a recent law that would allow military personnel to be tried in civilian courts, instead of the military ones. (Here is one of the niceties about our regime: Soldiers can be tried only by other soldiers.)

So, how can we, the People, ever be able to get the real answer to the chilling question that the Sledgehammer plan, besides previous others, puts in front of us:

Does the Turkish military really make plans to kill Turkish people?

AKP, CHP prep for constitutional battle

Friday, January 22, 2010

GÖKSEL BOZKURT

HURRIYAT

The CHP's 'landmine-like' resistance to constitutional change

The ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, is working on a constitutional package. According to information leaked by the government wing, important changes are made in the package. Discussions continue over 10 items in the package such as making it more difficult to close political parties in light of the Venice Criteria, paving the way for trials of military officers in civilian courts, the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors, or HSYK, arrangement in the Court of Appeals, 100 Turkey representatives, positive discrimination toward women and children, protection of private data, the right to make collective agreements and to strike for civil servants. The AKP, however, doesn't have enough votes to pass the amendments on its own. And the opposition has announced it has no support for the government in the issue. A popular vote is the only option under these circumstances...

However, it is not an easy task for the AKP. The government party has the power to pass all these parliamentary motions and then seek referendum, but a serious resistance may block Parliament. And just for this reason only, the AKP may have to postpone many critical legal arrangements. Let me clarify this a little...

The Republican People's Party, or CHP, leader Deniz Baykal in a Central Executive Body meeting this week said, "It is not appropriate to take constitutional change to a popular vote without reaching consensus first. We, as the CHP, will do everything in our power to prevent the amendments." Baykal acts like a harbinger of a possible resistance if the constitutional amendments package is submitted to Parliament. How tough could this resistance be? Baykal believes the planned constitutional change is the "continuation of the AKP's battle with the state institutions." By changing the Constitution the AKP aims for some critical gains against the judiciary and the military, according to Baykal. He also claims that a possible referendum is a "trap" to cheat the people. And such a strong resistance will have serious impacts in Parliament. The AKP wants to bring changes to the agenda as soon as possible. But some significant arrangements are already pending in Parliament. The Trade Bill and the Debts Bill being at the top, there are so many other important draft laws on the line. If a possible constitutional package is submitted to Parliament in February or March, it could clog Parliament until the summer term. There is an abundance of articles in Parliament's bylaws that could give an upper hand to the CHP and the Nationalist Movement Party, or MHP. And the first impression is that the CHP will resist together with the MHP in parliamentary commissions and the General Assembly; thereby causing a serious blockage.

We saw the latest example of this exhibited in the previous term by the CHP with the MHP's support. The CHP prevented the AKP's motion on cleaning up landmines, applying all the rules including breaching the bylaw and managed to block Parliament. The AKP failed to pass the bill despite having the majority, instead the party surrendered in the end and withdrew the motion. The AKP later made a few arrangements in the method of public procurements about cleaning up landmines.

So, the CHP is preparing more seriously for the constitutional package. I should make a prediction at this point that the resistance may take to the streets because the CHP tends to show resistance not only in Parliament but also in the streets against a new constitution. Even if the AKP seeks a popular vote for constitutional change, this could be very difficult to pass in Parliament. Ahead of elections, Parliament is preparing for the most serious row between the government and the opposition.

The dove cannot be shared

A group of Democratic Socialist Party, or DSP, members departed from the party and have united around the late Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit's wife Rahşan Ecevit. And a new political party, the Democratic Socialist People Party, or DSHP, is formed. The two parties, however, do not seem to have a truce on the "dove." The DSP leader Masum Türker says, "The dove is ours," referring to the party emblem that features a dove. Yet DSP founding member Rahşan Ecevit says, "I will definitely allow the use of the dove." So the dove figure has already been placed on the DSHP emblem. The two are seeking a solution in court now. Yet another politician comes forward, claiming to have the dove figure: Mustafa Sarıgül. He is also a former member of the DSP and likes doves very much. In every meeting of the party, white doves were let go. But the tradition was broken at the İzmir meeting of the Movement of Change, formed by Sarıgül. Doves were dyed yellow. As Sarıgül's movement becomes a political party, its emblem would be a yellow dove and that wouldn't be a surprise to anyone, but of course, only if Rahşan Ecevit allows it.

E-appointment starts in Parliament

Transportation Minister Binali Yıldırım has announced that the e-state system is in the pocket of people and it will be widespread. Yıldırım also gave a surprise. He said beginning from February the appointment system in Parliament would be included in the e-state system. Therefore people will be able to make e-appointments and easily meet with parliamentary deputies via the e-state. The number of weekly visitors to Parliament reaches into the thousands. We'll see if the traffic will slow down with e-appointments.

Turkey not participating in Davos this year

Friday, January 22, 2010

GİLA BENMAYOR

HURRIYAT

We have gotten used to Turkey being an agenda item during the World Economic Forum, or WEF, meetings for years in the Swiss town of Davos.

After all these years, Turkey is, for the first time, not participating in any of the panels on Turkey. Following the "one minute" incident last year, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that he wouldn't attend Davos meetings anymore. As far as I see, there is not a single minister in Davos.

I think we'll only have a chance to see the Central Bank Gov. Durmuş Yılmaz this year in Davos. What a big difference compared to previous years! If we turn around to see how the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, expressed itself at the WEF, this is the picture: Top officials of the newly established AKP in January of 2002 appeared for the first time in New York for the WEF meeting, was held in the United States to show solidarity in the aftermath of Sept. 11.

We ran across Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül in the hallways of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, though they did not attend the meetings with ministers of the period İsmail Cem and Kemal Derviş.

Erdoğan and Gül had contacts with various officials and institutions.

Erdoğan's first address

The AKP won a landslide victory in the 2003 general elections. Erdoğan was not a Parliament member but accompanied the prime minister of the period to Davos. They posed in a WEF family picture taken in the snow but had no voice in the Convention Center.

Besides, leaders' wives were wearing headscarves and that was a first in Turkish political history, bringing so many questions to mind, naturally. Erdoğan as the prime minister and Gül as the foreign minister, attended Davos meetings in 2004. Erdoğan made his first speech in front of the WEF family in Davos. As I scan through my old articles, I see that his speech was a disappointment for all.

It was an average speech better suited to a party convention meeting, and reflected nothing about the vision and place of Turkey in the world.

The Davos case is closed

We see an experienced Erdoğan in Davos 2005. He delivered a speech calmly. In the meantime, ministers of the AKP became regulars of Davos. Former Finance Minister Kemal Unakıtan and especially State Minister for the Economy Ali Babacan regularly showed up in Turkey-related panels.

In 2007-2008, Erdoğan didn't attend the Davos meetings but Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek accompanied Babacan. And finally, Davos 2009, where the "one minute" incident took place. Last year, Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in addition to a team of experts attended the WEF meetings.

Did Turkey not have anything to say?

Turkey will not be presented in Davos in 2010. As Erdoğan said, "The case is closed as I said last year in Davos," announcing that he will not join the WEF panels. Neither will Babacan. Şimşek who previously said that he would go to Davos now seems to have changed his mind. Cüneyt Zapsu, however, is optimistic. Preparing the Davos programs of Erdoğan and the Turkish delegation, Zapsu says, "Perhaps, there could be last-minute changes."

But I am not that optimistic when I look at the program, because I see only Yılmaz's name on the panel schedules. What is this year's theme of the 40th WEF annual meeting in Davos? "Rethink, Redesign, Rebuild."

Leaders will discuss how the world can shape a future under the threat of unemployment, systematic failures and global warming in the aftermath of the global economic crisis. Does Turkey have nothing to say in these debates?

Turkey-Armenia: There's no will for there to be a way

Thursday, January 21, 2010

Semih Idiz

HURRIYAT

Has the Constitutional Court of Armenia thrown a spanner into the works of the "Zurich Protocol's" that aim to normalize ties between Armenia and Turkey? There are those on both sides who think (and hope) so; and yet there are those think (and hope) that this is not the case. The bottom line is that the court decided the protocols in question are in compliance with the Constitution of Armenia. It added no qualification to the key sentence spelling out this final decision.

But it still confused minds; because it hitched some conditions to the protocols in the six-page text it issued later explaining the details of its decision. Most notably, it declared that nothing done under these protocols could violate Article 11 of the Armenian Declaration of Independence.

That article makes it a duty for Armenia to try and get the world to accept the events of 1915 as genocide. This angered Turkey, of course, which said, “It violated the spirit and letter of the protocols.”

Officials on the Turkish side were quick to point out that the protocols foresee the establishment of an independent panel of historians to look into the events of 1915.

They added that the court’s ruling prejudices what independent historians may say.

As an aside here, it must be said the attempt by both sides to force a particular interpretation of 1915 on each other is a dead-end-street. No matter what an independent panel of historians say – and it is unlikely they will come up with one view on the matter – Armenia will not stop claiming a genocide happened.

Neither will Turkey stop denying that such genocide occurred. If there is anyone on either side who believes that the process foreseen in the protocols will finally and definitively vindicate one side or the other as far as this complex historical issue is concerned, they are dreaming.

The best that a panel of historians can do – and it must be remembered this is not a court panel – is provide as much information and explanation about what happened in 1915. That way those who are concerned with this historic matter can come out with their own views on those events and the context in which they took place.

The Armenians side believes, of course, that this will “obfuscate” a historical fact. For many on the Turkish side, however, what comes out will not be “obfuscation” but “clarification” and “contextualization.” At any rate, there can be no end to this discussion.

To return to the main subject, Turkey says now the protocols have been “wounded” because of the ruling of Armenia’s Constitutional Court. It has not, however, declared the protocols “dead.” But the whole question is in a vacuum.

It is not clear if the court said the protocols are in compliance with its constitution, and therefore their texts can stand as they are, or if it said that the text will have to be changed following this ruling.

It is, of course, the texts of these protocols that are important for the world at large. Both sides had, after all, poured months of efforts, under the auspices of Switzerland, to work out its extremely careful wording.

Compliance or non-compliance by the sides will therefore be ultimately determined according to these texts, whether they are ratified and enter the body of international law.

The protocols basically incorporate a detailed outline for establishing not just diplomatic ties but also normalizing relations in every sphere of human activity, according to a set of principles and certain timetables.

If the court is now calling on the texts to be revised, then this will effectively deem the protocols null and void and negotiations between Turkey and Armenia will have to start from ground zero (if indeed they can at all).

Whether the Yerevan government wants to go that way is an open question. The court’s decision also shows it, too, was caught between a legal and a highly emotional political issue, but could not openly risk returning the Turkish-Armenian process to ground zero.

It is clear, however, that these protocols are not moving. There is a tangible reluctance and reserve on both sides in this respect. The Recep Tayyip Erdoğan government is not blameless either having effectively slapped a “Karabakh condition” on the ratification of the protocols by the Turkish Parliament.

Erdoğan boasts that “his government is one step ahead of the Armenian government,” having sent the protocols to Parliament for ratification. He argues that the rest is up to Parliament now.

In the meantime he keeps insisting that it is unlikely that Parliament will ratify the protocols, unless there is movement on the Karabakh front to Azerbaijan's advantage.

This is completely disingenuous.

Erdoğan is playing to the political gallery because he knows there is serious opposition in Turkey to the protocols. If he wanted to show real leadership, however, he could guide his party, which has a majority in Parliament, to vote for the protocols without delay.

Some argue, of course, that many of Erdoğan's own deputies would vote against the protocols given the sensitivity of all issues related to Armenia and Armenians. If so, that begs an even bigger question. Why did the Erdoğan government initiate this process in the first place then if it was not going to be able to complete it?

In the meantime, the confusing ruling of the Constitutional Court has given a fresh argument for those in Ankara who are reluctant about the Turkish-Armenian process.

Neither does there seem to be extreme enthusiasm in Yerevan over the issue.

The government there has said it will only endorse the protocols if the Turkish Parliament does and hence the current stalemate. It also appears to be doing little to support the protocols in public against harsh opposition and criticism.

Put openly, there is no will in Ankara or Yerevan at the present time to find a way to move forward in their ties. If there was, that way forward would be found regardless of the difficulties.

Big revenues in tourism

Thursday, January 21, 2010

MİTHAT MELEN

HURRIYAT

World tourism will grow between 3 percent and 4 percent in 2010, according to the World Tourism Organization, or UNWTO, which has estimated that global tourism dropped by 4 percent in 2009.

The number of people visiting other countries decreased to 880 million people last year as well. Compared to 2008 figures, tourists spent 6 percent less money in 2009 but tourism expenditures around the world increased to \$994 billion. The global crisis and the H1N1 virus, or swine flu, had negative effects on world tourism.

European tourism was the most affected compared to other continents. In 2009, the number of tourists visiting European countries dropped by 6 percent, initially frightening tour operators. In the U.S., the number of visiting tourists decreased by five percent and certain investments to the sector were postponed. Africa was the continent that gained most from tourism in 2009, by an increase of 5 percent.

In 2010, the World Football Championships, which are going to be held in South Africa, the world fair in Shanghai and the Winter Olympics in Vancouver are expected to reactivate global tourism. Increases of between 1 percent and 3 percent in Europe, between 2 percent and 4 percent on both American continents and between 5 percent and 7 percent in Asia Pacific are predicted for 2010, according to UNWTO. But these targets can only be reached with the establishment of a relative world peace, the organization says.

With the new year, optimism is on the rise. But the first sad news has already reached us from Haiti. According to what we watch on TV channels, a great tragedy is occurring on the island. The entire world is mobilized to help Haiti. But with its insufficient infrastructure and great

poverty, Haiti is in a very bad state. Even the building that once hosted the U.N. has collapsed in the earthquake. More than 150 victims were counted under the debris of that same building. In the near future, new tensions are expected in several regions around the world. Iran, the target of the U.S. for adamantly continuing its nuclear-energy program, is Turkey's border neighbor. Northern Iraq and the rest of the Middle East are the hottest regions. Since coming to power, U.S. President Barack Obama repeatedly says U.S. troops will withdraw from Iraq. The best haven for withdrawing American troops seems to be Turkey. But Turkey has to reissue a license. To withdraw 130,000 troops will take a long time and cost a lot of money. To leave behind U.S. arms in Iraq means great trouble. Russia and other countries in the region are concerned about a possible instability from Afghanistan to Pakistan and India. An American occupation in Yemen is considered imminent. Flare-ups in other parts of the world continue. Unfortunately, a lasting peace in the world cannot be achieved for the time being. Increasing economic problems create more tensions. It is very curious, but in such economically unstable conditions, instead of economizing, people tend to spend more. This is why 2010 may create new tourism possibilities for Turkey and European countries. Turkey's problem is not a decrease in the number of tourists but a yearly per capita drop in tourism revenues. The "all inclusive" system possibly helps certain resorts in Turkey, but it doesn't create additional revenues. The debts of tourism resorts, especially in southern Turkey, are increasing daily. This year, Turkey has to benefit from the trend of recuperation in world tourism. Tourism resorts have to spend their savings to repair all the old buildings.

No' to a single-party constitution

Thursday, January 21, 2010

KADRİ GÜRSEL

HURRIYAT

The Justice and Development Party, or AKP, is seeking partial amendments to the Constitution in advance of upcoming general elections.

Without any consensus on a constitutional change in Parliament, the government party seems to be acting swiftly and doing whatever it sees fit.

Considering today's arithmetic, the amendments will most likely be presented to a popular vote... Article 175 of the Constitution says the changes adopted by the votes of between 330 and 367 deputies shall be put to referendum unless the president sends them back to Parliament. The government is in a hurry...

They wanted to shorten the period of waiting time for the referendum from 90 days to 45, but the sub-committee decided it should be 60 days.

Is it the "pressure of time" that makes the AKP seek "accelerated constitutional change" due to intentions for a possible early election in 2010?

Or, is the government afraid of not reaching a sufficient number of votes for a change even if it wins the elections?

These are questions in "real politics"... And frankly I am not dying to have the answers...

The real question that I am curious about in the face of the alarming course of events in Turkey is this: How will constitutional amendment affect the separation of powers as an essential of democracy?

The executive already crushed the legislative... Will a "package of amendments" introduce an opportunity for the executive's supremacy over the judiciary? If we face a popular vote for a

constitutional change, these are the questions I want answers to... And if I sense a trap in the package to make the executive dominant over the judiciary, I will vote "No."

The new Parliament should seek a new constitution

Would it not better if political parties reached consensus and let the new Parliament make the Constitution following the next elections? Therefore, the possibly positive changes the AKP wants in the package could be included in the new one to be prepared by the "Constitution Assembly" based on a broad understanding...

The AKP is acting in a way to weaken, or even to eliminate, the division of powers and that's a threat to democracy.

Democracies are protected by properly functioning control and balancing mechanisms against leaders and political movements having tendencies of authoritarian regimes, corruptions and favoritism. If the executive in a country rules over other powers, democracy lacks self-defense in that country. Then an authoritarian regime is invited, as is the case for the moment.

No matter whether the AKP is right about complaints against the high judiciary or not, the measures to be taken should not jeopardize the independence of the judiciary before the government. Otherwise, an authoritarian regime is unavoidable.

Picture a country... Assume that its parliament is weak because of failing inner-party democracy... And the parliament is always insufficient to reflect the will power of the people due to 10 percent election threshold... And its one-man government shapes the high judiciary through legislation as it pleases... The "Fourth power," which is crucial in "control and balance", i.e. the media, is kept silent or totally under the government's control... And, finally, the public is ruled by the fear and pressures of a police state...

How do you call such a regime?

I've never used "civilian fascism" or "civilian coup" expressions.

But I would say "We're heading for an 'authoritarian regime.'"

* Mr. Kadri Gürsel is a columnist for the daily Milliyet in which this piece appeared Thursday. It was translated into English by the Daily News staff.

Sledgehammer Operation inflicted heavy bash on TSK

Friday, January 22, 2010

MEHEMT ALİ BİRAND

HURRIYAT

The Constitutional Court ruling that a military person be tried in civil court is against the Constitution started an important and maybe dangerous process in the future of our country. The decision should count as an important victory for the TSK. Spirits in the General Staff should be high after a long period of a bad mood because this view that the General Staff has been defending persistently has been accepted unanimously. But it won't solve the problem and maybe even make it worse.

For about two years there is an ongoing struggle between the AKP and the military, increasing progressively. The AKP does not want the General Staff to interfere in civil supervision and the TSK does not want to retrieve from its duty "to protect and watch for internal threats against the Turkish Republic" manifested in article 35 of the Internal Services Act based on the constitution. Military personnel being supervised or tried by civilians is not a subject to be discussed anymore. And the military supervising the elected administration is also unacceptable. The military will plan a coup, form a gang and when caught not tried in a civil court. Is that deemed likely?

But despite everything, the Constitutional Court taking this decision unanimously is what counts. This result obviously reveals that this act was against the Constitution. This means, if the AKP wants to continue its path the only way is to change the Constitution. Not one single judge at the Constitutional Court opposing this decision prevents all arguments in this regard.

So now today's question emerges as follows: What will the AKP do in view of this situation? Will it accept the decision of the Constitutional Court and leave it at that or make changes in the Constitution to solve the problem all together?

If the prime minister says, "Let's leave it at that," which I don't deem likely, there won't be any problem. Relations will be back on track and elections will be held in a more relaxed environment.

Many though expect that the prime minister won't stop at that thus changing the Constitution to include supervision of military personnel by the civil administration. As a matter of fact, his speech Friday was pointing in that direction. He was careful not to swoop down on the military preferring to target the CHP and MHP. But his intention was obvious.

With such a possibility it seems this year preparations for the referendum will be extremely tense. The election campaign for the secular-nationalistic segment will turn into a death or survival manner. Erdoğan is self-confident. He is positive that he'll win the referendum. I am sure that for Turkey a split of road will be the case.

Thus Kemalism as we know it today will end, military supervision of Turkish politics will be lifted and Erdoğan will enter 2011 elections with, according to him a "miracle" win. This is what appears so far. It is a risky but at the same time a scenario that will change the country's future.

Gen. Doğan has not been very convincing

Retired Gen. Çetin Doğan, former First Army Commander whose signature is beneath the Sledgehammer Operation, visited TV channels and defended himself that all allegations are foolish. Gen. Doğan may be right in his views. And in the name of defending himself he may be right as well. But his words between the lines and his general attitude are not very convincing. He clearly stated that the AKP administration poses a threat and that he does not like their course. He never concealed that he openly criticizes the administration and that he advised the prime minister to "precinct his party."

One other fact drawing attention in his speech was he said he never understood why everybody made such a fuss about this operation, for, the officials are obligated to protect this country against internal threats.

I would like to believe Gen. Doğan when he says that games like bomb attacks and airplane crashes were attributed to this operation later on. A commander never lies. Anyway, after examination of prosecutors the situation will become clearer. Whatever may be, the public did not miss out on the difference between the words of Gen. Doğan and the scarce statements of the General Staff. In short, recent statements have been far from being satisfactory.

Military's scenario is like a elementary school play

The Sledgehammer scenario also includes a chapter that talks about how this country will be saved by a military government to be formed and what precautions will be taken when chaos breaks loose. O my God, it is a disaster. I have never ever before encountered such a primitive plan splitting Turkey in such a way. If it really was the Turkish Armed Forces that prepared this plan, so help us God.

They have prepared a plan that will isolate Turkey from the rest of the world, cause its economy to collapse with measures of an underdeveloped country and split the country into pieces.

I am very puzzled. I am a person who knows that the TSK undergoes a very well education. I don't understand how come they make up a serious of such precautions in present day Turkey. You should definitely read this document sequencing inflexible solid precautions, only to be seen in communist countries, like cutting of relations with the European Union and ally with only the United States and Russia.

Once you read this document you'll do anything you can to prevent the in your eyes brilliant TSK from leading Turkey by a coup. What a pity, I wish we had not read this document.

'Data loss inevitable' breaks hearts in e-age

Friday, January 22, 2010

NAZLAN ERTAN

HURRIYAT

Erospolis wonders in today's e-age, whether any pain, loss of love or money, compares to the loss of data in a trusted computer. A computer with memory erased is like Tom without Jerry, a European Union without the Commission, Erdoğan without Gül and Turkey without the Constitutional Court

End of the e-affair

Dressed in a severe black dress and dark glasses hiding the pain, I signed the papers with a heavy heart, knowing full well that no treatment would enable a full restoration. In this e-age, very little, including loss of love or money, can compare to the loss of a trusted computer.

Rather like Carrie Bradshaw of Sex and the City wrapping up her computer in a pashmina, I put mine silently in its old box, complete with the guarantee and the invoice, and feebly whispered: "You think there is any chance of bringing it back?"

The technician, who looked worryingly young, said: "Well, seems there is something wrong with the main card. We will re-format it and it will be as good as new."

He then took a look at my miserable face and uttered the words I least wanted to hear: "Some data loss is inevitable."

What? A computer minus existing data is rather like Tom without Jerry, a European Union without the Commission, Hürriyet without Ertuğrul Özkök, Erdoğan without Gül and Turkey without the Constitutional Court!

Spotless mind

Some loss? I have watched the movie, "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind" and know what that means. Given that memory, unlike good wine, does not improve with age, all my MSN conversations, e-mails with customers, articles, ideas for future articles, strategy papers and even e-love letters were in my computer. As Hercule Poirot said, women never throw away letters, pictures and the like. Never believe one who says she did!

"I am sorry," said the young technician. "You do have a back-up, don't you?"

Ah, the evasive back-up! Bring this up and see who your real friends are.

"I never back up," said my best friend, "I guess I should start now, huh?" I could hug her for that solidarity.

"For future references, but there are automatic back-ups," said my "ex", trying but not quite succeeding, to be helpful and nice in a "I-dumped-you-so-I-have-to-be-friendly-now-to-pay-my-dues" way.

“I can send you new poems and letters,” said my “next”, who is too young to understand that a woman needs to maintain a past to have a future.

Worse than data loss

What can be worse nowadays than losing your computer data, I asked friends in the hope that they might come up with some real horrors for Erospolis.

“What can be worse than computer loss?” repeated a friend who is a notable member of the Turkish paparazzi. “Have the press say that you will be offered a supporting role in the script that Mehmet Ali Ağca will write for Hollywood!”

“To know that the paparazzi articles on Ağca-in- Sheraton-luxury suit will claim more space than my articles on the third anniversary of the murder of Hrant Dink,” said a judiciary correspondent.

“To know that Ağca is news but the editor in chief he shot, Abdi İpekçi and his principles, are hardly remembered,” said an editor in chief in the making.

“To have the Constitutional Court annul the law on civil court jurisdiction for the military on non-military affairs,” said another friend.

“To know that you lost your computer data but others have their data stored somewhere in the dark chambers of bureaucracy in case it comes in handy for Ergenekon investigations,” said another friend.

This country can indeed upstage your personal miseries!
