

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

TURKEY

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

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Summary-POLITICAL ISSUES

- **Kurdish Democratic Initiative**

The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) after Failing to win any support from political parties in Parliament for its democratization initiative to resolve Turkey's longstanding Kurdish problem, has held a series of conferences across Turkey. Party organizations and local administrations in 20 provinces are simultaneously being briefed on the government's

democratization initiative. In the coming days, the AK Party plans to invite representatives from local media organizations from 81 provinces and 450 districts to Ankara in order to talk to them about the initiative.

The AK Party officials focused on the two goals of the initiative, one of which is to raise the democratic standards of all segments of society, while the other is saving the country from terrorism. AK Party officials noted that it is impossible for any terrorist organization to survive this long without the support of international support, as they explain that the PKK has so far been used as a political instrument against Turkey by the US, the EU, Israel and many countries in the Middle East. However, they say these countries have reached a consensus for the elimination of the PKK while noting that Turkey has seized a historic opportunity to solve the PKK problem.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has asked artists to support the government's democratic initiative, which aims to improve standards of democracy, freedoms and respect for human rights in Turkey. The request has been well received, with Erdoğan hosting the country's leading artists on Saturday for a breakfast at the Prime Ministry's working office and urging them to help spread the idea and feeling behind the widely acclaimed initiative to the most distant corners and every citizen through their work. In addition, Erdoğan said "Your songs have the power to transcend deaf walls. I ask you to help this movement of change with your artistic sensitivity." he said at the meeting, where 62 important names from the Turkish world of art were present.

- **Judicial Reforms**

President Abdullah Gül has said Turkey needs urgent judicial reform, as tensions rise between the government and hard-line secularists over a power struggle involving the country's judiciary. "Reform in the judicial system should be carried out quickly. Turkey should swiftly adopt European Union standards in this area," Gül said at a news conference on Thursday with Tanzanian President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, who is currently paying a state visit to Turkey.

While talking about the recent discussion, which exposed a tug-of-war between the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and hard-line secularists, who are mostly represented in the country's judiciary, the president was referring to a recent debate over the role of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) and special prosecutors.

The HSYK on Wednesday decided to strip Erzurum Prosecutor Osman Şanal of his special authority over a probe into now-jailed Erzincan Chief Public Prosecutor İlhan Cihaner on charges of membership in a terrorist organization and falsification of documents. Şanal was also investigating 3rd Army Commander Gen. Saldıray Berk, who allegedly conspired with Cihaner. The decision sparked indignation in various segments of society as it cast doubt on the impartiality and independence of the judiciary. There has been a fierce debate in the country over whether the HSYK has the authority to carry out such actions.

Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin called the HSYK decision against Şanal and other prosecutors "unlawful." He said the board totally ignored the Constitution and the Code on Criminal Procedure (CMK). The Supreme Court of Appeals and the Council of State, however, support the HSYK decision. Hard-line secularists also control the Supreme Court of Appeals and the Council of State.

The Justice Ministry completed an EU-driven reform package, making changes to the judiciary, and submitted it to the Cabinet for approval in August. The package introduces comprehensive changes in line with EU requirements, including a change to the structure of the HSYK. The package introduces comprehensive changes in line with the requirements of the EU, including a change to the structure of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK), increasing its number of members and changing how they are elected.

Tusiad support for Judicial Reform

Ümit Boyner, the chairwoman of the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (TÜSİAD), and her delegation had talks with Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç and President Abdullah Gül, respectively, on Wednesday to discuss the association's expectation for a judicial reform.

The delegation expressed the country's growing expectation for a judicial reform. "Turkey needs to cover significant distance in the democratization and judicial reform areas in order to return to its regular agenda," Boyner remarked. When she mentioned the regular agenda she was referring to the fight against unemployment, the global financial crisis and aspirations to continue economic growth.

Boyner's TÜSİAD has received praise from many observers recently due to its emphasis on the government's efforts to settle the country's problems through democratic means.

Boyner added that Turkey would continue discussing constitutional changes and democratization throughout 2010. "We will be glad if we cooperate with opposition parties and contribute to [governmental] efforts as civil society organizations."

• **Counter Narcotic Operations**

Turkish police seized 124 kg of hashish and 37 kg of heroin in five operations across the country. Police waged an operation in eastern province of Diyarbakir and in southeastern province of Mardin, Dogubayazit town of eastern province of Agri, western province of Izmir and northwestern province of Bursa. Five people were detained in these operations

On 20 February 2010, Turkish security forces confiscated 52 kilograms of hashish in separate operations conducted in south-eastern province of Hakkari, central Anatolian province of Kayseri and south-western province of Isparta. Security forces detained 13 people in connection with the illicit drugs.

• **Detention of migrants**

Security forces detained 156 migrants in the western province of Izmir and southern province of Antalya.

• **Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ's involvement in Military Plot Plan**

Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ has been at the center of fierce criticism over his stance regarding recently exposed military plots to overthrow the AK Party government. Though various actors have called on the government to remove Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ from office, the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) seems reluctant to make such a move for a number of reasons, including a lack of government confidence in the democratic line of candidates who would replace the military chief.

• **Total Number of involved Army and Navy officers in Plot Plans**

Eleven retired generals and several retired colonels were detained early Monday as part of the investigation into alleged coup plots named the Sledgehammer and the Cage plans, devised by the military members of Ergenekon. This criminal network that has alleged links within the state and is suspected of plotting to topple the government, as a step taken towards the civilianization of the country through a confrontation with those involved in subversive plans. Seven people were arrested under an investigation into alleged coup plan known publicly as "Balyoz (Sledgehammer)". The arrestees include Admiral Ramazan Cem Gundeniz, Admiral Aziz Cakmak, retired General Mehmet Kaya Varol, retired Admiral Ali Deniz Kutluk and retired Admiral Ozer Karabulut. They were sent to prison. The number of officers jailed now stands at 20 - including five admirals and three generals, the Associated Press reported Thursday.

• **The AK Party initiated an intra-party investigation**

Earlier this week, the AK Party initiated an intra-party investigation into the two deputies. Last week, Kahramanmaraş deputy Avni Doğan publicly said his party was categorizing its

opponents. “They categorized us for 40 years. Now it is our turn [to categorize them.] They have categorized all those whose daughters wear the headscarf. They have categorized all those whose children attend the religious imam-hatip high schools. They have done this to the public for 40 years. Now we are doing the same to them,” the deputy stated. AK Party Deputy Chairman Hüseyin Çelik said Doğan overstepped limits with his remarks and said his party would take action against him. Shortly after the Doğan controversy, AK Party Çorum deputy Ahmet Aydoğmuş said opponents of the ruling party had “problems with their roots.” The AK Party also launched an investigation into Aydoğmuş.

- **Several CHP deputies attacked the Today's Zaman and Zaman dailies**

At the 63rd meeting of the JPC held in the European Parliament in Brussels on Tuesday, several CHP deputies attacked the Today's Zaman and Zaman dailies. Accusing the European Parliament's rapporteur on Turkey, Ria Oomen-Ruijten, of only reading certain newspapers, Öymen called on European deputies “to learn about the tendency and orientation of such media.”

Another CHP deputy, Osman Coşkunoglu, claimed the sales figures of Zaman were very low but its circulation was high as it was handed out for free. The claims came amid discussions in the European Parliament about freedom of the press in Turkey. Öymen insisted that he did not name any specific media outlet, but when asked, everybody in the room understood that he was referring to Today's Zaman. He said he could not prevent people from having certain opinions.

- **Prof. Ihsan Dogramaci passed away**

Prof. Ihsan Dogramaci, who passed away early on Thursday, will be laid to rest in the Turkish capital on Sunday. Ceremonies will be held for Dogramaci, the founding president of Turkey's Higher Board of Education (YOK) and founder of Bilkent University, at Ankara's Hacettepe and Bilkent universities on February 27. He authored over 100 scientific articles, three books, six book chapters and served as the editor of four medical journals.

- **A new constitution for Turkey**

A new constitution would make easier for Turkey to become a member of the European Union, said a Turkish lawmaker with the ruling Justice and Development (AK) Party.

- **Turkey's radio and television board allowed 14 TV and radio channels**

Turkey's radio and television board allowed on Tuesday 14 TV and radio channels to broadcast in different languages and dialects. The above mentioned channels said they would broadcast in Kurdish, Zaza, Kirmanchi and Arabic. Turkey allowed broadcasts in different languages and dialects in 2006. The state-run Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) began broadcasting in different languages and dialects on its TRT-6 channel as of January 1, 2009.

- **Mini summit held to discuss the ongoing civil-military strife**

Turkey's top three figures come together for a mini summit to discuss the ongoing civil-military strife. Afterward, President Gül declares that the conflict will be resolved and asks for all citizens to act responsibly.

SUMMARY-GEO-STRATEGIC NEWS

- **VISITS AND MEETINGS**

Serbia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Vuk Jeremic will arrive in Turkey on Friday. Regional and international issues, as well as bilateral relations between Turkey and Serbia would be on the agenda. Turkish State Minister Selma Aliye Kavaf began her meetings in Albania on Friday.

Kavaf will attend Turkey-Albania Business Council meeting and meet with Turkish and Albanian businessmen. Kavaf will also visit Turgut Ozal school complex which was opened in 1993.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu is paying a visit to Madrid for the 2nd Turkey-Spain Intergovernmental Summit, had a closed-door meeting with Moratinos. Officials said Davutoglu and Moratinos discussed diplomatic initiatives regarding Iran's nuclear energy, Davutoglu's visit to Tehran, Turkey's EU accession process and Cyprus issue in the meeting Davutoglu and Moratinos also discussed bilateral trade volume which dropped to 6 billion euros due to economic crisis. A new strategy would be determined to boost the volume, officials said.

Tanzanian President presented with honorary doctorate by Turkish University. Speaking at the ceremony, President Kikwete said that they attached great importance to their economic, social and cultural relations with Turkey. Turkish Agriculture and Rural Affairs Minister Mehdi Eker left for France on Wednesday to participate in meetings of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

- **Azerbaijani's condolence message to Turkey**

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev sent a message of condolence to the Turkish President Abdullah Gul and expressed his sadness over a mine explosion that took place in Dursunbey town of the north-western province of Balikesir on Tuesday.

- **Turkey condemned terrorist attack in north of Pakistan**

Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) announced Friday Turkey condemned the terrorist attack that took place in north of Pakistan on Thursday. Turkey strongly condemns yesterday's terrorist attack that targeted the peace, stability and tranquility of brotherly country Pakistan.

- **Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu participated in the inauguration ceremony of Ukrainian**

The ceremony for Yanukovich took place in the City of Kiev. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu on Thursday participated in the inauguration ceremony of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in Kiev. Yanukovich elected the president following the second round of elections held in Ukraine on February 7. Davutoglu will attend a reception following the oath taking ceremony and have several meetings.

- **Al-Qaeda condemns Turkey for its role in Afghanistan**

A newly released and unauthenticated video from al-Qaeda condemns Turkey for its role in Afghanistan, broadcaster CNN reported Monday.

The man speaking in the video, who claims to be al-Qaeda's No. 2, Ayman al-Zawahiri, says Turkey is committing crimes against Islam and Muslims by participating in the war in Afghanistan. CNN reported that it could not authenticate the message but that the voice was "consistent with al-Zawahiri's intonation and accent."

In what would be al-Zawahiri's first audio message released to the world in 2010, the speaker accuses Turkey of committing crimes against Islam and its adherents. Turkish troops are part of the coalition forces in Afghanistan. The speaker did not appear in person in the video; a picture of him was shown instead as part of a larger production focusing on al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. The video was released by As-Sahab Media, al-Qaeda's production company.

"Let every free Turkish Muslim who is keen on protecting Islam and his fellow Muslims know that the Turkish forces will serve the Crusader campaign in Afghanistan, which is burning the villages, destroying the houses and killing the women and the children, occupying the lands of the Muslims, fighting the Sharia and spreading lewdness, debauchery and corruption," the speaker says.

- **Turkey and Serbia**

Ahmet Davutoğlu (R) held a joint press conference with Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic on Saturday. Turkey and Serbia are ready to work together to establish stability and peace in the Balkans as well as to support the promotion of mutual economic cooperation,

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said following talks with Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic, the Anatolia news agency reported on Saturday.

- **TURKEY, ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN**

Azerbaijan warned Thursday that the threat of conflict with Armenia is rising fast and that a "great war" is inevitable if Armenian forces fail to pull out of disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. Armenian forces seized control of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding districts from Azerbaijan in the early 1990s, in a war that claimed an estimated 30,000 lives.

Armenian and Azerbaijani forces are spread across a ceasefire line in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, often facing each other at close range, and shootings are common. Last week three Azerbaijani soldiers were killed in fighting with Armenian forces in a tense area on the border with Karabakh. France, along with Russia and the United States, is among the co-chairs of the so-called Minsk Group, which is trying to negotiate a resolution to the longstanding conflict.

- **TURKEY AND Armenia**

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and Armenian President Serge Sarkisian met in Kiev on Thursday.

The Armenian parliament Thursday made it easy for Yerevan to scrap the protocols signed with Turkey by passing amendments that will allow President Serge Sarkisian to suspend ratification and withdraw from previously signed international agreements. The amendments were passed by a vote of 70 to 4. The move comes amid growing frustration in Armenia over the Turkish Parliament's failure to ratify the protocols signed in October.

The signing of the deals was hailed internationally as a key step in overcoming decades of enmity stemming from World War I-era killings of Armenians under the late days of the Ottoman Empire. Ratification by both countries' parliaments stalled as the two sides traded accusations of attempts to modify the deal. Ankara has accused Yerevan of trying to set new conditions after Armenia's Constitutional Court said the protocols could not contradict Yerevan's official position that the Armenian killings constituted "genocide" - a label Turkey fiercely rejects.

Armenia, for its part, is furious over Ankara's insistence that normalizing Turkish-Armenian ties depends on progress in resolving the conflict between Armenia and Turkish ally Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

- **TURKEY AND IRAN**

Davutoğlu was in Tehran holding talks with Iranian leaders on Tuesday as Turkey has offered to use its access to the Iranian leadership to help solve a dispute between global powers and Tehran over its nuclear program. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan would also talk about the issue with US President Barack Obama shortly. The Issue will be resolved through diplomatic channels. Iran's top diplomat in Ankara is confident Turkey will not permit the United States to put a radar base on its territory.

- **TURKEY AND TANZANIA**

Visiting Tanzanian President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete on Thursday praised Turkey for its efforts to voice Africa's problems in the international arena through platforms such as the G-20 and the UN Security Council. Last February, Gül paid official visits to Kenya and Tanzania, which made him the first Turkish president to pay an official visit to a sub-Saharan nation. There are Sixty percent of the issues on the agenda of the UN Security Council are related to Africa such as Political issues, security issues and humanitarian issues which are still unresolved. The two presidents yesterday signed bilateral agreements on visa immunity, commercial cooperation and air transportation in addition to a memorandum of understanding on establishing a political consultation mechanism between the foreign ministries of Tanzania and Turkey.

- **Turkish Red Crescent Sends Assistance to Mongolia**

Turkish Red Crescent will send 9 tones of humanitarian assistance to Mongolia which was hit by strict winter conditions. Turkish Red Crescent issued a written statement and said more than one million animals were destroyed in the wake of intense snowing. "Severe winter conditions started to have an impact on daily livings of people," the statement noted.

Turkish Red Crescent (Turk Kizilayi) will establish natural disaster coordination and logistics centers in Palestine and Georgia, the chairman said on Saturday.

- **TURKEY AND ISRAEL**

Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) said Wednesday they were concerned about labelling certain Islamic historical artifacts as "Israeli cultural heritage" including those in the West Bank. At a time when efforts are being made to solve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, such acts by Israeli authorities will harm the process and lead to serious deterioration of confidence among the sides, the MFA stressed.

Turkey has called on Israel to refrain from taking a "unilateral and provocative" step with its plan to renovate two contested West Bank holy sites. Earlier this week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he hoped to include Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem and the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron in a national heritage restoration plan, sparking outrage among Palestinians.

- **CYPRUS ISSUE**

On February 19, the Greek Cypriot House of Representatives unanimously approved a resolution reading that in Cyprus, as a member state of the European Union, there should not be provisions for guarantors or guarantees. The resolution was approved by all Turkish Cypriot political parties; UBP, CTP, DP, TDP and ORP and said that the decision of the Greek Cypriot parliament dealt a serious blow to the solution process in Cyprus.

The resolution called on the international community to lift sanctions which did not have any legal provision on Turkish Cypriot people.

- **TURKEY AND EUROPEAN UNION**

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday that Spain never left Turkey alone in European Union (EU) process. Spain had experienced the difficulties we have been going through. Spain is one of the countries that understand Turkey the best," Erdogan said while speaking at a joint new conference with Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luiz Rodriguez Zapatero. Erdogan said. "The meetings in Spain were very fruitful. I believe that there is a promising future in front of us. We are trying to boost political, military, commercial and economic relations.

Erdogan said around 350 Spanish businessmen invested in Turkey, "nearly 70 Turkish businessmen are investing in Spain. Cooperation in energy is in question. I believe that the parties will make very important steps both in wind and solar energy. Talks are underway. We need solidarity in renewable energy. We also have joint works carried out in food, particularly in olive and olive oil."

The European Court of Human Rights approved a complaint by a Turkish religious group regarding clothing regulations during hearings in Turkish courts. The case was filed by Müslüm Gündüz and 126 other members of the Aczmendi community, which describes itself as an Islamic order, reported broadcaster CNN Türk on Tuesday. The groups' special attire consists of wearing black robes and a black turban, while males in the community have long beards. Gündüz, who founded the Aczmendi community, graduated from an Elazığ evening school 1985 and is an alleged member of the Islamic Nurcu movement.

SUMMARY-ECONOMICS NEWS

- **Turkish Ziraat Bankasi's opening a bank in Syria**

Turkish State Minister for foreign trade Zafer Caglayan met with leading businessmen of

Regarding the issue of Turkish Ziraat Bankasi's opening a bank in Syria with Syrian partners. Caglayan said that banking issue was very important in which the two countries were boosting commerce. Caglayan added that business between Turkey and Syria was increasing each day.

- **TURKEY AND RUSSIA-POULTRY EXPORTS**

The Russian deputy premier expressed his thought on Friday that poultry exports from Turkey would begin soon.

- **Turkey's Customs Union agreement with EU**

The Turkish chief EU negotiator said on Friday that Turkey's Customs Union agreement with EU should be reviewed. The EU and Turkey are linked by a Customs Union agreement, which came in force on 31 December 1995, pursuant to the 1963 EU-Turkey Association Agreement, which aims at promoting trade and economic relations. The Customs Union covers all industrial goods, but does not address agriculture (except processed agricultural products), services or public procurement.

- **TURKEY AND KAZAKHSTAN**

Turkey's Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BDDK) and Kazakhstan's Agency on Regulation and Supervision of Financial Market and Financial organizations (AFN) signed a cooperation agreement in Astana, Kazakhstan. Two agencies will share information about commercial banks in Kazakhstan and financial institutions in Turkey.

- **TURKEY AND SYRIA**

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has requested that Turkish businessmen directly get in contact with him to report any issues they face when investing in Syria, assuring them that the difficulties will be resolved.

Turkish State Minister for foreign trade Zafer Caglayan is set to depart Wednesday for Damascus, Syria. Caglayan is scheduled to take part in a Turkey-Syria business forum along with Syrian Economy and Trade Minister Lamia Mari Assi and Deputy Premier Abdallah al-Dardari.

This is the fourth high profile visit in a year from Turkey to Syria in the level of ministers and businesspeople. Trade volume between Turkey and Syria in 2008 climbed 49 percent to 1.8 billion USD after a free trade agreement went into effect in 2007. Turkish exports constitute major part of the trade with 1.4 billion USD with a 27.8 percent increase over the last year. Turkey's imports from Syria was down 48 percent to 327 million USD in 2009 mainly due to a drop in oil prices.

AnadoluJet will launch direct flights between Ankara, Turkey and Damascus, Syria on March 4. The subsidiary company of the Turkish Airlines (THY) will start flying between Turkish and Syrian capital cities.

Syrian Premier Muhammad Naji al-Utri invited Turkish companies to Syria. Turkey's Trade Minister Caglayan said the current volume of trade between the two countries was USD 2 billion, adding that they aimed at increasing it to USD 10 billion by 2013.

- **TURKEY AND TANZANIA**

Tanzanian President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete has called on Turkish businessmen to take advantage of investment opportunities in Tanzania and said the trade volume between the two countries should be increased from its current level of \$66 million to billions of dollars within the next five years.

- **Negative effects of coup plans over Economy**

Turkey's capital markets are reacting wildly to recent internal developments regarding coup plans, the Ergenekon indictment and talk of another closure case against the Justice and Development Party (AK Party), while the lira lost value against the dollar.

The İstanbul Stock Exchange's (İMKB) İMKB-100 index was down nearly 1,000 points by the end of the first session of trading on Wednesday to 50,443.16, continuing this week's trend of continuing losses. The index closed last Friday at 53,318.97, a slight recovery from a two-week dip. This recovery was short-lived, however, as the index had dropped a staggering 5.4 percent, or nearly 2,900 points, from that figure by the end of the first session of trading on Wednesday. The lira also lost value against the dollar, with the dollar trading at TL 1.548, the highest value in over seven months.

- **TURKEY AND FRANCE**

Turkish State Minister for foreign trade Zafer Caglayan and French Minister of State for foreign trade Anne-Marie Idrac signed a memorandum of understanding at the end of the second meeting of Turkey-France Economic and Commercial Partnership Committee in Ankara on Thursday. French oil company Total is getting prepared to make a 100 million USD investment in Turkey.

- **Turkey's automotive sector on rise**

Turkey's industry minister said on Thursday that Turkish automotive sector was "on the rise". Turkish Industry & Trade Minister Nihat Ergun said that the number of automobiles sold in Turkey increased in 2009 despite the global economic crisis. A total of 306,000 automobiles were sold in 2008 while it rose up to 370,000 in 2009," he said.

- **Visa removals boosts number of tourists in Turkey**

Turkey's Ministry of Culture and Tourism told a statement that 809,974 foreigners visited Turkey in January 2010. Removal of visa procedures between several countries and Turkey has had a positive impact on tourism. Over 27 million tourists visited Turkey in 2009. Turkey expects to host more than 28 million tourists in 2010.

- **Unemployment a risk for Turkey, World Bank says**

Macroeconomic management and tackling unemployment are among the main concerns for Turkey during its process of recovery from the global financial crisis, World Bank representative Ulrich Zachau says .

According to Ulrich Zachau, who spoke at the Fourth International Risk Management Summit in İstanbul, one of the most important challenges for Turkey in the short to medium term will be maintaining a competitive business environment and providing jobs. The recession has left its mark on the economy and unemployment is high, the World Bank official said. This is one of the main risks for Turkey. Unemployment in Turkey is estimated at 13.1 percent.

SUMMARY-SOCIAL NEWS

- Turkish Airlines (THY) is set to become the official sponsor of the Greek basketball club Maroussi BC after signing back-to-back agreements with superstar soccer teams Barcelona and Manchester United.
- Two earthquakes rocked eastern Turkey in the early hours of yesterday morning. No damage was reported. The first quake occurred at 6.38 a.m. in the Gökdere region of Elazığ province and measured 4.3 on the Richter scale, said the İstanbul-based Kandilli observatory. It resulted in panic among residents but no human or material damage was reported. The second earthquake occurred at 9.02 a.m. in the Patnos region of Ağrı province and measured 3.8 on the Richter scale. No damage was inflicted in this instance either.
- The United States will host Turkey here on May 29 in the Americans' last tuneup before departing for the World Cup in South Africa. The match will be held at Lincoln Financial Field, home of the National Football League's Philadelphia Eagles and one of the sites included in the U.S. bid for the 2018 or 2022 World Cup.

POLITICAL ISSUES

KURDISH ISSUE

Feeling the heat, AK Party takes the initiative to the heartland

Monday, 22 February 2010 11:03

TODAYS ZAMAN

Failing to win any support from political parties in Parliament for its democratization initiative, which aims to resolve Turkey's longstanding Kurdish problem, the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) has kicked off a series of conferences across Turkey. Party organizations and local administrations in 20 provinces are simultaneously being briefed on the government's democratization initiative.

In the coming days, the AK Party plans to invite representatives from local media organizations from 81 provinces and 450 districts to Ankara in order to talk to them about the initiative.

Introduced in the summer of 2009, the democratization initiative, dubbed the "Kurdish initiative" by some, aims to solve Turkey's Kurdish problem through the expansion of rights for Kurds and to end Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorism, which has claimed the lives of thousands of people since 1984. The opposition parties in Parliament announced that they would not support the government on the initiative, while describing the project as a move aiming to divide Turkey.

The conferences, titled "Turkey Meetings," were launched after an order from Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who thinks the public has not been adequately informed on the initiative thus far.

Today's Zaman had the chance to observe one such conference held in the northwestern province of Zonguldak over the weekend. The conference in Zonguldak took place in the conference hall of the Mine Workers' Union, which was attended by the provincial chairman and some administrators of the labor union, which staged Turkey's biggest demonstration in 1990. Until the 2002 general elections, Zonguldak was seen as the stronghold of the left.

The AK Party officials focused on the two goals of the initiative, one of which is to raise the democratic standards of all segments of society, while the other is saving the country from terrorism. A majority of the public favors an increase in democratic standards in the country, but they have doubts that the initiative will end PKK terrorism.

AK Party officials noted that it is impossible for any terrorist organization to survive this long without the support of international support, as they explain that the PKK has so far been used as a political instrument against Turkey by the US, the EU, Israel and many countries in the Middle East. However, they say these countries have reached a consensus for the elimination of the PKK while noting that Turkey has seized a historic opportunity to solve the PKK problem.

How much is state support?

One of the issues that the AK Party sees as a shortcoming for the initiative is that the public does not see it as a state project. During the "Turkey Meetings," the AK Party officials are frequently asked: "If the democratization project is a state project, then why does the state not openly voice support for this project?" There is a common view among the public that a statement released following a National Security Council (MGK) meeting in October 2009, which suggested continuing the studies regarding the initiative, is not satisfactory. It is claimed that the state [particularly the military] not voicing its support for the initiative encourages the opposition parties to make propaganda against the initiative.

The AK Party, which accused the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and the now-defunct pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) of nourishing PKK terrorism, has difficulty explaining to the public that the initiative is a state project. The AK Party grassroots supporters believe that the party will receive more support for the initiative if state support for the project is voiced more strongly.

Regarding the criticism that the initiative does not include any concrete proposals for the end of terrorism, AK Party officials are working on convincing answers and note that if the government had brought forward its own initiative package and had not sought the proposals of various segments of society then the opposition parties would claim that the government was “imposing” its package on the nation.

The AK Party, which won the March 2004 municipal elections in Zonguldak, lost in the March 2009 local elections, handing over the post to the Republican People’s Party (CHP). The AK Party won three seats while the CHP won two seats in the province in the general elections of 2007.

There is not any MHP influence in the province, while there is remarkable support for the Democrat Party (DP) in the rural areas of the province. Having won the March 29 elections, the CHP believes that it will increase its votes in the province. Yet, Mustafa Sarıgül, who established a new party after parting ways with the CHP, is likely to get the CHP votes in the province. While pressing for early polls, the opposition parties seem to not be in tune with the public in the Anatolian provinces.

The AK Party, which is determined to hold the general elections as scheduled, is trying to disperse public skepticism in Zonguldak regarding the initiative.

Music and poetry

In front of AK Party Bursa deputy Mehmet Ocaktan, a former journalist and writer, there was a group of people questioning the course of developments in the country. In the background, renowned Turkish poet Nazım Hikmet’s “Memleketim” (My homeland) poem was being read. Music and poems are the unchangeable parts of the AK Party meetings.

Abdülkerim Gün is the head of AK Party political affairs in Zonguldak. In his view, Erdoğan doesn’t have any problem convincing the public about the democratization initiative in the rural parts of the city. There are some problems in the city center. Gün says the AK Party did not lose any votes due to its democratization initiative. He believes that the AK Party will win its former success if Erdoğan renews tired party staff there.

According to Hamdi Uçar, the AK Party Zonguldak provincial chairman, it is not the public that should be convinced about the initiative but intellectuals and journalists. He says some journalists are doing their best to confuse the minds of the public regarding the initiative.

Indicating that the AK Party is still the most popular party in Turkey despite being in power for the past eight years, Ocaktan recalled the remarks of CHP leader Deniz Baykal, who said the AK Party’s votes were around 35 percent and said, “There is certainly a problem with the opposition in a country if a party which has been in power for eight years in that country preserves its votes.”

Is the PKK spoken to?

Recalling the fact that Turkey has so far spent \$300 billion for the fight against terrorism and lost more than 30,000 citizens to terrorism, Ocaktan responds to criticisms about the government giving up fighting terrorism due to the initiative. "If need be, we can spend \$1 trillion for this country, and we can all become martyrs. The democratization package has nothing to do with the fight against terrorism. The fight against terrorism will always continue. The PKK will either be isolated on the mountains or it will lay down its weapons," he said.

Another question Ocaktan answered was whether the government was speaking to jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan about the initiative. He said: "Öcalan described the initiative as an operation aimed at eliminaing the PKK. We have never spoken to a jailed man. But the MHP [as a coalition partner] bargained with him during his capture and handover to Turkey in 2002."

In the meantime, the AK Party's women voters find the government's democratization project a sincere one. It seems that Erdoğan's statement "Let mothers no longer cry" has greatly influenced women; however, AK Party's male voters who have dialogue with various circles seem to have been affected by the opposite views.

Artists pledge support for democratic initiative

Monday, 22 February 2010 15:34

Today's Zaman

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has asked artists to support the government's democratic initiative, which aims to improve standards of democracy, freedoms and respect for human rights in Turkey.

The request has been well received, with Erdoğan hosting the country's leading artists on Saturday for a breakfast at the Prime Ministry's working office and urging them to help spread the idea and feeling behind the widely acclaimed initiative to the most distant corners and every citizen through their work. "Your songs have the power to transcend deaf walls. You are the heartfelt voice of this country. I ask you to help this movement of change with your artistic sensitivity," he said at the meeting, where 62 important names from the Turkish world of art were present.

Among them were İbrahim Tatlıses, Bülent Ersoy, Seda Sayan, Sertap Erener, Fatih Kısaparmak, Erol Evgin, Ferdi Tayfur, Nükhet Duru, Kayahan, Orhan Gencebay, Arif Sağ, Mustafa Sandal, Yavuz Bingöl, Zerrin Özer, Kenan Doğulu, Emel Sayın, Neşet Ertaş, Kıraç, Kubat, Emel Müftüoğlu, Murat Göğebakan, Nilüfer, Bülent Ortaçgil, Nihat Doğan, Onur Akin, Sinan Özen, Safiye Soyman, Rojin, Mustafa Sağyaşar, Cengiz Kurtoğlu, Hakan Peker, Nuri Sesigüzel, Işın Karaca, Funda Arar, Zekai Tunca, Alişan, Şahin Özer, Ferhat Göçer and Teoman.

Following the establishment of the republic, the state policy was one of ignoring and denying differences. This policy persisted long thereafter. But Turkey in recent years has come to a point at which a more pluralistic approach has been adopted by the government towards the people. As a reflection of this change at the administrative level, the democratic initiative was given momentum by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) last year to elevate democratic standards and extend freedoms as well as to better comply with the contemporary understanding of human rights in the country.

In order not to allow it to fall victim to political bickering, Erdoğan and his government embarked on an effort to broaden the appeal of the project and to make it supra political. Interior Minister Beşir Atalay previously had talks with leading academics and journalists

while trying to determine concrete steps to be taken as part of the project. The prime minister's meeting with artists was the most recent of such moves. Erdoğan addressed the audience during the event and asked them to put their hearts into the initiative, which he believes will bring a much brighter future for Turkey. "I believe neither flying bullets nor political orations can suppress and draw limits to your tunes. You are the ones who will understand a mother's scream the best. You are the ones to feel from the heart the pain of a youngster who gets shot and falls to the ground, no matter where he is. You have cemented our brotherhood through your songs and you will again be the ones who will ensure that this country will have brighter days," he stressed. Participating artists echoed similar feelings after Erdoğan's address and offered their support for the initiative's success. Bingöl said he did not vote for the AK Party but backs the government's project. "My world view may not be the same as yours, but I support you in this matter. Please do not lose anything from your courage," he said. Composer and lyricist Özdemir Erdoğan told the audience that his mother is of Armenian origin and that his father is from the Black Sea region, a multiethnic family composition which he said is very common in Turkey. "Differences coexisted here in this country peacefully for ages," he commented. Commending current developments, leading pop music singer Özer stressed that she was, as an Alevi, very happy to see Turkey going in that direction, too. Justice and equality were common aspirations at the meeting. While most participants drew attention to the fact that Turkey suffered enough because of domestic quarrels, they all called on everyone to unite in order to not allow another drop of blood to be spilled in the country. Duru, Evgin and Soyman said the meeting was very positive and that they were satisfied with what Prime Minister Erdoğan had said. Having sat next to Kurdish singer Rojin, Özen said he wanted the country's ability to hold differences together to continue. Rojin also left the meeting pleased. "Let's sing our songs in every language altogether," was her wish. Gencebay, Arar and Peker joined those who said pain would come to an end as the country becomes more united around common desires while there is a political will to translate this desire into concrete action. The meeting, which became a venue for a sincere exchange of views and feelings, ended with pledges on both sides to take a more courageous and united stand against bloodshed.

OTHER POLITICAL ISSUES

President Gül: Turkey needs urgent judicial reform

Friday, 19 February 2010 13:18

Today's Zaman

President Abdullah Gül has said Turkey needs urgent judicial reform, as tensions rise between the government and hard-line secularists over a power struggle involving the country's judiciary. "Reform in the judicial system should be carried out quickly. Turkey should swiftly adopt European Union standards in this area," Gül said at a news conference on Thursday with Tanzanian President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, who is currently paying a state visit to Turkey.

"Turkey is engaging in full membership negotiations with the European Union. We should incorporate the union's *acquis*, criteria and standards when it comes to the judiciary. All our political parties should cooperate to make this reform a reality," Gül added. Gül added that the recent discussions should not lead to polarization in the country.

"The issues of justice, the judiciary and law should be discussed through objective criteria and the highest of standards," he said. Asked by reporters if he plans to play a conciliatory role among the state's institutions, Gül said he recently brought together the heads of the

judiciary and the executive. He said he would continue to contribute to solving problems in that regard.

While talking about the recent discussion, which exposed a tug-of-war between the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and hard-line secularists, who are mostly represented in the country's judiciary, the president was referring to a recent debate over the role of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) and special prosecutors.

The HSYK on Wednesday decided to strip Erzurum Prosecutor Osman Şanal of his special authority over a probe into now-jailed Erzincan Chief Public Prosecutor İlhan Cihaner on charges of membership in a terrorist organization and falsification of documents. Şanal was also investigating 3rd Army Commander Gen. Saldıray Berk, who allegedly conspired with Cihaner. The decision sparked indignation in various segments of society as it cast doubt on the impartiality and independence of the judiciary. There has been a fierce debate in the country over whether the HSYK has the authority to carry out such actions.

Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin called the HSYK decision against Şanal and other prosecutors "unlawful." He said the board totally ignored the Constitution and the Code on Criminal Procedure (CMK). The Supreme Court of Appeals and the Council of State, however, support the HSYK decision. Hard-line secularists also control the Supreme Court of Appeals and the Council of State.

The Justice Ministry completed an EU-driven reform package, making changes to the judiciary, and submitted it to the Cabinet for approval in August. The package introduces comprehensive changes in line with EU requirements, including a change to the structure of the HSYK.

Turkish Premier Says Everyone In Turkey Expects Judicial Reform

Monday, 22 February 2010 13:45

TIME TURK

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Sunday, "judicial reform has become expectation of everyone in Turkey from the political parties to non-governmental organizations. We do not want to fail in meeting this expectation."

Prime Minister Erdogan told a news conference at Istanbul's Ataturk Airport prior to his departure for Spain, "we want to bring all political parties together to join studies on a constitutional amendment. My colleagues will pay visits to the political parties. If they accept our offer to work together, we will take the necessary steps. Otherwise, we can hold a referendum."

"My friends are working on a draft judicial reform. When they complete their work, we will bring it onto agenda of our parliament," Erdogan said.

Gül listens to heads of judiciary, pushes for reform

Wednesday, 24 February 2010 09:2

Todays Zaman

President Abdullah Gül hosted the heads of the Supreme Court of Appeals and the Council of State, Hasan Gerçeker and Mustafa Birden, separately, exchanging views with them on judicial reform, for which Gül had earlier expressed an urgent need.

After he left the meeting Gerçeker confirmed that the president had asked his opinion on judicial reform. Gül had earlier said everyone believes there is a need for judicial reform but that there had been disagreements between the stakeholders on the way it should be carried out. "I have said this before. This subject should be handled very carefully. There is

significant work going on to this end but there are also issues where there is no consensus. Everyone believes judicial reform is a must for Turkey. We only have problems over the way it will be carried out.

We need to focus on this subject without politicizing it or leaving room for partisan polarization,” Gül said during a visit to Sinop on Sunday.

The government is determined to implement an extensive reform of the country’s judiciary, mainly in the formation of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK), and particularly after the board’s recent move to revoke the authority of some prosecutors. They were conducting an investigation into Erzincan Chief Public Prosecutor İlhan Cihaner, who is now jailed and accused of being a member of the alleged terrorist Ergenekon gang as well as of falsifying documents. Whereas government representatives, including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and many jurists and intellectuals condemned the HSYK, stating that the board had made a political decision to protect criminals from being brought to justice, Gerçeker stood behind the controversial decision and argued that the board had acted lawfully. Asked if this recent tension between the judiciary and the government has spilled over into his meeting with Gül, Gerçeker said they only talked about the judicial reform. “No, he solely took my views over the judicial reform matter. I conveyed my suggestions over how such a reform should be. But certainly, there are disagreements between us and the Ministry of Justice,” Gerçeker said. “Time will tell if those disagreements will be resolved or not,” he added.

Gül will host the head of the Constitutional Court, Haşim Kılıç, and Minister of Justice Sadullah Ergin on Wednesday over the same matter.

TÜSİAD voices expectation for judicial reform in meetings with Gül and Arınç

Thursday, 25 February 2010 09:24

Todays Zaman

Ümit Boyner, the chairwoman of the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (TÜSİAD)

Ümit Boyner, the chairwoman of the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (TÜSİAD), and her delegation had talks with Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç and President Abdullah Gül, respectively, on Wednesday to discuss the association's expectation for a judicial reform.

Arınç accepted the TÜSİAD delegation at the Prime Ministry building. The delegation expressed the country's growing expectation for a judicial reform. “Turkey needs to cover significant distance in the democratization and judicial reform areas in order to return to its regular agenda,” Boyner remarked. When she mentioned the regular agenda she was referring to the fight against unemployment, the global financial crisis and aspirations to continue economic growth.

Boyner’s TÜSİAD has received praise from many observers recently due to its emphasis on the government’s efforts to settle the country’s problems through democratic means.

The Justice Ministry completed an EU-driven reform package making changes to the judiciary and submitted it to the Cabinet for approval in August. The package introduces comprehensive changes in line with the requirements of the EU, including a change to the structure of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK), increasing its number of members and changing how they are elected.

It also seeks to create an appeal mechanism for HSYK decisions, which are currently final and not subject to further judicial review. Boyner added that Turkey would continue discussing constitutional changes and democratization throughout 2010. “We will be glad if

we cooperate with opposition parties and contribute to [governmental] efforts as civil society organizations.”

Arınç, in response, said TÜSİAD is a much-trusted association whose activities create noteworthy impressions in the country. Recalling that TÜSİAD has so far prepared various reports for the implementation of reforms and democratic steps, the deputy prime minister noted that “many reports have been prepared. But only a few of them have been put into operation. I hope TÜSİAD will revise its projects under your [Boyner’s] presidency for a more independent and democratic Turkey governed by the rule of law.”

The TÜSİAD delegation later paid a visit to President Gül at the Çankaya presidential palace. Boyner spoke to reporters after an hour-long meeting with the president and said her delegation voiced its expectations for a more democratic country.

“We discussed recent developments in Turkey with the president. The world and Turkey have rescued themselves from a critical corner [referring to the financial crisis], but we are losing our energy in a vicious cycle [due to political polemics]. What we are expecting is that the agenda will return to employment and other related issues rather than [political] tension. We told the president that we are ready to do our best to contribute to such efforts,” the TÜSİAD head remarked.

Boyner also said the president’s views on judiciary-related issues were very clear. Gül publicly said last week that reforms to the judicial system should be carried out quickly.

Counter-Narcotic Operations

Friday, 19 February 2010 12:34

TIME TURK

Turkish police seized 124 kg of hashish and 37 kg of heroin in five operations across the country.

Police waged an operation in eastern province of Diyarbakir, confiscating 37 kg of heroin. One person was detained in the operation.

In other operations in southeastern province of Mardin, Dogubayazit town of eastern province of Agri, western province of Izmir and northwestern province of Bursa, security teams seized 124 kg of hashish. Five people were detained in these operations

Counter narcotics operations in Turkey

Saturday, 20 February 2010 11:07

TIME TURK

Turkish security forces confiscated 52 kilograms of hashish in separate operations conducted in south-eastern province of Hakkari, central Anatolian province of Kayseri and south-western province of Isparta on Friday.

Security forces detained 13 people in connection with the illicit drugs.

Turkish security forces detain 156 illegal migrants

Saturday, 20 February 2010 10:51

TIME TURK

Security forces detained 156 migrants in the western province of Izmir and southern province of Antalya as they were trying to proceed to the other countries illegally.

The migrants of Palestinian, Somalian and Eritrean origin will be deported once the legal proceedings are completed.

Army General's case under review in Istanbul

Friday, 19 February 2010 14:51

Hürriyet

Third Army commander Gen. Saldıray Berk's case has been forwarded to the Istanbul Prosecutor's Office and the general's testimony in the ongoing Ergenekon case may be taken up in Istanbul.

Gen. Berk had been called on to testify on Feb.10 by Erzurum Chief Public Prosecutor Osman Şanal in the investigation regarding the alleged plot against religious İsmailağa community in Erzincan. Berk had missed the date for his court appearance in February, citing military duties.

Şanal, however, was stripped of his authorities by the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors, or HSYK, on Thursday in the wake of the judiciary crisis that ensued with Şanal's arrest of Erzincan public prosecutor İlhan Cihaner on Wednesday.

A second request for Berk's appearance before the court was issued by Şanal that stipulated he be forcefully brought to court if he did not appear before Feb. 26.

However, due to Şanal's loss of jurisdiction over the case, a special prosecutor from Erzurum forwarded Berk's dossier for review to the Istanbul Prosecutor's Office. Officials from the Istanbul Prosecutor's Office have stated that Gen. Berk may appear before the court in Istanbul and they will set an exact date next week

Berk is the first general on active duty summoned to testify in the ongoing Ergenekon investigation, which alleges that a suspected criminal gang had a coup plot and was aiming to topple the ruling government.

Lawyers and jurists' associations condemn HSYK decision

Friday, 19 February 2010 10:01

Today's Zaman

Lawyers from the Law and Democracy Platform protested against the HSYK decision to remove prosecutors conducting a probe into the Erzincan chief prosecutor.

Several associations representing lawyers and jurists have condemned a recent decision by the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) to strip an Erzurum prosecutor of his special authority because of his investigation into another prosecutor on charges of membership in a terrorist organization and falsification of documents.

In a joint statement, several associations, including the Justice and Law Association, the Boğaziçi Lawyers Association, the Democratic Jurists Association, the Supremacy of Law Association and the Reform in Judiciary Group, reacted to the removal of Erzurum prosecutor Osman Şanal from his post.

Şanal was investigating now-jailed Erzincan Chief Public Prosecutor İlhan Cihaner, on charges of membership in a terrorist organization and falsification of documents, and 3rd Army Commander Gen. Saldıray Berk, who had allegedly conspired with Cihaner.

Reşat Petek, vice president of the Jurists Association, said the HSYK decision violated the Constitution. He interpreted the decision as interference into the judiciary, which is supposed to be impartial and independent. He also said the decision attempts to intimidate prosecutors who are conducting lawful investigations against terrorism.

"This is pure intimidation," Petek said, speaking on behalf of the associations, and added that stripping prosecutors of their duties can only be done after an investigation into their conduct. "But the HSYK has ruled on the Erzurum prosecutor without any investigation."

Petek said Article 139 of the Constitution states that judges and prosecutors cannot be dismissed and the rules regarding their inspection is explained in Article 144.

“The HSYK decision amounts to extrajudicial enforcement,” he added.

Petek called on the government and Parliament to work on a judicial reform package as soon as possible in order to prevent such misconduct.

From April 27 to Feb. 17 on the anniversary of the Feb. 28 coup

Monday, 22 February 2010 16:42

Today's Zaman

Turkey is continuing to make breakthroughs that will be remembered for many years to come. The strong civil will against the e-memorandum released by the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) on April 27, 2007 was a first.

The nation rewarded those who rejected the military's warning by providing them unprecedented support in the July 22 elections. Feb. 17, 2010 also went down in history as an important day when major developments along the Erzurum-Erzincan-Ankara line occurred. It was the first time that a prosecutor issued a notice saying a commander could be brought to court by police force if he refused to show up to give testimony. The first general to experience the “by force” warning is 3rd Army Commander Gen. Saldıray Berk, a close friend of Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ, which adds to the significance of the event. For the first time, a chief public prosecutor was detained in Erzincan and arrested in Erzurum.

The Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) intervened in the incident in a way that fractured the legal world. The HSYK stripped the authority of Erzurum Chief Public Prosecutor Osman Şanal, who ordered the arrest of Erzincan Chief Public Prosecutor İlhan Cihaner and summoned Gen. Berk to testify. The HSYK also stripped other prosecutors of their authority and lodged criminal complaints against them. People speculated that the HSYK had taken action in order to prevent any investigation of Berk. While Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who met with legal experts, remained silent about the matter, Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin made a strong public statement against the decision. The public statement resembled the statements issued by Minister Cemil Çiçek, who had read the government's counterstatement to the April 27 military statement.

An AK Party legal expert who attended the meeting in which the statement emphasizing that the HSYK had overstepped its authority and impaired the independence of the judiciary was drafted conceded that the current statement in fact resembled the previous one read by Çiçek, saying: “We had the same feeling as when we were preparing the counterstatement for April 27. We shaped the current text with the same thoughts.”

I pointed out to the legal expert, who had explained that both events were critical breakthroughs as civilian will stood strong against the army on April 27 and the judiciary on Feb. 17, that while important steps were taken after April 27, no steps have been taken to move forward with the much needed reform in the judiciary in the aftermath of Feb. 17. His response was: “The elections were near and the conjuncture was appropriate. Just like how April 27 yielded a result requiring the army to take a step back, Feb. 17 will yield the same result for the HSYK, which is willing to exceed the limits of law, and for its blindfolded supporters.”

In other words, it will pave the way to re-evaluating the judiciary, redefining its position, making it dependent on the public will and restructuring it through reform. The incident on Feb. 17 occurred just days before the 13th anniversary of Feb. 28, which was the last post-modern military coup.

Hüseyin Kocabıyık, who was then Prime Minister Tansu Çiller's advisor, made an interesting remark, saying: “Gen. Çevik Bir, the symbol of Feb. 28, is too embarrassed to show his face

because he was ‘used.’ He is apparently a person with a sense of shame.” Will there be people in the judiciary who will be “embarrassed” for being used? The upcoming days or years will show us.

In fact, Bir should also disclose the name of those who used him. The main issue is that those who used and those who let themselves be used against the national will understand that the era of fighting against the national will is over.

Center-right unites but fails to consolidate, problems continue

The Democrat Party (DP), which consists of the Motherland Party (ANAVATAN) and the True Path Party (DYP), continues to face obstacles. Party leaders have decided that the new party should comprise an equal number of members from each party to avoid potential problems. But the sides quickly gave up on the idea. Removing certain people with roots in ANAVATAN from the new party drew the ire of former Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz, who is close to leader Hüsamettin Cindoruk. Yılmaz, who led ANAVATAN for many years, warned the party administration that removing members who came from ANAVATAN from the party administration would impair the integration process.

Cindoruk’s statements that seemed to support Ergenekon sparked criticism within the party. While former DYP members accused ANAVATAN member of being leftists, ANAVATAN members said the party could not win the support of voters if it distanced itself from Ergenekon. A former ANAVATAN member friend of mine who expressed the impossibility of ANAVATAN and the DYP uniting said: “Those who want to bring these two parties together overlook a very important detail. This unification is like trying to mix water and oil. In order to unite, they need a constant mixer. But even this would not create full consolidation because the moment the mixing stops, members from the two parties will begin to separate.”

Cindoruk also showed he is not a good “mixer” leader. Many years have passed, and the center-right has finally merged, but it has yet to become integrated.

Contemporary and center-left activity encourages CHP to reach poor voters

Republican People’s Party (CHP) senior officials are working to restructure the party. The renewal is part of efforts to reach two specific groups, namely, wealthy educated voters and destitute voters. A CHP member friend of mine says the reason for this change, which is rare for parties to do outside of election periods, is to be able to reach a wider segment of society. “We know our shortcomings in reaching people. We also know that the era of going door to door during election periods is over. In any case, we have already entered an election atmosphere.” He went on to explain that their plans were connected to the new party and new formations in the left wing. It seems efforts to establish a new party by Mustafa Sarıgül, a strong candidate for CHP leadership, has affected the CHP. To secure the votes of economically disadvantaged voters, CHP officials have already started to visit shanty neighborhoods.

Social Democratic People’s Party (SHP) leader Hüseyin Ergün’s “contemporary left” movement is also being closely followed. To prevent the new formation from winning the support of intellectuals, wealthy voters and Alevis, the party is renewing its party program. As for Ergün, he is preparing to send an important message to the public by merging three different left formations under one roof on March 13. Noting that he is working to introduce a true left party to Turkey, Ergün said he was not insisting on becoming the leader of the new party. He explained that he might announce the new leader and other senior members of the party before March 13 and added that once the true left unites with the people, CHP’s share of the vote will drop to less than 10 percent.

Largest Ergenekon probe touches all untouchables

Tuesday, 23 February 2010 17:12

Today's Zaman

Eleven retired generals and several retired colonels were detained yesterday as part of the investigation into the Sledgehammer and Cage alleged coup plots, devised by military members of Ergenekon, a clandestine gang charged with plotting to overthrow the government. At least 50 people were detained, a majority of them retired and active duty military officers. Retired Air Forces Commander Gen. İbrahim Fırtına, who was interrogated earlier in January by prosecutors conducting the investigation into Ergenekon, was detained yesterday in addition to former Naval Forces Adm. Özden Örnek, the writer of detailed journals kept between 2000-2004 on some of the force commanders' coup plans, former 1st Army Commander Ergin Saygun, Gen. Engin Alan and several retired colonels. Fırtına was detained in Ankara, where the police raided 14 locations.

In addition to the generals listed above, retired generals Feyyaz Ögütçü, Ayhan Poyraz, Ayhan Taş, Mustafa Çalış, Yavuz Yalçın, Özer Karabulut, retired Admiral Ali Deniz Kutluk and retired colonels Ümit Öcan, Emin Küçükılıç, Kubilay Aktaş, Ahmet Metin Dikici and Ali Karababa were also taken into custody.

Retired generals Deniz Kutluk and Yusuf Ziya Toker were also detained and taken to the İstanbul Prosecutor's Office. There were also searches in the homes of retired 1st Army Commander retired Gen. Çetin Doğan and retired Gen. Süha Tanyeli, the former head of the General Staff's Strategic Research and Study Center (SAREM), a foundation affiliated with the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK). Doğan was detained later in the afternoon.

Fourteen officers, seven retired and seven on active duty, were detained in Ankara.

Yesterday's operation was carried out under the order of the İstanbul chief prosecutor, the Ankara Governor's Office said. The detainees were flown to İstanbul later yesterday.

In the face of the developments, Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ delayed a planned visit to Egypt yesterday morning. An announcement from the General Staff said Başbuğ would instead be flying to Egypt tonight.

There was also a search of the Turkish Armed Forces Mehmetçik Foundation's İstanbul representative office, in İstanbul's Caddebostan neighborhood. Police teams and prosecutors arrived at the Mehmetçik Foundation at 8 a.m. The search continued throughout the day. The police reportedly made copies of files found on the foundation's computers.

At the same time, in İzmir police launched another operation to apprehend suspects believed to be part of the Cage operation plan, yet another alleged military plot to create chaos in the country. Several suspects were detained, including a former navy colonel, in the operation conducted by the İzmir Police Department; however, no exact number was provided by officials.

Gen. Alan is best remembered for his role in an operation in Kenya in 1999, in which terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan was apprehended by Turkish Special Forces.

The Cage plan was exposed during a police raid on the office of retired Maj. Levent Bektaş as part of a probe launched after the discovery of a large arms cache in İstanbul's Poyrazköy district in April within the framework of the investigation into Ergenekon. The Cage Operation Action Plan sought to intimidate Turkey's non-Muslims and assassinate prominent non-Muslim figures to put domestic and international pressure on the Justice and Development Party (AK Party), which would in turn lead to diminishing public support for the party.

The Sledgehammer plan, revealed in January by a Turkish newspaper, was more than simply an outline of a plan to kill or injure various bureaucrats, journalists and the government. It included a plot to bomb one of İstanbul's largest mosques during Friday prayer and a subplot named Oraj (Thunderstorm) that called for the deliberate downing of a Turkish jet to trigger problems with Greece, which the conspirators hoped would give the army the upper hand in politics as the public would feel threatened by a foreign enemy.

Police said the operation yesterday was launched when the National Police Department's criminal investigations department examined and verified the authenticity of documents regarding the Sledgehammer and Cage plans. The original documents were handed to the Ergenekon prosecutors by the Taraf daily, which exposed both plans.

Former force commanders were among those detained in a major operation as part of the investigation into Ergenekon. The operation was launched after an examination of documents detailing an alleged coup attempt established that the documents are authentic. A retired admiral who chronicled the coup attempts was also detained

Removal of Gen. Başbuğ could open Pandora's box for Turkey

Tuesday, 23 February 2010 09:27

Today's Zaman

Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ has been at the center of fierce criticism over his stance regarding recently exposed military plots to overthrow the AK Party government. Though various actors have called on the government to remove Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ from office, the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) seems reluctant to make such a move for a number of reasons, including a lack of government confidence in the democratic line of candidates who would replace the military chief.

Contrary to established practice in many democratic countries, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) generally determines many years beforehand who the new head of the armed forces will be. Such a determination is believed to prevent a junta wing from taking full control of the military but has failed to curb the strength of pro-coup and anti-democratic members of the armed forces. The junta wing is known to have worked in recent years to have its candidate appointed as the chief of General Staff rather than fight a democratically elected government.

Calls on the AK Party government to remove Gen. Başbuğ from office have intensified, particularly after yet another suspected military plot to overthrow the government was exposed in January. Called the Balyoz (Sledgehammer) Security Operation Plan, the plot was a subversive military plan to get rid of the AK Party government through violent acts. Since then, many civil society organizations, intellectuals and even leaders of opposition parties have called on Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to dismiss Gen. Başbuğ.

Erdoğan, however, has remained cautious thus far, emphasizing the harmony between his government and the TSK. What lies behind the prime minister's caution is most probably his suspicions about the loyalty and respect for democracy and the rule of law of the candidates to replace Gen. Başbuğ.

In 1997, a colonel was killed by a bullet from an unidentified assailant during a military ceremony in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (KKTC). Later, many alleged that the true target of the bullet was Gen. Hüseyin Kıvrıkoğlu, then-commander of the land forces. The planned assassination was to prevent the general from becoming the new chief of General Staff. Such a move would have enabled Gen. Çevik Bir, then-deputy chairman of the General Staff, to be appointed as chief of General Staff. However, the plan failed, and Gen. Kıvrıkoğlu ascended to the top spot.

Only a few months before Gen. Kıvrıkoğlu completed his term in office, the government, led by former Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, asked him to remain in office for an extra year. The general, however, did not accept the proposal, which was aimed to prevent Gen. Hilmi Özkök from being appointed as the new chief of General Staff. After Gen. Özkök became chief, he blocked several TSK attempts to overthrow democratic governments.

Why did Baykal ask the PM to dismiss Gen. Başbuğ?

Deniz Baykal, the leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP), is one of the fervent supporters of removing Gen. Başbuğ from office. In June 2009, Baykal publicly asked Prime Minister Erdoğan to take action against the pro-coup wing within the armed forces and dismiss the chief of General Staff.

The CHP leader's call came shortly after a Turkish daily exposed a coup plan titled the Action Plan to Fight Reactionaryism. The plan was drafted by a colonel on active duty and sought to undermine the power of the AK Party government and the faith-based Gülen movement.

Erdoğan, however, refused to comply with the call and told a Turkish news station that he did not "feel" the risk of any coup preparation at the TSK. "If I did feel such a thing, I would not just take my jacket and go as my precedents did. I would do what was necessary," he noted. The removal of Gen. Başbuğ last summer would have paved the path for now-retired Gen. Ergin Saygun, the then-commander of the 1st Army, to be appointed first as the land forces commander and later as the chief of General Staff. Saygun was known to have been a frequenter of seminars organized by retired Gen. Çetin Doğan at the Selimiye barracks, where senior members of the military discussed ways to get rid of the AK Party government. Gen. Saygun was detained on Monday as part of an investigation into the Sledgehammer plan.

Baykal reiterated his call to dismiss Gen. Başbuğ last month. The call was aimed to clear the obstacles for Gen. Hasan Iğsız, the commander of the 1st Army, to be appointed the next chief of General Staff. Gen. Iğsız will retire at the Supreme Military Council (YAŞ) meeting in August 2010.

A chief of General Staff has the right to appeal to the Supreme Military Administrative Court in the event of his dismissal; however, Turkey has never experienced such an incident. It is not certain what the outcome would be if a chief of General Staff sought legal redress after being removed from his position.

The Turkish Constitution, drafted under martial law after the Sept. 12, 1980 military coup, does not allow the trial of a military chief. The AK Party included the trial of military chiefs in a draft constitution it prepared in 2008, but the draft has not been adopted. According to this bill, the chief of General Staff would be required to appear in court if he is removed from the military due to certain specified charges.

Army commanders dismissed during Özal's term in office

Former President Turgut Özal left his mark on Turkish history when he removed two military commanders in 1987. Özal was prime minister at the time. Chief of General Staff Gen. Necdet Üruğ and Gen. Necdet Öztorun were removed after the two made a secret plan over who would be the next military chief.

The terms of office of both commanders were to expire in a few months, and Gen. Necip Torumtay was set to become the new chief of General Staff. However, Üruğ wanted Öztorun to take office as the new army chief when he left the position. The two struck a deal, and Üruğ petitioned to retire two months before his term in office expired. Frustrated by the move, Özal removed both Üruğ and Öztorun from office and appointed Torumtay as the new chief of General Staff. After his appointment as chief, Gen. Torumtay was forced by Özal to resign in 1990 due to his reluctance to comply with government directives.

Özal's move was highly applauded at the time and was deemed a historic challenge to the armed forces.

After the retirement of Gen. Başbuğ and Gen. Iğsız at the YAŞ meeting next August, Gen. Işık Koşaner, the commander of the Gendarmerie General Command, is expected to be appointed as the new chief of General Staff. Koşaner will be replaced at the Gendarmerie General Command by Gen. Necdet Özel, the commander of the 2nd Army.

However, if Gen. Başbuğ is removed from office early, such a move will pave the way for Gen. Iğsız to replace him.

Detentions signal normalization of civilian-military relations

Tuesday, 23 February 2010 17:45

Today's Zaman

Ali Bayramoğlu, Mehmet Altan, Alper Görmüş and Ümit Kardaş (from left to right)

Opinion leaders have described the detention of former and active military members yesterday as part of an ongoing probe into Ergenekon, a clandestine criminal network that has alleged links within the state and is suspected of plotting to topple the government, as a step taken towards the civilianization of the country through a confrontation with those involved in subversive plans.

Eleven retired generals and several retired colonels were detained early Monday as part of the investigation into alleged coup plots named the Sledgehammer and the Cage plans, devised by the military members of Ergenekon.

Retired Air Forces Commander Gen. İbrahim Fırtına, who was interrogated earlier in January by prosecutors conducting the investigation into Ergenekon, was among those detained yesterday as well as former Naval Forces Commander Adm. Özden Örnek, the writer of detailed journals kept between 2000-2004 on some of the force commanders' coup plans, and former 1st Army Commander Ergin Saygun, Gen. Engin Alan and 10 army colonels. There were also searches at the homes of retired 1st Army Commander retired Gen. Çetin Doğan and retired Gen. Süha Tanyeli, the former head of the General Staff Strategic Research and Study Center (SAREM), a foundation affiliated with the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK).

Doğan was also detained later in the afternoon.

Characterizing Monday's developments as extraordinary, Ali Bayramoğlu, a columnist for the Yeni Şafak daily, said Turkish politics was undergoing very critical and difficult changes toward democratization.

"The detention of two former force commanders shows that the military tutelage regime, which has been deemed "untouchable" so far, is no longer untouchable. These developments are very important as they mark Turkey's process of civilianization," Bayramoğlu told.

He also explained that those behind the military plots with code names Sledgehammer and Cage were undergoing judicial proceedings starting with their detention yesterday.

The Cage plan was exposed during a police raid on the office of retired Maj. Levent Bektaş as part of a probe launched after the discovery of a large arms cache in İstanbul's Poyrazköy district in April within the framework of the investigation into Ergenekon. The Cage Operation Action Plan sought to intimidate Turkey's non-Muslims and assassinate prominent non-Muslim figures to put domestic and international pressure on the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government, which would in turn lead to a loss of public support for it.

The Sledgehammer plan was revealed in January by the Taraf daily. The plot had included shady plans such as bombing of most-frequented mosques in İstanbul to trigger chaos in the country with the ultimate goal of a military takeover.

Both of the plans have led to a nationwide outcry with many calling on the authorities to punish those behind them.

Mehmet Altan, a professor and columnist for the Star daily, interpreted yesterday's detentions as a move saving Turkey from being a militarist state. "This new era cannot bear the existence of a militarist state in the world. Turkey is shifting from Kemalism to democracy," he noted.

Taraf daily journalist Alper Görmüş, who was the editor-in-chief of the now-defunct Nokta weekly magazine, which first published the copies of Adm. Örnek's coup dairies, said yesterday's detentions marked "a threshold" because Turkey was confronting the coup attempts in 2003-2004.

"It seems certain that serious plans to meddle in politics were made during those times. A commander who deemed himself powerful made a plan, tried to put it into practice but failed in doing so. Some judicial circles commented that these plans did not constitute an offense because they were not put into practice. Here, prosecutors and judges believe that making such plans constitutes a crime. Furthermore, we do not know whether the Sledgehammer plot remained a plan; perhaps some steps were taken in line with it," explained Görmüş.

Ümit Kardaş, a retired military judge, said yesterday's detentions were normal, noting that any citizen can be detained if they commit an offense. "If a coup attempt is in question and if there is evidence showing the existence of coup attempts, and we know there are, then these detentions should be seen as normal. We should wait for the conclusion of the judicial process," he said.

Seven People Arrested Under "Balyoz Plan"

Wednesday, 24 February 2010 09:5

TIME TURK

Seven people were arrested under an investigation into alleged coup plan known publicly as "Balyoz (Sledgehammer)".

The arrestees include Admiral Ramazan Cem Gundeniz, Admiral Aziz Cakmak, retired General Mehmet Kaya Varol, retired Admiral Ali Deniz Kutluk and retired Admiral Ozer Karabulut.

They were sent to prison.

Earlier in the week, a number of people including former commanders of Turkish air and naval forces were detained over alleged military plans to overthrow the government.

MHP leader calls recent developments a 'state crisis'

Wednesday, 24 February 2010 09:3

Today's Zaman

Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli has said the process that started last week with a Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) decision and was followed by the detention of dozens of military members as part of a probe into an il Bahçeli was speaking at his party's parliamentary group gathering yesterday. Stating that no state institutions work in harmony with each other in Turkey except the president and the prime minister, Bahçeli said: "This state of affairs is impossible to continue. No matter what others say, this is a state crisis. And it calls for a regime crisis."

Bahçeli was referring to last week's tension, triggered by an HSYK decision, and Monday's wave of detentions. The HSYK last Wednesday stripped specially authorized Erzurum Prosecutor Osman Şanal of his authority over an investigation into Erzurum Chief Public

Prosecutor İlhan Cihaner, currently under arrest on charges of membership in a terrorist organization and falsification of documents. Nearly 50 retired and active duty military personnel were then detained on Monday as part of an investigation into the Sledgehammer coup plot, allegedly devised by the military to overthrow the government.

Stating that the current process Turkey is passing through has reached a level that would harm the security of the regime, Bahçeli said the judiciary, which is currently a party to the crisis, is also one of the parties to the solution. “Everybody should believe in the law and consent to the possible outcomes,” he added.

Yalçınkaya denies rumors of looming closure case for AK Party

Thursday, 25 February 2010 09:30

Today's Zaman

Supreme Court of Appeal Chief Prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalçınkaya has said the court has not initiated a probe into the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) in preparation for a closure case.

The prosecutor said the court was examining news reports about the AK Party but that it is not investigating the party. The prosecutor sparked controversy in early February when he commented on the possibility of launching a closure case against the AK Party. Yalçınkaya also refuted reports that the Supreme Court of Appeals had launched an investigation into two AK Party deputies whose recent remarks sparked controversy.

Earlier this week, the AK Party initiated an intra-party investigation into the two deputies. Last week, Kahramanmaraş deputy Avni Doğan publicly said his party was categorizing its opponents. “They categorized us for 40 years. Now it is our turn [to categorize them.] They have categorized all those whose daughters wear the headscarf. They have categorized all those whose children attend the religious imam-hatip high schools. They have done this to the public for 40 years. Now we are doing the same to them,” the deputy stated.

AK Party Deputy Chairman Hüseyin Çelik said Doğan overstepped limits with his remarks and said his party would take action against him. Shortly after the Doğan controversy, AK Party Çorum deputy Ahmet Aydoğmuş said opponents of the ruling party had “problems with their roots.” The AK Party also launched an investigation into Aydoğmuş.

CHP's Onur Öymen attacks Today's Zaman in Brussels

Wednesday, 24 February 2010 09:2

Today's Zaman

The main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) has accused European Parliament members of being misinformed by only reading certain newspapers including Today's Zaman.

Despite the CHP's accusations, the co-chairwoman of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), H el ene Flautre, called Today's Zaman “one of the stars of Turkish press.” Speaking to Today's Zaman, Onur  ymen, the CHP's deputy chairman, said he did not name any specific publications, complaining that the European Parliament was only getting its information from certain sources.

At the 63rd meeting of the JPC held in the European Parliament in Brussels on Tuesday, several CHP deputies attacked the Today's Zaman and Zaman dailies. Accusing the European Parliament's rapporteur on Turkey, Ria Oomen-Ruijten, of only reading certain newspapers,  ymen called on European deputies “to learn about the tendency and orientation of such media.”

Another CHP deputy, Osman Coşkunoglu, claimed the sales figures of Zaman were very low but its circulation was high as it was handed out for free. Coşkunoglu made this remark while referring to Zaman's Monday headline in which Dutch Christian Democrat Ruijten called for an overhaul of the judiciary. Coşkunoglu also told Today's Zaman that he did not explicitly name any newspaper.

The claims came amid discussions in the European Parliament about freedom of the press in Turkey. Addressing the JPC meeting, Öymen said: "Do not limit yourself to the information of some media. You read some English daily newspapers, but please try to learn about the tendency and orientation of such media."

Öymen insisted that he did not name any specific media outlet, but when asked, everybody in the room understood that he was referring to Today's Zaman. He said he could not prevent people from having certain opinions.

Öymen was apparently not happy about the inclusion of a Today's Zaman article in a JPC file. The article was presented to members of Parliament and Turkish deputies together with 17 documents before the meeting. The article, titled "Turkey wants full visa immunity from EU, not ease in requirements" and published in the Feb. 4 edition of Today's Zaman, called for visa-free travel for Turkish citizens between Turkey and Europe.

Asked about CHP deputies' remarks on Today's Zaman, Flautre said Today's Zaman was one of the stars of the Turkish media. Stressing that there is a great variety of opinions in the Turkish press, Flautre said they expect to hear all the differing views from all segments of Turkish society. Referring to the Doğan Group tax issue as well, Flautre, a member of the European Parliament from the French Green Party, said the majority of the European Parliament thought the tax fine was political rather than fiscal.

Meanwhile, speaking at the meeting on Monday, Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin said an independent and impartial judiciary was the pledge of the government to the public and that they will keep this promise. Ergin delivered a speech at the meeting on Monday, stressing the government's efforts to improve the country's judicial standards. "In addition to our government's efforts at democratization, a judicial system that operates in an independent and impartial way is our pledge to our citizens," Ergin said, stating that they have taken the initiative to keep this promise with a judicial reform strategy draft, prepared by the Justice Ministry last year.

The draft calls for the implementation in 2010 of many long-overdue laws that are essential to Turkey's European Union accession process.

Islamic world, Turkey to celebrate Prophet's birth

Thursday, 25 February 2010 11:11

WORLD BULLETIN

Muslims will on Thursday night observe Mawlid, that celebrates the birth of prophet Mohammad all over the world.

It is celebrated to mark the Eid milad-un-Nabi, birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who entered the world in 570. It is celebrated on the 12th day of Rabi al-Awwal, the fifth month of the Islamic Calendar. This year the day falls on 25 February.

On this day Muslims celebrate by focusing on the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad. They sing songs and say special prayers. A special part of this remembrance is on how he forgave even his most bitter enemies. As with other holidays, Muslims also give to the poor. Turkey also will celebrate Milad-un-Nabi with special programs by state-run TV, TRT, in Kurdish and also through connections to Kirkuk, Lefkosa, Sarajevo and Istanbul.

Mawlid, Milad-un-Nabi, is observed by Muslims in mosques across Turkey with prayers.

After the prayers, congregation performs evening prayer.

Live broadcast from 5 different countries

A live broadcast from 5 different countries will be on TRT screens.

Head of the Religious Affairs Ali Bardakoglu underlined in his message he delivered from Egyptian capital Cairo that the humanity is in a great need of Him today.

TRT will realize a live broadcast from five different countries including Istanbul Eyup Sultan Mosque. Other live broadcast centers will be Tataristan's Kazan, Cairo of Egypt, Skopje in Macedonia, Kirkuk in Iraq and Saudi Arabia's Medina.

Head of the Religious Affairs Bardakoglu will deliver a sermon from Huseyniye Mosque in Cairo, Egypt.

The special Mawlid programme will be watched from TRT-1, TRT-AVAZ and TRT-6 channels at 19.30 hours local time, on Thursday night.

YOK founder dies in Turkey

Thursday, 25 February 2010 11:23

TIME TURK

Prof. Ihsan Dogramaci, who passed away early on Thursday, will be laid to rest in the Turkish capital on Sunday.

Dogramaci, who had been under treatment at Hacettepe University Hospital's intensive care unit since November 2009, lost his life due to "multiple organ failure".

Ceremonies will be held for Dogramaci, the founding president of Turkey's Higher Board of Education (YOK) and founder of Bilkent University, at Ankara's Hacettepe and Bilkent universities on February 27.

Following the ceremony to take place at YOK headquarters and the funeral to be held at Kocatepe Mosque on February 28, Dogramaci will be laid to rest at the courtyard of Bilkent Dogramacizade Ali Pasa Mosque.

YOK founder

Professor Ihsan Dogramaci, born in Irbil, Iraq in 1915, was an Iraqi Turkmen pediatric physician, an academic and an international leader of development.

He was the founder of Bilkent University, a leading private university in Ankara, Turkey, and he had been the first President and the Chairman of its Board of Trustees since 1985. He was the founding President of Higher Board of Education of Turkey (YOK) from 1981 until 1992. He established the Hacettepe University in 1967, which is now one of the best state universities in Turkey in medicine-related areas. He also chaired the Board of Trustees in Middle East Technical University in 1965 and held the rector position in Ankara University in 1963.

Dogramaci was the founder Fellow of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, London and had been an Honorary Scientific Advisor to the International Centre for Childhood Studies in England since 1982.

He was also a member of the Board of Trustees of Heart International since 1981 and had been the Honorary President of International Pediatric Association (IPA) since 1992.

He signed the World Health Organization (WHO) Constitution in New York in July 1946 and acted as the organization's Vice President in 1976 and a member of Executive Board between 1976 and 1982.

He had been a member of the UNICEF Executive Board (1959-1985) and was elected Chairman of the Board for two terms. He had been the President of Turkish National Committee for UNICEF (1958-2003).

Dogramaci, who was married with three children, spoke Turkish, English, French, German, Arabic and Persian.

He authored over 100 scientific articles, three books, six book chapters and served as the editor of four medical journals.

New Constitution a Help for Eu Membership, Turkish Lawmaker Says

Tuesday, 23 February 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

A new constitution would make easier for Turkey to become a member of the European Union, said a Turkish lawmaker with the ruling Justice and Development (AK) Party. Speaking at a conference on works over a new constitution in the central province of Corum, Burhan Kuzu, head of the parliament's constitution committee, said Turkey's main problem with its constitutions was closely related with the circumstances under which they were made and their implementation.

Kuzu said all of the constitutions Turkey had used to date, including the first constitution of the Ottoman Empire, had failed to take people's opinions into account.

Turkish Board Allows 14 Channels to Broadcast In Different Languages

Tuesday, 23 February 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkey's radio and television board allowed on Tuesday 14 TV and radio channels to broadcast in different languages and dialects.

Turkey's Supreme Board of Radio and Television (RTUK) gathered in Ankara, and discussed applications of several radio and TV channels that wanted to broadcast in different languages and dialects under a concerned regulation.

The board permitted Mardin's Cemre FM, Mersin's Radyo Ses, Sanliurfa's Radyo Net, Diyarbakir's Cagri FM, Gun Radyo, Nur FM, Gun TV, TV 21, Aktuel TV, Soz TV, Can TV, Can Radyo, Aktuel FM and Aksa FM to broadcast in different languages and dialects.

The above mentioned channels said they would broadcast in Kurdish, Zaza, Kirmanchi and Arabic.

Turkey allowed broadcasts in different languages and dialects in 2006. The state-run Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) began broadcasting in different languages and dialects on its TRT-6 channel as of January 1, 2009.

Turkish court charges 20 officers in coup plot

Thursday, February 25, 2010

ANKARA - The Associated Press

HURRIYAT

A Turkish court has charged more ranking officers for involvement in the Ergenekon gang, allegedly plotting several years ago to topple the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, government.

The number of officers jailed now stands at 20 - including five admirals and three generals, the Associated Press reported Thursday.

The court ordered the jailing of eight more officers, including five active duty officers and two generals, pending trial Thursday, ahead of a critical meeting by the president, military chief and prime minister to discuss tensions over the largest-ever crackdown on the military in Turkey. In total, eight out of 20 officers were on active duty.

The wiretap evidence and discovery of alleged military coup plans drafted in 2003 led to the detention of about 50 commanders Monday. Among them are former chiefs of the Navy, Air Force and Special Forces.

Top leaders urge responsibility to protect Turkey's institutions

Thursday, February 25, 2010

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

Turkey's top three figures come together for a mini summit to discuss the ongoing civil-military strife. Afterward, President Gül declares that the conflict will be resolved and asks for all citizens to act responsibly. 'The meeting could help reduce tensions, but recall that there is still ambiguity over the fate of these arrested officers,' says an observer. A rare meeting Thursday between Turkey's president, prime minister and chief of General Staff has concluded with a vow from the Presidency that the current civil-military tensions will be resolved within the framework of the Constitution.

President Abdullah Gül took on the role of broker as he invited Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ to join in a three-hour meeting to discuss the ongoing crisis between the government and the military.

This latest crisis erupted following the detention on Monday of nearly 50 former and active officers on charges of plotting in 2003 to overthrow the government.

"During the meeting, the issues that are being discussed by the public were handled in depth. Our citizens should be confident that these issues will be solved within the constitutional order and within the framework of our laws, and in this process everyone should act responsibly in order to not tarnish our institutions," a brief statement issued by the Office of the Presidency after the meeting read.

Erdoğan and Başbuğ were seen carrying briefcases as they entered the Office of the Presidency.

Tension between the government and the military escalated once again following Monday's detentions, which included former air and naval forces commanders and former 1st Army generals. According to the chief of General Staff, a spontaneous meeting was held Tuesday with the participation of all generals and admirals to assess the "serious situation."

"It was a very good meeting," Erdoğan told reporters at Parliament, without further elaborating on the issue.

But veteran journalists said this meeting would have only a limited effect on the ongoing judicial process that has resulted in the detention of many prominent military figures.

"It's not possible to know what has been discussed, but we can say that this meeting could help reduce the tension," Bilal Çetin, Ankara representative and columnist for daily Vatan, said in an interview with the CNN Türk on Thursday. "But we should recall that the judicial process is still ongoing and there is still ambiguity over the fate of these arrested officers."

One important point the brief post-meeting statement underscored was in the reference to the constitutional order being the source of the solution to the problem. While this reference could be interpreted as the military reiterating its commitment to democratic order, it could also be seen as saying that the armed forces' possible future reactions will be within the laws. Another point dealt with protecting institutions, namely the Turkish Armed Forces, or TSK, during the judicial process.

Başbuğ had earlier complained through newspapers and some Web sites about an ongoing, asymmetric campaign against the military. In addition, the top general has said he is very disturbed about the way the former generals were taken into custody.

Rumors of the potential resignation of the entire command structure have shaken the Turkish capital in the wake of the growing disturbance in the military Tuesday and Wednesday.

"I did not get the impression that they would resign. They even did not imply [that]," Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Çiçek said in an interview with daily Hürriyet on Thursday. Çiçek was the first government official to meet with Başbuğ and other top military personnel Monday just hours after the arrests.

"However, the situation is very disturbing for them. Their old friends, their comrades in arms, have been arrested on very serious charges. It obviously shakes them and they have a deep sorrow about it," Çiçek said.

"In addition, they also underline the importance of the Turkish Armed Forces as a valuable institution of this country," the deputy prime minister said. "They, of course, point out that the criminals are to be prosecuted, but beyond this point they also express sorrow for systematic attacks on them and voice their demand that these are stopped."

Başbuğ, speaking to reporters at Parliament later, dismissed claims that the government would decide to hold early elections. "Turkey should get used to having elections on time," he said.

Regarding constitutional changes, Erdoğan told journalists, "Keep following us."

GEO-STRATEGIC NEWS **VISITS AND MEETINGS**

Serbian Foreign Minister Due In Turkey

Friday, 19 February 2010 14:35

TIME TURK

Serbia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Vuk Jeremic will arrive in Turkey on Friday upon an invitation from his Turkish counterpart Ahmet Davutoglu.

Regional and international issues, as well as bilateral relations between Turkey and Serbia would be on the agenda of Jeremic's talks with Turkish officials, a statement from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on Friday.

As part of his visit, Jeremic will also be received by Turkish President Abdullah Gul and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Turkish State Minister In Albania

Friday, 19 February 2010 14:44

TIME TURK

Turkish State Minister Selma Aliye Kavaf began her meetings in Albania on Friday.

Kavaf and accompanying delegation visited Epoka University campus in Tirana.

Later in the day, she will attend Turkey-Albania Business Council meeting and meet with Turkish and Albanian businessmen.

Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha is also expected to attend the council meeting.

Kavaf will also visit Turgut Ozal school complex which was opened in 1993.

Turkish Foreign Minister Meets His Spanish Counterpart

Monday, 22 February 2010 18:43

TIME TURK

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu had a meeting with Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos in Madrid on Sunday.

Davutoglu, who is paying a visit to Madrid for the 2nd Turkey-Spain Intergovernmental Summit, had a closed-door meeting with Moratinos. Officials said Davutoglu and Moratinos discussed diplomatic initiatives regarding Iran's nuclear energy, Davutoglu's visit to Tehran, Turkey's EU accession process and Cyprus issue in the meeting. Moratinos said Spain fully supported Turkey's EU membership bid. Davutoglu and Moratinos also discussed bilateral trade volume which dropped to 6 billion euros due to economic crisis. A new strategy would be determined to boost the volume, officials said. Davutoglu also had a meeting with representatives of leading foundations and think-tank organizations in Madrid.

Turkish Premier Visits Spanish City Of Cordoba

Tuesday, 23 February 2010 16:07

TIME TURK

The Turkish prime minister visited on Tuesday the Spanish city of Cordoba. Turkey's Premier Recep Tayyip Erdogan took a high-speed train from Seville to Cordoba, and visited the city of Medinat al-Zahra and Mosque-Cathedral (Mezquita) of Cordoba. Erdogan later had a meeting with Cordoba's Mayor Andres Ocana, and attended a luncheon hosted in his honor by Ocana. Premier Erdogan is actually paying a state visit to Spain. He was received by King Juan Carlos of Spain and met his Spanish counterpart Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero in Madrid. Erdogan also attended a meeting hosted by the Nuevo Economia Forum in Madrid, and received Seville NODO Foundation's award from Seville's Mayor Alfredo Sanchez Menteseirin during a ceremony held in Seville.

Tanzanian President presented with honorary doctorate by Turkish University

Saturday, 20 February 2010 10:44

TIME TURK

President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete was presented with the title of "honorary doctorate" by Istanbul's Fatih University for his contributions to development of relations between the two countries. Speaking at the ceremony, President Kikwete said that they attached great importance to their economic, social and cultural relations with Turkey. President Kikwete is currently paying a state visit to Turkey.

Croatian Parliamentary Delegation Visits Turkish Parliamentarian

Monday, 22 February 2010 20:07

TIME TURK

A delegation led by Frano Matusic, chairman of the Croatian Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, visited Turkish Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Murat Mercan in Ankara on Monday. Mercan said at the meeting that there were issues shared by Turkey and Croatia such as regional problems and efforts to ensure stability in the Balkans. The delegation is set to meet with Turkish Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali Sahin later in the day.

Turkish Premier In Spain

Monday, 22 February 2010 21:11

TIME TURK

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan arrived in Madrid, Spain on a state visit. Prime Minister Erdogan will meet with his Spanish counterpart Jose Luis Zapatero. The two leaders will hold a joint news conference following their meeting.

Erdogan is also set to attend a meeting to be hosted by the Nueva Economia Forum as a speaker.

He will be received by King Juan Carlos of Spain.

Later, Prime Minister Erdogan will proceed to Seville to receive the "Seville NODO Prize for Intercultural Dialogue".

Besides his wife Emine Erdogan, State Minister Mehmet Aydin, State Minister & chief negotiator for EU talks Egemen Bagis, State Minister Zafer Caglayan, National Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul, Interior Minister Besir Atalay, Health Minister Recep Akdag, Transportation Minister Binali Yildirim, Energy & Natural Resources Minister Taner Yildiz and Environment & Forestry Minister Veysel Eroglu are accompanying the prime minister.

Turkish delegation warmly welcomed in Arkansas

Monday, 22 February 2010 16:08

Today's Zaman

A delegation from the Turkish Parliament over the weekend met with officials in Little Rock, the capital and most populous city of the US state of Arkansas.

A reception was held on Sunday by a Türkiyevi (Turkish House) in Little Rock to improve friendly relations with Turkey. Many high-level officials from Turkey participated in the reception, including Özlem Türköne, an Istanbul deputy from the Justice and Development Party (AK Party); AK Party Malatya deputy Mehmet Şahin; Vahit Kirişçi, chairman of the parliamentary Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Affairs Commission and AK Party Adana deputy; AK Party Giresun deputy Nurettin Canikli; and AK Party deputy from Samsun Fatih Öztürk.

The delegation visited Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe in his office shortly before the reception. Welcoming his guests warmly, Governor Beebe said he was glad to host the Turkish delegation. Underlining that this was the first time such a delegation from Turkey came to visit Arkansas, Beebe said this visit is an indicator of a friendly and lasting relationship between Turkey and the US. Referring to a Turkish flag that was hanging in front of the Arkansas General Assembly for the visit by the Turkish delegation, Beebe said, "Hanging a Turkish flag shows we attach great importance to your country, Turkey." "We are very happy to be in Arkansas. We hope this visit will contribute to our relations. We were also happy to see our flag in front of the General Assembly of Arkansas. We thank you very much," Türköne said while conveying President Abdullah Gül, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali Şahin's best regards to the state's high-level officials.

The delegation also visited Speaker of the Arkansas House Robbie Wills. "As a person who has visited Turkey and loves Turkish people very much, I want to say that our doors are always open to the Turks," Wills said.

In addition to Turkish officials, a wide range of high-level officials from Arkansas were present at the reception, where awards were also handed out.

Arkansas Secretary of State Charlie Daniels received the Outstanding Service Award, Pulaski County Judge Buddy Villines received the Community Service Award and Speaker of the Arkansas House Wills was given the Leadership Award.

Many officials from Arkansas showed great interest in the reception and added that they would like to see more delegations come from Turkey every year.

Turkish Agriculture Minister Leaves For France

Wednesday, 24 February 2010 12:0

TIME TURK

Turkish Agriculture and Rural Affairs Minister Mehdi Eker left for France on Wednesday to participate in meetings of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Eker is set to participate in an OECD meeting on sustainable development on Wednesday and he will take part on Thursday in a meeting of OECD agriculture ministers.

Eker is expected to return to Turkey on Friday.

OTHER GEO-STRATEGIC NEWS

Azerbaijani President Aliyev Sends Message Of Condolence To President Gul

Thursday, 25 February 2010 09:40

TIME TURK

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev sent a message of condolence to the Turkish President Abdullah Gul and expressed his sadness over a mine explosion that took place in Dursunbey town of the north-western province of Balikesir on Tuesday.

I offer my condolence to the families of the killed miners and the Turkish nation. I would like to express my and the Azerbaijani people's deep sadness over the incident and wish speedy recovery to those injured in the mine explosion, President Aliyev said.

13 miners died when a methane gas explosion ripped through the coal mine near the town of Dursunbey. 18 miners were hospitalized after being injured in the explosion. Two of them are in life-threatening condition.

Turkish MFA condemns terrorist attack in Pakistan

Saturday, 20 February 2010 10:48

TIME TURK

Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) announced Friday Turkey condemned the terrorist attack that took place in north of Pakistan on Thursday.

Turkey strongly condemns yesterday's terrorist attack that targeted the peace, stability and tranquility of brotherly country Pakistan. Turkey shares the pain of the Pakistani people, the MFA said in a statement issued on Friday.

Turkey will continue to support Pakistan's struggle against terrorism and radicalism with determination and will continue solidarity with the people and government of Pakistan, the MFA also said.

Many Pakistanis were killed and injured due to the terrorist attack on Thursday.

Turkish envoy presents diplomatic credentials to Obama

Thursday, 25 February 2010 11:19

WORLD BULLETIN

The newly-appointed Turkish Ambassador to the United States submitted his credentials to the U.S. president on Wednesday.

U.S. President Barack Obama received newly-appointed ambassadors to the United States, including Turkish Ambassador Namik Tan, at the White House.

After presenting his letter of credence to Obama, Tan has officially assumed the Turkish diplomatic mission in Washington D.C.

Tan replaced Nabi Sensoy who was appointed at the Foreign Ministry.

Graduated from Ankara University's Faculty of Law, Tan joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1982.

He previously served as the first secretary and counselor at Turkey's Embassy in Washington D.C., the head of United States Department of the Ministry, the secretary of the Foreign Minister, the spokesman for the Ministry, the Turkish Embassy in Israel, and deputy undersecretary of the Ministry.

Turkey's FM attends Yanukovich's swear-in in Ukraine

Thursday, 25 February 2010 08:28

WORLD BULLETIN

The ceremony for Yanukovich took place in the City of Kiev.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu on Thursday participated in the inauguration ceremony of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in Kiev.

Yanukovich elected the president following the second round of elections held in Ukraine on February 7.

Davutoglu will attend a reception following the oath taking ceremony and have several meetings.

Mevlut Cavusoglu, president of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, presidents of 11 countries, chiefs of three international organizations, foreign ministers of 15 countries and parliament speakers of 4 countries attended the inauguration ceremony.

Al-Qaeda Criticizes Turkey For Its Role in Afghanistan, Says Report

Tuesday, 23 February 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

A newly released and unauthenticated video from al-Qaeda condemns Turkey for its role in Afghanistan, broadcaster CNN reported Monday.

The man speaking in the video, who claims to be al-Qaeda's No. 2, Ayman al-Zawahiri, says Turkey is committing crimes against Islam and Muslims by participating in the war in Afghanistan. CNN reported that it could not authenticate the message but that the voice was "consistent with al-Zawahiri's intonation and accent."

In what would be al-Zawahiri's first audio message released to the world in 2010, the speaker accuses Turkey of committing crimes against Islam and its adherents. Turkish troops are part of the coalition forces in Afghanistan.

The speaker did not appear in person in the video; a picture of him was shown instead as part of a larger production focusing on al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. The video was released by As-Sahab Media, al-Qaeda's production company.

"Let every free Turkish Muslim who is keen on protecting Islam and his fellow Muslims know that the Turkish forces will serve the Crusader campaign in Afghanistan, which is burning the villages, destroying the houses and killing the women and the children, occupying the lands of the Muslims, fighting the Sharia and spreading lewdness, debauchery

and corruption,” the speaker says.

Harsh rhetoric

“The Turkish troops will carry out the same operations in Afghanistan that the Jews are carrying out in Palestine, so how would the pious, free Turkish Muslim people accept such a crime against Islam and the Muslims?” CNN quoted the speaker as asking. Amid the harsh rhetoric toward Turkey, the speaker does not refer to any specific Turkish military operations in Afghanistan.

After the message purported to be from al-Zawahiri, the video goes on to feature a Turkish man, identified as Muaath al-Turki, who is described as a soon-to-be martyr.

Al-Turki praises the Sept. 11 attacks, asks his family for forgiveness and tells them not to grieve over him. Asked whether he is happy or sad about his coming mission, he says he is sad only that he "can die only once for the sake of jihad."

According to the narration on the video, al-Turki attacked the U.S. base in Khost, Afghanistan, the same base that was the site of a Dec. 30 suicide attack in which seven CIA operatives and a Jordanian army captain were killed.

The narrator describes the locale as "the old Khost airport that the U.S. forces and the CIA use as their operations headquarters and a den for their intelligence service."

The video shows, from a distance, an explosion and billowing smoke, and the narrator says al-Turki's attack killed eight U.S. soldiers and 12 Afghans.

The U.S. military says there is no truth to that claim. The one other suicide attack on the Khost base was in January 2008, Sgt. Susan Wilt at the Bagram base in Afghanistan said. The assailant prematurely detonated the bomb, and no U.S. soldiers died, she said. Three Afghans, however, were killed, she said.

Al-Qaeda Accuses Turkey of Providing Support in Occupying Afghanistan

Tuesday, 23 February 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Key figure in the Al-Qaeda terrorist organization Ayman al-Zawahiri has accused Turkey of betraying the Islamic world and supporting Western countries in occupying Afghanistan, CNN Turk reported.

An audio recording of Al-Zawahiri was posted on the terrorist organization's Web site in connection with a recent dispatch of Turkish soldiers to Afghanistan to train the Afghan army.

In late January, about 120 people suspected of involvement in the activities of Al-Qaeda's Turkish cell were detained in 16 provinces in Turkey.

As a result of raids and searches in suspects' homes, large quantities of weapons and explosives were found.

Serbia to become Turkey's strategic partner in Balkans

Monday, 22 February 2010 14:12

Today's Zaman

Ahmet Davutoğlu (R) held a joint press conference with Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic on Saturday.

Turkey and Serbia are ready to work together to establish stability and peace in the Balkans as well as to support the promotion of mutual economic cooperation, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said following talks with Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic, the Anatolia news agency reported on Saturday.

Paying a one-day visit to Turkey upon the invitation of his Turkish counterpart, Serbian Foreign Minister Jeremic met with Davutoğlu at breakfast. Extensively discussing Turkish-Serbian bilateral relations, the two ministers also covered the situation in the Balkans and the political crisis surrounding Bosnia and Herzegovina as a result of constitutional reform in that country. Holding a joint press conference subsequent to the meeting, the two ministers stressed the growing relations between their two countries.

Davutoğlu said a free trade agreement signed between Turkey and Serbia would be approved in the Turkish Parliament next week and that this agreement would contribute to improved economic relations between the two countries. Davutoğlu emphasized that Turkey and Serbia would also work together on several infrastructure projects in Serbia. The two countries were determined to collaborate to boost economic prosperity in Balkans, he said. Davutoğlu also said that the talks had touched upon the cooperation of Turkey and Serbia in the region, especially in resolving the political crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina. “Regional matters were also discussed in the meeting. I congratulated Jeremic once again regarding the ongoing process with Bosnia and Herzegovina,” Davutoğlu noted.

Reiterating Davutoğlu’s statements, Jeremic stressed that Serbia and Turkey share the same vision regarding the establishment of stability and peace in the Balkans and that they will make an effort to ensure “zero problems in the Balkans.” Referring to meetings with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and President Abdullah Gül, Jeremic said they talked about the advancement of possible bilateral and regional cooperation. Stating his satisfaction with the interest of Turkish banks and companies in building a highway connecting the capital of Belgrade with Sandzak, Jeremic said this project would alter the social and economic dynamic of Sandzak. “This is a strategically big investment that will make Serbia Turkey’s most important partner in the western Balkans,” he said.

TURKEY AND ARMENIA

Turkey should be a step ahead in Armenian relations, Wexler says

US Congressman Robert Wexler

Friday, 19 February 2010 10:13

Today's Zaman

Robert Wexler, a former US congressman from Florida and co-chairman of the Congressional Caucus on US-Turkish Relations who recently resigned from Congress to accept an offer to head the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace has proposed that Turkey adopt a policy concerning its relations with Armenia that is similar to its policy of “being one step ahead” on the Cyprus issue.

The former US congressman, who gave a conference at the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA) in Washington titled “Model Partnership: Creative Approaches to US-Turkey Relations” on Wednesday, praised the steps taken by the Turkish and Armenian governments to solve their problems and the political risks they had taken on the road to normalization of bilateral relations. Responding to a question about his message for Turkey regarding the ratification of protocols signed by Turkey and Armenia for the normalization of ties between the two estranged neighbors, Wexler stated that he has always refrained from imposing a strategy on Turkey or on any other party. Recalling that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan previously said concerning the Cyprus issue that Turkey would always be one step ahead for peace, he suggested that Turkey do the same for the Armenian issue. He highlighted that this is for the benefit of both Turkey and its friends in the US.

Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan earlier this week submitted to parliament for ratification

two protocols on normalizing ties with Turkey after decades of hostility. He stated, however, that he expected Turkey to ratify and start implementing the protocols before Armenia. The Turkish government has already sent the protocols to Parliament for ratification, a procedural requirement. However, the protocols hit a roadblock as a result of a sub-annex the Armenian constitutional court attached to the protocols. In a ruling on whether the proposed protocols were constitutional, Armenia's constitutional court approved the protocols signed in October. Yet in its ruling dated Jan. 12 the court referred to the country's Declaration of Independence, which calls for the recognition of the 1915 killings of Armenians under Ottoman rule as genocide. Turkey accepts that many Armenians died under the Ottoman Turks but denies that up to 1.5 million perished or that it amounts to genocide, saying many Muslims died as well. While commenting on Turkish-Armenian relations and protocols signed between the countries as well as resolutions pending in the US Congress endorsing the genocide claims, Wexler said leaders of all parties, including the US, should make sure that tensions do not escalate.

Wexler also shared his views regarding Turkey's current foreign policy and said it cannot be argued that Turkey is heading towards the East when steps taken by the country as part of the EU harmonization process are taken into consideration. Noting that Turkey is far more democratic and liberal a country now than in previous years, he said Turkey is the country where East and West meet rather than a country where East and West clash.

Azerbaijan sees 'great war' risk with Armenia

Thursday, February 25, 2010

BAKU - Agence France-Presse

HURRIYAT

Azerbaijan warned Thursday that the threat of conflict with Armenia is rising fast and that a "great war" is inevitable if Armenian forces fail to pull out of disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

"For 15 years diplomacy has not achieved any concrete results and Azerbaijan cannot wait another 15 years," Defense Minister Safar Abiyev said. "Now it's the military's turn and the threat is growing every day," a defense ministry statement quoted him as telling the French ambassador to Baku, Gabriel Keller.

"If Armenia does not end its occupation of Azerbaijan's territory, the beginning of a great war in the South Caucasus is inevitable."

Abiyev's statement was one of the most threatening to emerge from Baku as tensions with Yerevan have grown in recent months. Tensions over Karabakh have risen amid efforts by Armenia and Turkey, a close ally of Azerbaijan, to establish diplomatic ties and reopen their border after decades of hostility. Azerbaijan fears the efforts will lead Ankara to soften its longstanding support for Baku in the dispute.

Backed by Yerevan, ethnic Armenian forces seized control of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding districts from Azerbaijan in the early 1990s, in a war that claimed an estimated 30,000 lives.

The two former Soviet republics have cut direct economic and transport links and failed to negotiate a settlement on the region's status. Armenian and Azerbaijani forces are spread across a ceasefire line in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, often facing each other at close range, and shootings are common.

Last week three Azerbaijani soldiers were killed in fighting with Armenian forces in a tense area on the border with Karabakh. France, along with Russia and the United States, is among

the co-chairs of the so-called Minsk Group, which is trying to negotiate a resolution to the longstanding conflict.

Turkish FM and Armenian leader meet in Kiev

Thursday, February 25, 2010

ISTANBUL- Daily News with wires

HURRIYAT

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and Armenian President Serge Sarkisian met in Kiev on Thursday.

The Turkish foreign minister told reporters after the meeting that he had had the opportunity to talk to the Armenian president about the Turkish-Armenian relationship normalization process, and developments in the Caucasus.

"We reviewed the Turkish -Armenian normalization relationship in its entirety with open hearts today including our anxieties and the obstacles we face," Davutoğlu said. "We spoke about Armenian- Azerbaijan relations and the activities of the Minsk Group as related to the Karabakh issue," he said.

"I also had the opportunity to tell Mr. Sarkisian about Turkey's vision for the region," he said. Davutoğlu said this was the first meeting between him and Sarkisian after a controversial decision from the Armenian Constitutional Court slowed down progress made after the two countries signed protocols to restore diplomatic ties.

The Armenian parliament Thursday made it easy for Yerevan to scrap the protocols signed with Turkey by passing amendments that will allow President Serge Sarkisian to suspend ratification and withdraw from previously signed international agreements. The amendments were passed by a vote of 70 to 4. The move comes amid growing frustration in Armenia over the Turkish Parliament's failure to ratify the protocols signed in October.

The signing of the deals was hailed internationally as a key step in overcoming decades of enmity stemming from World War I-era killings of Armenians under the late days of the Ottoman Empire.

Ratification by both countries' parliaments stalled as the two sides traded accusations of attempts to modify the deal.

Ankara has accused Yerevan of trying to set new conditions after Armenia's Constitutional Court said the protocols could not contradict Yerevan's official position that the Armenian killings constituted "genocide" - a label Turkey fiercely rejects.

Armenia, for its part, is furious over Ankara's insistence that normalizing Turkish-Armenian ties depends on progress in resolving the conflict between Armenia and Turkish ally Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Turkey closed its border with Armenia in 1993 in solidarity with Azerbaijan after ethnic Armenian forces wrested Nagorno-Karabakh from Baku's control in a war that claimed an estimated 30,000 lives.

The conflict remains unresolved despite years of international mediation

Armenian MPs adopt 'exit strategy' on Turkey accords

Thursday, February 25, 2010

YEREVAN - Agence France-Presse

HURRIYAT

The Armenian parliament Thursday made it easy for Yerevan to scrap protocols signed with Turkey by passing amendments that will allow President Serge Sarkisian to suspend ratification and withdraw from previously signed international agreements.

The amendments were passed by a vote of 70-4.

The move comes amid growing frustration in Armenia over Turkey's Parliament's failure to ratify two protocols signed in October to establish diplomatic ties and open the Armenian-Turkish border.

"The need for these amendments obviously stems from the current situation with the process of ratification of the Armenia-Turkey protocols," the chairman of parliament's foreign affairs committee, Armen Rustamian, said.

"Existing tools are not sufficient to protect our interests and these changes create such a legal basis. ... Armenia is today facing such problems that it may withdraw from the process. We are now developing an exit strategy," he told parliament.

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The conflict remains unresolved despite years of international mediation.

From the Bosphorus: Straight - 'Ergenekon Avenue' should be 'Hrant Dink Street'

Thursday, February 25, 2010

HURRIYAT

When it comes to Turks and Armenians, the list of problems to be resolved, confidence-building steps to be taken and gestures to be made and received is long. The name of a street should not be among them.

As readers know, the Hürriyet Daily News has long supported Turkish-Armenian reconciliation. We support the government's initiative to normalize relations with Armenia and hope it is not derailed by either the nationalist-influenced Constitutional Court of Armenia or the American Congress.

We support the steps the government has taken to enable the study of the Armenian language in Turkish universities and broadcast in the Armenian language on state radio. We applaud the news, reported in our culture pages today, that state broadcaster TRT has made history with the broadcast of a concert in the Armenian language. We have and do support the many initiatives to restore Armenian churches in Turkey and to find ways to educate the children of undocumented Armenian workers in Turkey

We have also joined the criticism of the slow pace with which the trial of those charged with the murder of our colleague, Hrant Dink, has proceeded. Justice delayed is justice denied.

Justice must prevail in this and other cases of journalists and intellectuals who have paid for their principles with their lives in Turkey.

We also realize that all of this is part and parcel of deep and dramatic transformation in Turkish and Armenian societies. The challenges are many and include the dichotomy between the pace of changing positions in Turkey and Armenia and the pace with which attitudes are changing in the diasporas of both peoples. There is much that is complicated. Progress on all of these fronts will take time.

But changing the name of “Ergenekon Avenue” which transects the district of Kurtuluş where many Turkish Armenians live, to “Hrant Dink Street” should be quick and easy. The name, of course, preceded the alleged gang now on trial and refers to a legendary mountain in Central Asia that is part of Turkic history. So it is not as if this involves a retreat from an honor bestowed on another important individual.

But, as we reported yesterday, requests for this name change have twice been rejected by municipal officials. An online petition seeking the name change, at www.hrantdinkcaddesi.org, has already collected nearly 2,000 signatures. We believe the city should reconsider. This would be a small but important monument to the memory of a man who did so much to foster understanding. And it is a small step that would certainly ease and enable the much larger diplomatic, political and social leaps that we hope will follow.

It is time that “Ergenekon Avenue” be made an avenue or street commemorating the life and work of journalist Hrant Dink. The Şişli municipality should embrace this project and get to work on the new signs.

Davutoğlu: Ball in Turkey’s court on Iran’s nuke row

Friday, 19 February 2010 10:10

Today's Zaman

Ankara appeared hopeful and unwavering on Thursday in its efforts aimed at salvaging a UN-brokered uranium swap deal as calls grow for new sanctions against Iran, with Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu saying the process is continuing based on concrete pro Davutoğlu was in Tehran holding talks with Iranian leaders on Tuesday as Turkey has offered to use its access to the Iranian leadership to help solve a dispute between global powers and Tehran over its nuclear program.

Noting that he conveyed his impressions from Tehran to US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during a telephone conversation late on Wednesday, Davutoğlu told reporters on Thursday that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan would also talk about the issue with US President Barack Obama shortly.

“Diplomatic channels are open. The channel which is currently open is functioning through Turkey and there is an opportunity to move on diplomatic ground,” Davutoğlu said.

When asked which court the ball was in concerning the nuclear controversy, he replied, “It’s in Ankara’s court.”

Diplomatic sources said on Thursday that Ankara is confident that the issue can still be resolved through diplomatic means. While urging both Iranian and US officials to refrain from using aggressive rhetoric, Ankara is also contributing its own original proposals in order to overcome the impasse.

Davutoğlu, meanwhile, warned on Thursday that the adoption of a resolution to label the World War I-era killings of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as “genocide” by a US congressional panel would “seriously impede” normalization efforts between Armenia and Turkey.

Rep. Howard Berman of California, the Democratic chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, said last week that he intended to call a committee vote on March 4 on a

non-binding resolution that would call on President Barack Obama to ensure that US policy formally refers to the killings of Armenians in Anatolia during World War I as “genocide” and to use that term when he delivers his annual message on the issue in April -- something Obama avoided doing last year.

Davutoğlu, speaking at a joint press conference following talks with Burkina Faso Foreign Minister Bedouma Alain Yoda, was reminded of Berman’s call as well as the recently reported remarks by US officials which link the probability of the adoption of the resolution with the Turkish Parliament’s “timely” ratification of two protocols signed between Ankara and Yerevan to normalize ties after a century of hostility that traces its roots to the 1915 mass killing and deportation of Armenians

Recalling that Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu recently paid a visit to Washington where he also discussed these issues, Davutoğlu said Ankara believed that “the new initiative in the US will seriously impede the ongoing efforts” on the maintenance of the normalization efforts with Armenia at a fundamental level as well as hampering the building of a permanent peace in Caucasia.

Kikwete: Turkey is Africa’s voice within G-20

Friday, 19 February 2010 10:11

Today’s Zaman

Visiting Tanzanian President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete on Thursday praised Turkey for its efforts to voice Africa’s problems in the international arena through platforms such as the G-20 and the UN Security Council.

“Turkey is our friend and, particularly among G-20 countries, it is Africa’s voice. We don’t have a voice among G-20 countries, as none of the countries on the Africa continent are G-20 members,” Kikwete said at a joint press conference following his talks with President Abdullah Gül at Çankaya Presidential Palace.

Last February, Gül paid official visits to Kenya and Tanzania, which made him the first Turkish president to pay an official visit to a sub-Saharan nation.

During Gül’s term as foreign minister, in April 2005, Turkey won observer status in the African Union and accredited its embassy in Addis Ababa as a representative to the union in May of the same year. At the union’s summit held in Addis Ababa in January 2008, Turkey was declared a strategic partner of the AU. In the summer of 2008, İstanbul hosted a Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit in a bid to transform an already good relationship into sustainable cooperation.

“We have responsibilities to Africa. Sixty percent of the issues on the agenda of the UN Security Council are related to Africa. Political issues, security issues and humanitarian issues are still unresolved. ... As a member of the UN Security Council, we have to closely know and deal with these problems,” Gül said at the time, referring to Turkey’s ongoing non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council for 2009-2010.

The two presidents yesterday signed bilateral agreements on visa immunity, commercial cooperation and air transportation in addition to a memorandum of understanding on establishing a political consultation mechanism between the foreign ministries of Tanzania and Turkey.

TURKEY AND ISRAEL

Ayalon under spotlight in yet another diplomatic spat

Friday, 19 February 2010 10:14

Today’s Zaman

A US congressman on a fact-finding mission in Israel has lashed out at the country's number two diplomat, saying he was snubbed by the Foreign Ministry and demanding an official explanation.

William Delahunt, a Democrat from Massachusetts, expressed "surprise and disappointment" on Wednesday while accusing Israel's controversial Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon of trying to block his group's access to top officials.

Ayalon, from the far-right Israel Beiteinu party, has been at the center of several diplomatic spats in recent months over his heavy-handed approach to those he perceives as anti-Israel. Last month, he publicly humiliated the Turkish ambassador in Tel Aviv. Israel was forced to apologize after Turkey threatened to summon its ambassador home.

Delahunt, a member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, is heading a congressional delegation to the region. The trip is hosted by J Street, a liberal Jewish lobbying group that presents itself as an alternative to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee -- one of Washington's most powerful lobbies.

J Street, which supports President Barack Obama's push for a Palestinian state alongside Israel, says it sought a meeting for the US representatives with Israeli diplomats but was turned down. The Foreign Ministry dismissed the complaint, saying in response that it did not need mediators to set up meetings with US officials.

Turkish Red Crescent Sends Assistance to Mongolia

Monday, 22 February 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

Turkish Red Crescent will send 9 tones of humanitarian assistance to Mongolia which was hit by strict winter conditions.

Turkish Red Crescent issued a written statement and said more than one million animals were destroyed in the wake of intense snowing. "Severe winter conditions started to have an impact on daily livings of people," the statement noted.

Upon a call from the Mongolian government for international assistance, the Red Crescent worked in coordination with the related institutions and decided to send 9 tones of assistance comprising blankets and foodstuff.

Temperatures plunged as low as minus 50 degrees Celsius (-58 degrees Fahrenheit) in recent weeks, after a long, dry summer that left farmers with too little fodder for their herds, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said in a report.

Iran Envoy Confident Turkey Will Not Allow US Radar Base

Sunday, 21 February 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

Iran's top diplomat in Ankara is confident Turkey will not permit the United States to put a radar base on its territory.

"I am sure Turkey will not allow that," Iranian Ambassador Bahman Hosseinpour said in an address to the Turkish think tank, the International Strategic Research Organisation, or USAK, on Friday. "I am sure the land of Turkey will not be used against others, especially neighboring countries."

Former U.S. President George W. Bush proposed placing interceptor missiles in Poland and radar systems in the Czech Republic to counter long-range Iranian missiles as part of a U.S. effort to neutralize Tehran's nuclear and missile programs and prevent a Middle East arms race. The current U.S. administration, however, has changed focus and has considered

Turkey as a possible radar-base site.

The Iranian ambassador also responded to questions about his country's nuclear program and the Turkish role to defuse tension between Tehran and world powers, saying Iran was holding very close consultations with Turkey.

"We have confidence in Turkey," he said, adding that the consultation was based on the right of a country to have a peaceful nuclear program.

Referring to increasing demands from world powers for tougher sanctions on Iran, Hosseinpour said: "By pressuring us they think they'll beat us, but we'll stick to our independence. If the West wants to have normal relations with Iran, they should know us. If you listen to lobbies close to the U.S., you cannot know us ... Every country has its own culture. If they understand Iran, they will decide rightly."

Asked if a European Union-style bloc could be created in the Middle East, he said: "Why should we not have such cooperation? How could the friends in Europe do it? They had lots of wars among themselves. Even 60 years ago, they killed 60 million of their population. But fortunately, it is good news, they have the EU."

He said Turkey and Iran are the biggest countries in the region and can take the lead in forming such a bloc.

"If we have our consultation, if our relationships improve – something I am supporting – this will affect the region positively in many aspects. The others will follow us," Hosseinpour said.

Israeli president targeted in Turkish poster

Monday, 22 February 2010 16:26

Hürriyet

A huge poster showing Israel's president bowing to the Turkish prime minister was hung from an Istanbul crane Sunday in the latest round of sniping between the two nations, media reports said.

The picture, unfurled from a crane in a city suburb, combined an image of Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan standing upright with one of Shimon Peres leaning forward; making it look like the Israeli president was bowing.

Erdoğan was due to visit the area to inaugurate a new road network, and officials from his office had the poster removed before he arrived, the Akşam newspaper said on its Web site. It was not clear who was behind the stunt, the newspaper said, though it appeared to be retaliation for the public dressing down given to the Turkish ambassador to Israel last month. The diplomat was called in protest of a Turkish television series which showed Israel in bad light and was made to sit on a lower couch during the meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon.

Muslim-majority Turkey has been a close military ally of Israel since 1996 but relations between the two countries have been tense in the wake of Israel's devastating war on Gaza in late 2008 and early 2009, which Turkey vehemently criticized.

In a memorable outburst, Erdoğan stormed out of a debate at the World Economic Forum, accusing Israel of "barbarian" acts and telling Peres, who was sitting next to him, that "you know well how to kill people."

Earlier this month Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman slammed Turkey for what he called its recent "anti-Israeli" stance but said the Jewish state would continue efforts to rebuild ties with long-time ally Ankara.

Turkish Red Crescent to establish logistics centers in Palestine, Georgia

Saturday, 20 February 2010 16:47

TIME TURK

Turkish Red Crescent (Turk Kizilayi) will establish natural disaster coordination and logistics centers in Palestine and Georgia, the chairman said on Saturday.

In an exclusive interview with the A.A correspondent in Syrian capital of Damascus, Tekin Kucukali, the chairman of Turkish Red Crescent, said that centers would be established for immediate response to extraordinary situations in these countries.

"We have a registered land of 900 square meters in Palestine. We will establish our center there," Kucukali said.

"Infrastructure of Gaza is being rebuilt under coordination of Turkish Red Crescent. We have completed nearly 60 percent of infrastructure," he said.

Kucukali said Syrian Red Crescent has become member of executive board of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), noting that he and an accompanying delegation were visiting Damascus to congratulate Syrian Red Crescent.

Turkey says concerned by Israel's plans to annex Islamic heritage

Thursday, 25 February 2010 14:29

World bulletin

Turkey said were concerned about labelling certain Islamic historical artifacts as "Israeli cultural heritage" including those in the West Bank.

Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) said Wednesday they were concerned about labelling certain Islamic historical artifacts as "Israeli cultural heritage" including those in the West Bank.

At a time when efforts are being made to solve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, such acts by Israeli authorities will harm the process and lead to serious deterioration of confidence among the sides, the MFA stressed.

Turkish MFA made a call on Israel to act in accordance with international laws in Jerusalem and West Bank and seriously refrain from attempts that are one sided and provocative visa vis sacred sites and historical artifacts that are considered to be holy by Muslims.

Turkey urges Israel to refrain from provocation over holy sites

Thursday, February 25, 2010

ANKARA - Agence France-Presse

HURRIYAT

Turkey has called on Israel to refrain from taking a "unilateral and provocative" step with its plan to renovate two contested West Bank holy sites.

"Such a move will damage efforts to re-launch talks to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and create significant mistrust between the parties," the Turkish Foreign Ministry said in a statement late Wednesday.

"We urge Israel to abide by international law... and refrain from unilateral and provocative action on historical sites that are essentially a part of Islamic cultural heritage and include places holy to Muslims," the ministry added.

Earlier this week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he hoped to include Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem and the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron in a national heritage restoration plan, sparking outrage among Palestinians.

Israel's intention could make it "difficult, if not impossible" to launch even indirect peace talks, a senior Palestinian official said Wednesday.

Yasser Abed Rabbo, a senior official in the Palestine Liberation Organization, or PLO, called the decision part of "a deliberate poisoning of the atmosphere by an extreme rightwing government that does not want peace or serious negotiations."

"In these circumstances it will be difficult, if not impossible, to launch serious negotiations, either direct or indirect," Rabbo told reporters in Ramallah, referring to U.S.-led efforts to revive Middle East peace talks.

Flashpoint for violence

The two sites are revered by both Jews and Muslims, and the Tomb of the Patriarchs, where the Biblical figure Abraham is believed to have been buried, has been a flashpoint for Israeli-Palestinian violence for decades.

A few hundred hard-line Jewish settlers live near the site under heavy military protection and use part of the Ibrahimi Mosque above the tomb as a synagogue. More than 160,000 Palestinians live in the city.

Turkey has been a close military ally of Israel since 1996 but relations between the two countries have been tense in the wake of Israel's devastating war on Gaza in late 2008 and early 2009, which Turkey vehemently criticized.

In a memorable outburst, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stormed out of a debate at the World Economic Forum in Davos, accusing Israel of "barbarian" acts.

Earlier this month, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman slammed Turkey for its recent "anti-Israeli" stance but said his country would continue efforts to rebuild ties with long-time ally Ankara. Israeli President Shimon Peres has meanwhile insisted there will be no change in the status of the site.

"We are going to tell our children that this is a historic and holy place for the Jewish people. That does not mean that the Muslims don't have any rights there," Peres told reporters ahead of a meeting with U.N. envoy Robert Serry, who has expressed concern about the decision.

"We don't need artificial conflicts. It is not a conflict at all."

Netanyahu's remarks have nevertheless proved incendiary, with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas saying they could unleash a "holy war" and the Islamist Hamas organization calling on West Bank residents to "rise up" against Israel.

A few dozen Palestinian youths hurled stones at Israeli troops patrolling Hebron for a third day and the army fired tear gas, according to the army and witnesses. There were no reports of any injuries.

CYPRUS ISSUE

Any delay cannot be legitimated regarding Cyprus negotiations"

Saturday, 20 February 2010 16:49

TIME TURK

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said Saturday any delay could not be legitimated regarding the negotiations aiming to find a solution to the Cyprus issue.

Davutoglu and Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic had a meeting over breakfast and held a joint press conference in Ankara.

Replying to a question, Davutoglu said Turkey's stance on the Cyprus issue was clear and it wanted "a comprehensive and lasting" peace on the island. Negotiations should continue without interruption, he said.

Davutoglu said after Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) President Mehmet Ali Talat presented a package of proposal in January, the negotiation process has speeded up.

"This package showed that Turkish Cypriot party is eager to find a solution to the question," he said.

"Negotiations should be intensified more," he said.

Regarding the Greek Cypriot parliament's decision which said guarantees would not be accepted, Davutoglu said this decision showed there was lack of good intention in the Greek Cypriot side and it was against the nature of negotiations.

"If peace is wanted on the island, negotiations must be intensified. Everyone should do what he/she can for peace," he said.

Replying to a question on news stories which said the United States did not welcome Turkey's proposals on a conflict regarding Iran's nuclear program, Davutoglu said, "Some news stories which claimed that U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton denied Turkey's proposals are not accurate. Turkey did not offer anything."

"We hope that a diplomatic solution will be found on the matter. All efforts are for regional and global peace," he said.

In his part, Jeremic said Davutoglu and he discussed what Turkish Airlines and Serbian Airlines could do together in the meeting.

Free trade agreement which would be approved by the Turkish parliament soon would help relations between Turkey and Serbia boost.

Cyprus talks focus on mainly economy

Thursday, 25 February 2010 09:00

WORLD BULLETIN

Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders had a meeting within the scope of negotiations for a settlement to the Cyprus issue at the buffer zone in Cyprus.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's Cyprus advisor Alexander Downer said after the meeting between Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) President Mehmet Ali Talat and Greek Cypriot leader Demetris Christofias that the two parties mainly discussed economy.

Representatives of leaders and technical delegations will keep taking up economy on Friday, Downer said.

Downer added agenda of the two leaders' meeting scheduled to take place on March 4 was not definite yet.

Talat and Christofias last met on February 1, when UN Secretary General Ban visited the island to extend his "personal support" to both the ongoing negotiation process and the leaders.

The two Cypriot leaders expressed their resolve to continue negotiations in that meeting, and agreed to meet again on February 24, March 4, March 16 and March 30.

Talat and Christofias launched negotiations in September 2008.

Cyprus issue

Gaining independence from the United Kingdom 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.

Turkish Cyprus approves resolution on guarantorship role

Thursday, 25 February 2010 08:53

WORLD BULLETIN

TRNC unanimously approved a resolution on the Treaty of Guarantee's indispensable role in the solution process in Cyprus.

The parliament of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) unanimously approved a resolution on the Treaty of Guarantee's indispensable role in the solution process in Cyprus.

TRNC parliament convened in an extraordinary session chaired by Parliament Speaker Hasan Bozer on Wednesday and approved the mentioned resolution.

On February 19, the Greek Cypriot House of Representatives unanimously approved a resolution reading that in Cyprus, as a member state of the European Union, there should not be provisions for guarantors or guarantees.

The resolution was approved by all Turkish Cypriot political parties; UBP, CTP, DP, TDP and ORP and said that the decision of the Greek Cypriot parliament dealt a serious blow to the solution process in Cyprus.

The resolution called on the international community to lift sanctions which did not have any legal provision on Turkish Cypriot people.

Turkish Cypriot people were ready for a fair and lasting solution agreement and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's efforts should be supported, it said.

Turkish Cypriot president heads to Spain for talks

Thursday, 25 February 2010 08:38

WORLD BULLETIN

TRNC's President Mehmet Ali Talat will meet with Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs Miguel Angel Moratinos.

The Turkish Cypriot president has departed from the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) for Spain on Thursday.

As part of his visit to EU's rotating president, TRNC's President Mehmet Ali Talat will meet with Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs Miguel Angel Moratinos.

Talat is also scheduled to give a conference at the Spanish Real Elcano Institute in Madrid.

After holding talks with political circles and representatives of press organs, Talat is expected to return to the TRNC on Saturday.

TURKEY AND EUROPEAN UNION

EU official says expects more reforms in accession process

Saturday, 20 February 2010 16:51

TIME TURK

Deputy head of the European Union's delegation to Turkey has expressed hope that the country would make more reforms to in its bid to become a member of the Union. "I am expecting that 2010 will be a bright year for Turkey in passing more EU-oriented reforms," Tibor Varadi told a meeting on the chapter of environment in Turkey's accession negotiations. Varadi said Turkey weathered the effects of a global financial crisis quite well thanks to lessons learnt from a financial crisis the country faced back in 2001. "Turkey's banking sector stood resiliently against the effects of the global crisis and continued to operate well," Varadi said.

Judiciary crisis likely to top today's EU-Turkey debate in Brussels

Monday, 22 February 2010 14:35

Today's Zaman

Questions over the impartiality of Turkey's judicial system are likely top the agenda of a two-day meeting of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee which is scheduled to start in Brussels today.

The 63rd meeting of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, also to be joined by Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin, comes only days after a row was sparked in the EU-candidate country when a Turkish court last Wednesday arrested Erzincan Chief Public Prosecutor İlhan Cihaner on charges of belonging to a group accused of plotting to overthrow Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government.

The Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) subsequently said, however, that the prosecutors who had ordered the arrest had exceeded their authority and stripped them of their powers.

The government lashed out at the HSYK decision, with Ergin calling the HSYK move a "shame for democracy" and expressing the government's intention to pass a comprehensive judicial reform to raise the country's judicial standards.

Dutch Christian Democrat Ria Oomen-Ruijten, the European Parliament's rapporteur on Turkey, will also participate in the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee meeting, which will be co-chaired by French Green Party member H el ene Flautre and AK Party's L utfi Elvan.

Ahead of today's meeting, Baroness Sarah Ludford, a British member of the European Parliament, speaking on Samanyolu TV's (STV) "Avrupa Masası" (European Table) program prepared by Sel uk G ltaşı, the Brussels representative of Today's Zaman, touched upon the issue of exposed plans to overthrow the AK Party government.

"When I hear these reports over those plans, I think that Turkey has to make constitutional and democratic reforms very urgently. These reports strengthen further the urgency and the need; Turks must have seen this need much clearer than I do," Ludford, a liberal member who is also a member of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, told STV over the weekend.

Turkey's judiciary has emerged as the chief line of defense of an establishment that sees the country's hyper-secularist order threatened by the AK Party, which constantly says that it has no secret Islamist agenda and defines itself as a conservative-democrat party. The government says a constitutional reform is needed to curb the power of judges and prosecutors opposed to reforms required as part of the EU membership process.

Last month's ruling by Turkey's Constitutional Court, which overturned a law allowing military personnel to be put on trial in civilian courts, is another key item to be dealt with

during the meeting in Brussels. The overturned law was hailed at the time by many as the biggest step taken by the AK Party toward creating a balanced military-civilian relationship in the EU candidate country.

"This ruling led to disappointment," Ludford said, referring to the aforementioned ruling. "In cases except special situations like lack of discipline and refusal to disobey orders, which would have been considered a crime in armies of all democratic countries and which would have been followed by military courts, civilian courts are expected to get engaged," Ludford went on saying. "The military personnel can by no means have immunity. In a democratic country, two different justice systems cannot exist. The Constitutional Court's ruling appears to be favoring the continuation of these two different justice systems. The problem stems from here," she added.

Spain Never Left Turkey Alone Within Eu Process, Erdogan

Monday, 22 February 2010 19:48

TIME TURK

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday that Spain never left Turkey alone in European Union (EU) process.

"Spain had experienced the difficulties we have been going through. Spain is one of the countries that understand Turkey the best," Erdogan said while speaking at a joint new conference with Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luiz Rodriguez Zapatero.

Erdogan attended a conference "Turkey-Spain: Common Vision for Peace, Stability and Prosperity" hosted by Nueva Economia Forum in Madrid.

"The meetings in Spain were very fruitful. I believe that there is a promising future in front of us. We are trying to boost political, military, commercial and economic relations," Erdogan said.

Erdogan said Turkey and Spain, as the two co-chairmen in Alliance of Civilizations, entered an assertive process, "Contribution of the Alliance of Civilizations to world peace and global peace will be very different. I think this initiative will be in an important way out in dealing with terrorism. Different cultures will be considered as richness."

Erdogan said around 350 Spanish businessmen invested in Turkey, "nearly 70 Turkish businessmen are investing in Spain. Cooperation in energy is in question. I believe that the parties will make very important steps both in wind and solar energy. Talks are underway. We need solidarity in renewable energy. We also have joint works carried out in food, particularly in olive and olive oil."

Erdogan said they also assessed developments regarding unity for the Mediterranean process, "I believe that both Turkey and Spain have assignments within the Mediterranean basin. Mediterranean is a basin of civilizations. Turkey and Spain have solidarity in dealing with terrorism. A joint platform is necessary in the world against terrorism. Dealing with terrorism requires a joint fight."

Oomen-Ruijten: Rapid implementation of judicial reform important

Wednesday, 24 February 2010 09:3

Today's Zaman

European Parliament's Turkey rapporteur Ria Oomen-Ruijten on Tuesday stressed the importance of the rapid implementation of a judicial reform process in Turkey while speaking in a meeting of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) in Brussels.

European Parliament's Turkey rapporteur Ria Oomen-Ruijten on Tuesday stressed the importance of the rapid implementation of a judicial reform process in Turkey while speaking in a meeting of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) in Brussels.

She also said that recent developments in Turkey, such as the detention of a chief public prosecutor and the removal of authority of several prosecutors afterwards, did not provide a positive image of the country. Noting that developments in the Turkish judicial system did not reflect neutrality, Oomen-Ruijten said the Turkish Parliament should provide a legal ground that would not allow for the discussion of legal decisions. "A new constitution is needed to achieve this goal," Oomen-Ruijten said, adding that decisions made by judicial bodies would be neutral and not discussed if laws are clear enough.

The European Parliament's rapporteur also said Turkey could only turn into a state that is truly governed by the rule of law following judicial reform. Commenting on notes concerning Cyprus included in the EP's latest report on Turkey, Oomen-Ruijten said the parliament had similar demands from Turkey before.

Due to the "new balances formed in the European Parliament after the last elections," no amendments could have been made to the Cyprus paragraph of the report as Turkey expected, Oomen-Ruijten stated.

On Feb. 10, European lawmakers endorsed a resolution that called on Turkey to withdraw its troops from Cyprus, to resolve the issue of Turkish citizens settled on the island and to allow Greek Cypriot access to the Maraş region.

With a motion adopted in the general assembly afterwards, this call on Turkey to seek its active support for comprehensive peace talks on the island was expanded to include all relevant parties.

Complaining of delays in the implementation of judicial reform prepared by the government, Oomen-Ruijten said there is some thing going on within the judiciary as a result of this lack of neutrality. "In effect, the Turkish Parliament must create such a legal ground that the judicial rulings will not be debated. For this, a new constitution is needed; we want this. If regulations are sufficiently open and clear, then the judiciary will behave neutrally and decisions the judiciary announces will not be debated," she said.

She also asked the opposition not to hinder the process of judicial reform. "Please lean towards the judicial reform because Turkey can only be a country with the rule of law through judicial reform," Oomen-Ruijten said, adding that there are also circles in Turkey who want to postpone the judicial reform and claim that Turkey is not yet ready for it.

"There isn't enough dialogue within society. I do not think this is the government's problem. There are many other responsibilities for the opposition, too. If you really want to join the EU, you need to be a modern welfare state. The Copenhagen criteria are the basis of European cooperation. You cannot become a member if you do not respect this and fulfill the criteria," she noted.

Harshly reacting to Republican People's Party (CHP) deputy chairman Onur Öymen's remark that the government did not adopt any law on advice of the army, Oomen-Ruijten said this would be turning the world the other way around. "You have to check and control the army, not have the army check Parliament," the rapporteur said.

Spain continues to support Turkey's European Union membership bid

Wednesday, 24 February 2010 09:3

Today's Zaman

Turkey's European Union membership bid has been always supported by Spain, and Spain will continue to support Turkey, Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero said on Monday in Madrid during a joint press conference with Turkish Prime Minister. Spain's continued support for Turkey's EU membership is important as Spain holds the EU term presidency through June of this year. Speaking at the press conference, Zapatero said Spain would try to open four new chapters in Turkey's membership negotiations. According to Zapatero, the energy chapter is one of those that Spain will attempt to open. The energy chapter is currently blocked by the Greek Cyprus.

Speaking about the peace process between the two sides in Cyprus, the Spanish prime minister said his government was working to support the dialogue process and reach an agreement and is pursuing its activities with good relations with all parties, adding that Turkey and Spain share a common vision in many spheres. At the latest EU summit, held in early December of last year, Greek Cyprus complained about Turkey's continuing policy of refusing entry to Greek Cypriot vessels in Turkey's air and sea ports. Greek Cyprus warned it would block six negotiation chapters if Turkey persisted in keeping its seaports and airports closed to Greek Cypriot traffic. Meanwhile, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (KKTC) President Mehmet Ali Talat will pay a visit to Spain soon to discuss the current peace talks between the two leaders of the island.

Saying that Turkey's role in the Middle East, Iran and unity in Mediterranean, cultural, political and economic relations were among the issues discussed during the bilateral talks in Madrid, Zapatero said Spanish companies in Turkey have grown and that there are strong relations between Turkish and Spanish companies. He added that Spanish companies are especially interested in infrastructure investments in Turkey. There are nearly 350 Spanish businessmen operating in Turkey, and roughly 70 Turkish businessmen investing in Spain. Spain, a staunch supporter of Turkey's EU membership bid, also joined Turkey as a co-founder of the Alliance of Civilization, which operates under the auspices of the United Nations. Responding to criticism that the Alliance of Civilizations has not met expectations thus far, Zapatero said more than 100 countries have joined the Alliance of Civilizations since its establishment and that they have expressed positive views with respect to the project. Noting that the Alliance of Civilizations intended to help initiate dialogue between diverse parties, Zapatero said the Alliance of Civilizations was against discrimination and supported mutual understanding, dialogue and respect of different cultures and religions.

Erdoğan receives Nodo Culture Award

The Municipality of Seville honored Prime Minister Erdoğan with the Nodo entre Culturas award for his "important role" in the implementation of the Alliance of Civilizations initiative. He traveled to Seville to accept his award from Seville's Mayor Alfredo Sanchez Menteseirin in a ceremony on Monday evening. Speaking at the award ceremony, Mayor Menteseirin said Erdoğan has taken important steps to develop mutual dialogue between nations and work towards the resolution of international and regional issues.

Addressing the audience during the ceremony, Erdoğan said, "Turkey, which has a significant role in its region, believes that the optimistic and promising atmosphere that will be created with the spread of peace and prosperity will embrace the whole world." Speaking about the ongoing peace process to reunify the divided Cyprus, Erdoğan said Turkish Cyprus wants to reach a comprehensive solution based on political equality as soon as possible.

"Turkey is working for a just and lasting solution," he stated.

The Nodo entre Culturas award was earlier bestowed on former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, UNICEF goodwill envoy Mia Farrow and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Chairman Mohammad ElBaradei. Erdoğan will receive a statuette and a cash award of \$30,000 in conjunction with the Nodo entre Culturas.

Erdoğan also met with Jose Antonio Grinan, president of the Andalusian Autonomous Government, on Tuesday in a meeting that was closed to the press. Later in the day Erdoğan visited a facility where A400M military cargo planes are being manufactured, before departing Spain.

European Court Rules in Favor of Religious Order in Turkey

Tuesday, 23 February 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

The European Court of Human Rights approved a complaint by a Turkish religious group regarding clothing regulations during hearings in Turkish courts. The case was filed by Müslüm Gündüz and 126 other members of the Aczmendi community, which describes itself as an Islamic order, reported broadcaster CNN Türk on Tuesday. The groups' special attire consists of wearing black robes and a black turban, while males in the community have long beards.

The court had already ruled in favor of Gündüz in two instances against Turkey, both in 2003 for violations of his freedom of expression, and in 2005, for violations of his right to a fair trial.

The European court has now ruled that Aczmendis can attend court hearings in the outfit of their choice.

Gündüz, who founded the Aczmendi community, graduated from an Elazığ evening school 1985 and is an alleged member of the Islamic Nurcu movement.

ECONOMICS NEWS

Turkish Minister Meets Syrian Businessmen In Istanbul

Friday, 19 February 2010 11:17

Today's Zaman

Turkish State Minister for foreign trade Zafer Caglayan met with leading businessmen of Regarding the issue of Turkish Ziraat Bankasi's opening a bank in Syria with Syrian partners, Caglayan said that banking issue was very important in a milieu in which the two countries were boosting commerce.

Noting that banking system was necessary for easing commerce as well as for money transfer, Caglayan said that the issue about Ziraat Bankasi had been on the agenda for one month.

Caglayan added that business between Turkey and Syria was increasing each day.

On Thursday, head of Syrian-Turkish Businessmen Council Abdul-Kadder Sabra spoke at Syria-Turkey Business Council meeting organized by Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEIK), and said that Ziraat Bankasi might establish a bank in Syria with Syrian partners within six months. Sabra also said that trade volume between Turkey and Syria amounted to 2 billion USD.

Russian Deputy Premier Thinks Poultry Exports to Begin from Turkey

Friday, 19 February 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

The Russian deputy premier expressed his thought on Friday that poultry exports from Turkey would begin soon.

Russia's Deputy Premier Igor Sechin said that six of the 11 Turkish producers passed

standard tests in poultry exports.

"Exports to Russia will begin soon," Sechin told a joint press conference with Turkish Energy and Natural Resources Minister Taner Yildiz in Istanbul.

Sechin said Russia had allocated 500,000 tons of quota for poultry exports, and was ready to increase the quota if satisfied.

Also, Sechin said Turkey and Russia would hold talks in Moscow on March 9 on cooperation in establishing a nuclear power plant.

"I hope we can receive a draft intergovernmental agreement on this cooperation from Turkey till the end of next week," Sechin said. Sechin said Turkey and Russia were close to a final decision.

A Turkish-Russian consortium led by Russia's Atomstroyexport had been the only bidder in a 2008 tender to build country's first nuclear power plant. However, Turkey's state-run electricity wholesaler TETAS canceled the tender in November 2009.

On January 13, Turkey and Russian Federation signed a joint declaration on cooperation in establishment of nuclear power plant in Turkey within the framework of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's formal visit to the Russian capital of Moscow.

Executives of the two countries had said they would sign an intergovernmental deal on establishment of nuclear power plant in Turkey if they reached a compromise.

Turkey's EU Negotiator on Customs Union Agreement with EU

Friday, 19 February 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

The Turkish chief EU negotiator said on Friday that Turkey's Customs Union agreement with EU should be reviewed.

Delivering a speech at an exporters' summit in Istanbul, Turkish State Minister and Chief negotiator for EU Talks Egemen Bagis said Turkey would not have become the 6th biggest economy of the world and the foreign investments to the country would not have increased that much, if it had not signed the Customs Union agreement with the EU.

Noting that the agreement had certain lacking points, Bagis said some parts of the deal should be reassessed.

"Perhaps, we need to review the Customs Union agreement altogether. We have decided to start a preliminary study to renegotiate the agreement with the EU," he said.

"Whether we like it or not, Customs Union agreement is an engagement accepted by Turkey," Bagis said, stating that the sacrifices that could be made by Turkey or the points it would demand should be determined beforehand, if the agreement would be amended.

"We should know what we want when we sit at the negotiation table. We are currently displaying efforts to achieve such goal," he said.

The EU and Turkey are linked by a Customs Union agreement, which came in force on 31 December 1995, pursuant to the 1963 EU-Turkey Association Agreement, which aims at promoting trade and economic relations.

The Customs Union covers all industrial goods, but does not address agriculture (except processed agricultural products), services or public procurement.

Customs Union Agreement Beneficial For Turkey, Turkish State Minister

Friday, 19 February 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkish State Minister Zafer Caglayan said on Friday that the Customs Union agreement with EU had been beneficial for Turkey's industry, producers and consumers.

Speaking at an exporters' summit in Istanbul, Caglayan said the current export figures could not have been reached if Turkey had not signed the Customs Union agreement.

Caglayan said Turkey's imports from Europe had been 23.2 billion USD and its exports had amounted to 11.5 billion USD when it signed the Customs Union agreement with the EU in 1996.

He said the country's imports from the union rose up to 56.5 billion USD, while its exports increased to 47 billion USD currently.

Pointing to EU's quota application for Turkish products, Caglayan said, "I hope we will achieve a remarkable success on such matter. Our main goal is the lifting of quotas and liberalization of transportation of commercial goods".

Commenting on the visa issue as well, Caglayan said the visa procedure applied for the Turkish private sector and Turkish businessmen was unacceptable.

Turkish, Kazakh Banking Agencies Sign Cooperation Agreement

Friday, 19 February 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkish and Kazakh banking agencies signed on Friday a cooperation agreement.

Turkey's Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BDDK) and Kazakhstan's Agency on Regulation and Supervision of Financial Market and Financial organizations (AFN) signed a cooperation agreement in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Under the agreement, two agencies will exchange know-how and information about banking supervision and cooperate in complying their activities to international norms.

Two agencies will share information about commercial banks in Kazakhstan and financial institutions in Turkey.

Syria's Assad pledges help for Turkish investors

Monday, 22 February 2010 20:22

Today's Zaman

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has requested that Turkish businessmen directly get in contact with him to report any issues they face when investing in Syria, assuring them that the difficulties will be resolved.

Assad, speaking at a meeting with Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) President Rifat Hisarciklioğlu on Saturday, said, "We want Turkish businessmen to make investments in Syria." To overcome any difficulties these businessmen face, he requested that they directly get in touch with him so as not to have to deal with bureaucratic obstacles. In regards to the plans of Ziraat Bankası to establish a bank in Syria with Syrian partners, the TOBB head stated that the negotiations were continuing but that there were some obstacles. He said Assad expressed pleasure over the visit of 35 Syrian businessmen to Turkey last week. The Syrian president also stated that he wanted priority to be given to Turkish businessmen and construction companies in tenders in various fields such as highway construction, Hisarciklioğlu reported. The TOBB head underlined that "Syria should not be regarded merely as a country with a population of 21 million, but as a gateway to the Arab world."

He stressed that with the recent visa requirements between the two countries no longer in

existence, the largest barrier that had hindered bilateral trade had been removed. Hisarcıklioğlu stated that Syrian businessmen want to establish a structure similar to Turkey's Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK) and requested help from TOBB. Recalling that TOBB conducts training activities for the Syria Investment Agency, he continued: "The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey [TEPAV], the think tank of TOBB, will conduct an investment environment analysis of Syria. The project, which will also be supported by the World Bank, will determine the obstacles for investing in Syria." Following the completion of the analysis, a conference will be held jointly in Syria by TOBB, the Islamic Development Agency (İKT), the World Bank and the Syria Investment Agency, he said.

President Kikwete urges Turkish firms to invest in Tanzania

Monday, 22 February 2010 09:23

Today's Zaman

Tanzanian President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete was presented a plaque of appreciation by TUSKON President Rızanur Meral at the Turkey-Tanzania Trade and Investment Forum. Tanzanian President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete has called on Turkish businessmen to take advantage of investment opportunities in Tanzania and said the trade volume between the two countries should be increased from its current level of \$66 million to billions of dollars within the next five years.

Delivering a speech on Saturday at the Turkey-Tanzania Trade and Investment Forum, organized by the Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON) and attended by Turkish Foreign Trade Minister Zafer Çağlayan, Kikwete briefed delegates on the benefits provided to investors in Tanzania.

Companies investing in the country are relieved of the requirement of paying corporate tax until their businesses start to make a profit, he said, adding that these companies are also allowed to transfer their profits to their home countries. Offering lucrative opportunities to investors, Tanzania is in urgent need of investment in various fields ranging from melon production to energy, the president noted. He explained that a US-based aluminum firm, which plans to invest in Tanzania, needs 600 megawatts of electricity, while the country's total electricity capacity is only 700 megawatts. "Another American firm wanted to import 40 containers of melons from us, but we could not meet this demand due to a supply shortage. In short, we need investment, immediately. Come and invest, customers are waiting," he said. Kikwete predicted that trade volume between Turkey and Tanzania will increase steadily with the abolition of visa requirements between the two countries. An agreement for visa exemption was signed during Kikwete's four-day visit to Turkey.

With a population of 300 million, Tanzania is a gateway to the African market, Kikwete pointed out. "By investing in Tanzania, you can also reach neighboring countries easily, along with taking advantage of preferential trade agreements signed between Tanzania and countries such as China, Japan, the US and India. It is much easier to export to these countries through Tanzania," he said. Kikwete listed agriculture, energy, tourism and precious metals as sectors that offer lucrative investment opportunities.

TUSKON President Rızanur Meral, recalling that the two countries' trade volume has increased to \$66 million over the past two years, said their target is to raise this figure to \$500 million in the near future. "Tanzania offers lucrative and attractive opportunities in a number of sectors such as construction, construction equipment, tourism, real estate, petrochemicals, textiles, food, furniture, automobiles and retail," he stated.

Meral said that TUSKON put Africa on Turkey's agenda with its activities in line with the

government's export strategy to expand towards African markets, adopted in 2006. As opposed to the past, when Africa was a complete unknown for Turkish businessmen, now, he stressed, Africa has become one of the most important markets for them.

Çağlayan, speaking at the event, also said that the trade volume between Turkey and African countries had risen from \$5 billion to \$16 billion over a period of five years, by the end of 2008. The share of exports to Africa in overall exports also increased from 4 percent to about 10 percent in 2009, he added. "We export goods worth \$55 million to Tanzania, while Tanzanian imports to Turkey amount to \$11 million. We hope exports and imports will be more balanced in the future," Çağlayan noted.

Turkish Foreign Trade Minister To Visit Syria

Tuesday, 23 February 2010 16:12

TIME TURK

Turkish State Minister for foreign trade Zafer Caglayan is set to depart Wednesday for Damascus, Syria to participate in a series of promotion events for Turkey's southern province of Mersin.

Caglayan is scheduled to take part in a Turkey-Syria business forum along with Syrian Economy and Trade Minister Lamia Mari Assi and Deputy Premier Abdallah al-Dardari. The Turkish minister is set to hold talks also with Syrian Premier Muhammad Naji al-Utri, former Economy and Trade Minister Amir Husni Lutfi, and Hassan Turkmani, chairman of the Turkey-Syria High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council as well as with al-Dardari and Assi.

This is the fourth high profile visit in a year from Turkey to Syria in the level of ministers and businesspeople.

Trade volume between Turkey and Syria in 2008 climbed 49 percent to 1.8 billion USD after a free trade agreement went into effect in 2007.

Turkish exports constitute major part of the trade with 1.4 billion USD with a 27.8 percent increase over the last year.

Turkey's imports from Syria was down 48 percent to 327 million USD in 2009 mainly due to a drop in oil prices.

Coup plans, political tension lead to significant losses in markets

Thursday, 25 February 2010 09:33

Today's Zaman

Turkey's capital markets are reacting wildly to recent internal developments regarding coup plans, the Ergenekon indictment and talk of another closure case against the Justice and Development Party (AK Party), while the lira lost value against the dollar.

The İstanbul Stock Exchange's (İMKB) İMKB-100 index was down nearly 1,000 points by the end of the first session of trading on Wednesday to 50,443.16, continuing this week's trend of continuing losses. The index closed last Friday at 53,318.97, a slight recovery from a two-week dip. This recovery was short-lived, however, as the index had dropped a staggering 5.4 percent, or nearly 2,900 points, from that figure by the end of the first session of trading on Wednesday.

The lira also lost value against the dollar, with the dollar trading at TL 1.548, the highest value in over seven months. The lira is depreciating as political tension sweeps the country over the Cage and Sledgehammer coup plans, the detention of retired and active duty generals and colonels in an investigation of said plans and whispers from the judiciary of

another closure case against the AK Party. Investors appear to be pulling back from the currency, fearing that political instabilities will spill into the economy. Developments in global markets also worried Turkish investors, as data showed that the consumer confidence index in the US fell faster than expectations, declining to a depressingly low 46 in February from 56.5 in January. The news added to uneasiness before US Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke's testimony to US lawmakers yesterday and today. Ersagun Şimşek of İstanbul-based Tera Brokers also stated that the dip was mostly due to internal political developments, but added that the lack of developments regarding the situation in Greece -- which is suffering from widespread strikes against austerity measures -- also affected the İMKB. "There are many uncertainties about the coming period, especially regarding political developments. We recommend that investors take a step back and observe the political development before making further investments." He also added that political developments will overshadow economic developments in the short run. Yunus Kaya, a researcher at Gedik Yatırım, stated that the losses in the index were larger than expected and this was due to a "late reaction" by foreign investors with holdings in the İMKB toward coup plans. "News that the political environment in Turkey is increasingly becoming instable is coming to the forefront on a daily basis," said Kaya.

Turkey, France sign economic partnership deal

Thursday, 25 February 2010 15:41

WORLD BULLETIN

Ministers signed a memorandum of understanding at the end of the second meeting of Turkey-France Economic and Commercial Partnership Committee in Ankara. Turkish State Minister for foreign trade Zafer Caglayan and French Minister of State for foreign trade Anne-Marie Idrac signed a memorandum of understanding at the end of the second meeting of Turkey-France Economic and Commercial Partnership Committee in Ankara on Thursday. Delivering a speech in the signature ceremony, Caglayan said Turkish and French businessmen could work together in the third countries. 750-800 French-origin companies were operating in Turkey, Caglayan said. State Minister Caglayan said that Turkey deserves to be a full member of the EU with its strategic and geographical location and its role as a bridge between the east and the west. "Turkey will strengthen the EU," he said. In her part, Idrac said that the two countries were determined to boost trade volume to 15 billion euros in 2011. Turkey and France could cooperate in the areas of energy, transportation and environment, she said. Idrac said in regard to Turkey's EU accession process, EU opened two chapters to negotiations during the presidency of France.

French oil company to make \$100 mln-investment in Turkey

Thursday, 25 February 2010 13:39

WORLD BULLETIN

French oil company Total is getting prepared to make a 100 million USD investment in Turkey. Speaking to AA in the Mediterranean Antalya province on Thursday, Total Oil Turkey's Director General Olivier Chalvon-Demersay said Total had raised its market share to 7

percent in Turkey, despite the global economic crisis in 2009.

Expressing the importance Total attached to Turkey, Chalvon-Demersay said his company made an investment of 100 million USD in Turkish economy in 2009, adding it would continue to invest in the country in 2010.

Chalvon-Demersay said Total would provide employment opportunities for nearly 1,000 people this year.

Noting that Turkey was about to leave the global crisis behind, Total Turkey's head also said that his company had confidence in Turkish economy.

Total is the fifth largest publicly-traded integrated international oil and gas company and a world-class chemicals manufacturer.

The company operates in more than 130 countries and has 96,950 employees.

Turkey-France JEC meeting starts in Ankara

Thursday, 25 February 2010 12:31

WORLD BULLETIN

Caglayan said that economic relations between Turkey and France did not reflect the actual potential.

Turkish State Minister for foreign trade Zafer Caglayan said on Thursday that economic relations between Turkey and France did not reflect the actual potential.

"Bilateral relations should be further improved," Caglayan said while speaking at Turkey-France 2nd Term Joint Economic Commission (JEC) meeting in Ankara.

Caglayan and French Minister of State for foreign trade Anne-Marie Idrac, who is paying a visit to Ankara, addressed the JEC meeting.

Caglayan said there was regression in foreign trade in 2009 because of global crisis, noting, "there is a 22 percent recession in Turkey's foreign trade in 2009."

Caglayan said there was not increase in trade with France but at the same time was not affected as much as the general regression.

Caglayan said total direct investments amounted to 60-65 billion USD in 2002-2009, and noted that investments of France in Turkey reached 4.4 billion USD. He said there were important French investments in Turkey like Renault and Carrefour.

"Some sectors in Turkey and France are complementary. Automotive sector is an example to this. Turkey and France may cooperate in transportation and energy," Caglayan said, noting that Turkey was a country that may make 120 billion USD investments in the next decade.

Caglayan said Turkey has a very big potential in renewable energy, adding that Turkey and France could make cooperation in the third countries.

French minister said trade volume between Turkey and France should be upgraded, urging "shopping dynamics" to be boosted.

The guest minister said Turkey and France could work together in Africa, the Balkans and Central Asia.

French Minister of State for foreign trade Anne-Marie Idrac said France was one of the most important investors in Turkey but Turkish companies did not undertake much investments in France.

New direct flights to start between Turkish-Syrian capitals

Thursday, 25 February 2010 12:26

WORLD BULLETIN

AnadoluJet will launch direct flights between Ankara, Turkey and Damascus, Syria on March 4. The subsidiary company of the Turkish Airlines (THY) will start flying between Turkish and Syrian capital cities. AnadoluJet will launch direct flights between Ankara, Turkey and Damascus, Syria on March 4.

This will be second international destination of AnadoluJet, following Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

AnadoluJet will fly between the two cities on Thursdays and Sundays. The lowest one-way ticket will be 59 Euros, including taxes and fees.

The subsidiary company began Ankara-based flights in 2008.

AnadoluJet was founded on April 23, 2008 by Turkish Airlines as a separate brand with a new business model to provide masses of people with the transportation services.

The number of passengers carried by the Ankara airline has increased by 65 percent, and the occupancy rate has reached 85 percent.

AnadoluJet started operations with five airplanes, growing to a fleet of seven airplanes before the end of its first year, and serves 27 domestic destinations.

Syrian PM says to open special office for Turkey ties

Thursday, 25 February 2010 08:46

WORLD BULLETIN

Syrian Premier Muhammad Naji al-Utri invited Turkish companies to Syria.

Utri who met with Turkish State Minister for Foreign Trade Zafer Caglayan who is attending the Mersin Promotion events in Damascus, said his country was pleased with growing ties with Turkey.

Itri said they wanted to cooperate with Turkey in the contracting and consultancy sector adding that Syrian and Turkish companies could cooperate in international projects.

Caglayan later met with Syrian Deputy Premier for Economy Abdallah al-Dardari and Syrian Economy Minister Lamia Mari Assi.

Speaking during the meeting Caglayan called for more cooperation between the Banking sectors of the two countries.

Caglayan said the current volume of trade between the two countries was USD 2 billion, adding that they aimed at increasing it to USD 10 billion by 2013.

Assi said in his part that they would open a special office within their ministry to oversee relations with Turkey.

Turkish Industry Minister sees automotive sector on rise

Thursday, 25 February 2010 11:36

WORLD BULLETIN

Turkey's industry minister said on Thursday that Turkish automotive sector was "on the rise". Speaking to AA in the southern province of Adana, Turkish Industry & Trade Minister Nihat Ergun said that the number of automobiles sold in Turkey increased in 2009 despite the global economic crisis.

"A total of 306,000 automobiles were sold in 2008 while it rose up to 370,000 in 2009," he said.

Noting that the ratio between population and number of vehicles in Turkey was below the world average, Ergun said car ownership rate in Turkey was 135 automobiles per 1,000 people while it was 145 automobiles per 1,000 people in the world.

"The sector has not reached its saturation point yet," he said.

Pointing to the growing young population of Turkey, Ergun said people had the desire to purchase automobiles, therefore, there was a significant potential in the domestic market. Expressing the capability of the Turkish automotive sector, Ergun said the sector used high technology, besides, its workmanship was qualified.

Ergun also said the sector carried out R&D activities on new engine technologies, hybrid vehicles and reduction of fuel consumption.

"It is possible for us to have a place in world markets with new brands and models. We are encouraging our businessmen and industrialists to do that," he said.

The Automotive Distributers' Association (ODD) has recently announced that Turkish automotive industry raised its sales by 12.77 percent in 2009 over 2008, thanks to reduction in luxurious consumption tax.

The industry sold a total of 557,126 vehicles in 2009, ODD said.

Visa removals boosts number of tourists in Turkey

Thursday, 25 February 2010 11:30

WORLD BULLETIN

The number of foreigners visiting Turkey was up 7.7 percent in January 2010 over January 2009, the ministry said on Thursday.

Turkey's Ministry of Culture and Tourism told a statement that 809,974 foreigners visited Turkey in January.

The ministry said tourists were mostly coming from neighboring countries, and enumerated the nationalities of tourists visiting Turkey the most as German, Iranian, Bulgarian, Georgian, Syrian, Russian, Greek, Azerbaijani, British and French.

"Removal of visa procedures between several countries and Turkey has had a positive impact on tourism," the ministry also said.

Over 27 million tourists visited Turkey in 2009. Turkey expects to host more than 28 million tourists in 2010.

Following Turkey's recent diplomatic initiatives and its 'zero problem with neighbors' policy, number of countries lifting visa requirements on Turkey has risen to 55 with Syria, Libya, Lebanon and Jordan.

Below is the list of countries and special administrative regions that do not impose visa requirements on Turkish nationals:

Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Albania, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Brazil, Ecuador, El Salvador, Morocco, Fiji, the Philippines, Guatemala, Republic of South Africa, Georgia, Haiti, Croatia, Honduras, Hong Kong, Iran, Jamaica, Japan, Montenegro, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), Colombia, Republic of Korea (South Korea), Kosovo, Costa Rica, Libya, Lebanon, Macau Special Administrative region, Macedonia, Maldives, Malaysia, Mauritius, Nicaragua, Republic of Palau, Paraguay, St. Vincent-Grenadines, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Syria, Swaziland, Chile, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Tuvalu, Uruguay, Jordan, and Venezuela.

Sales of plane tickets in Turkey fall 22.4 pc in 2009

Thursday, 25 February 2010 11:26

WORLD BULLETIN

Sales of plane tickets in Turkey fell 22.4 percent on euro basis in 2009.

According to an assessment based on the International Air Transport Association (IATA)

data, flight tickets worth of 847.7 million euro were sold in Turkey in 2008. This figure dropped to 657.1 million euro in 2009.

Unemployment a risk for Turkey, World Bank says

Thursday, February 25, 2010

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

Macroeconomic management and tackling unemployment are among the main concerns for Turkey during its process of recovery from the global financial crisis, World Bank representative Ulrich Zachau says

Management of the macro-economy, tackling unemployment and climate change are the three main risks for Turkey during its process of recovery from the global financial crisis, the World Bank's Turkey country director said Thursday.

According to Ulrich Zachau, who spoke at the Fourth International Risk Management Summit in Istanbul, one of the most important challenges for Turkey in the short to medium term will be maintaining a competitive business environment and providing jobs. "The recession has left its mark on the economy and unemployment is high," the World Bank official said. "This is one of the main risks for Turkey."

Unemployment in Turkey is estimated at 13.1 percent.

There is also a risk that Turkey's current status as one of the most favorable emerging markets may erode. "Turkey has been doing well in getting out of the crisis and is today less risky and more attractive than the average emerging-market country. But there is the risk that this can change," Zachau said, adding that Turkey should, in this situation, maintain its position by hitting its fiscal targets.

There are also licensing and legislative issues that need further attention in order to improve the local business climate, the country director said.

"In terms of the business environment, licensing and legislative issues around doing business in Turkey have worsened since 2008," Zachau said. "This has nothing to do with the crisis.

The fact is that Turkey has not objectively declined, but other emerging markets have improved more than Turkey. This is both an opportunity and a challenge for Turkey."

The focus should now be on creating a more flexible labor market, he added.

"There are concrete things Turkey can do. The new commercial code, for example, will help Turkey grow more," Zachau said. "As youth unemployment is much higher than unemployment generally, it must be made easier and more advantageous for firms in Turkey to hire young people."

SOCIAL NEWS

Turkish Airlines to sponsor Greek basketball team Maroussi

Friday, 19 February 2010 10:26

Today's Zaman

Turkish Airlines (THY) is set to become the official sponsor of the Greek basketball club Maroussi BC after signing back-to-back agreements with superstar soccer teams Barcelona and Manchester United.

The sponsorship agreement, which will be signed in March, will add THY's logos to the team's jerseys and to the sidelines of the courts. The one-and-a-half-year sponsorship of the Euroleague team marks the third such deal this year, after the Spanish soccer team Barcelona and the team with the highest advertising value in the world, Manchester United.

The agreement with Manchester United will be signed on March 15. The sponsorships of Barcelona and Manchester cost THY a total of \$16 million.

As the official sponsor of Barcelona and Manchester, THY posts its advertisements on the sidelines of the teams' home fields and will also be allowed to market itself on the teams' Web sites and television channels in addition to including members of the teams in its public relations activities. THY will also fly all of the training and tournament equipment and staff for the two teams.

Istanbul's traditional wooden houses under threat

Wednesday, 24 February 2010 09:1

Today's Zaman

Fires, neglect, poor planning and migration have turned a growing problem into a threat of extinction for one of İstanbul's least appreciated architectural forms: the wooden house. Demolition sites are everywhere in Süleymaniye. Chaotic plots of broken beams, rubble and grubby sandbags, they dot the winding streets of this İstanbul neighborhood perched on a hillside below an Ottoman mosque.

Further down, toward the waters of the Golden Horn inlet of the Bosphorus, fences surround a construction site where a tunnel for a new metro line bores into the ground.

"There used to be another row of wooden houses there," says Stein-Gunnar Sommerset, a Norwegian academic who has a house nearby.

Istanbul -- one of this year's European capitals of culture -- is renowned for its great stone monuments, including the Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque.

But Turkey's largest city also has a long tradition of construction in wood, and in the early 20th century, timber structures accounted for most of İstanbul's housing stock.

Many of those traditional buildings have vanished, and the survivors are under threat.

Martin Bachmann, an architectural historian at the German Archaeological Institute in İstanbul, estimates that there are only about 250 timber houses left in the entire city. In a mere three streets clustered around the mosque in Zeyrek, a neighborhood once renowned for its wooden structures, 10 demolitions took place in the last six years.

"Compared to the historical situation, it's nearly nothing," says Bachmann.

Devastating fires

According to Zeynep Ahunbay, a professor of architectural restoration at İstanbul Technical University (İTÜ), wooden construction took off in the city in the 16th century.

"There was a strong earthquake in 1509, and the earlier buildings, mixed structures, they were not so good," she explained, adding that the majority of houses that survive today date from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Built with oak frames and clad in pine, the houses were painted and many had distinctive bay windows on the higher floors and lengthy eaves.

The decline of the timber houses began early in the 20th century.

After devastating fires during World War I, the authorities banned construction in wood. In the 1920s foreign minorities -- who dominated the ranks of the skilled craftsman needed to build and maintain the structures -- began to leave.

Then, following World War II, the Turkish middle classes started to desert old wooden neighborhoods like Zeyrek and Süleymaniye for more modern accommodation. In their place came poor rural migrants who had neither the means nor the experience to maintain the houses.

As the years passed, more and more of the houses vanished, some demolished, others destroyed by fires, or simply neglected until they collapsed. Many of those that do survive are in an advanced stage of decrepitude.

UNESCO to decide

Emine Erdoğan, a member of the wood committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites and an Istanbul resident, says that while houses are officially protected by law, regulations are widely flouted.

“Our laws are perfect, up to European standards,” she said. “It’s the people who are playing with the laws.”

Concern about the houses extends beyond Turkey, too.

This summer UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee will decide whether the Istanbul World Heritage Site, established in 1985, will be placed on an endangered list.

According to Mechtild Rossler, Europe and North American chief at the UNESCO World Heritage Center, the condition and preservation of the timber houses will be one of the issues considered, along with a proposed new Golden Horn crossing.

Mustafa Demir -- mayor of the Fatih Municipality, which includes many of the surviving wooden houses -- says that preservation is a priority.

“One of the most important jobs is to protect the historic sites,” he said, adding that in the past renovation often meant demolishing a house, rebuilding in concrete and then adding wood cladding, a method that is now forbidden. Demir admitted, however, that there is a reluctance to spend public funds on houses in private ownership.

The Turkish authorities have made clear progress in some areas though. In 2006 the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality set up the Directorate of Conservation, Implementation and Inspection (KUDEB).

This organization has streamlined the process required to gain permission to carry out repairs, and also runs training courses in the skills required.

“They learn to do windows, doors, roof construction, traditional building construction,” explained Demet Sürücü, an engineer in KUDEB’s timber workshop. Sürücü added that the workshop has so far repaired 55 houses.

Elsewhere, before his death in 2003, Turkish preservationist Çelik Gülersoy initiated house restoration on Soğukçeşme Street close to Hagia Sophia, while more recently Sommerset is renovating two houses in Süleymaniye.

“I think it’s a pity to see them decay, and it’s possible to rescue them with modest means.”

Two Quakes Jolt Eastern Turkey

Sunday, 21 February 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

Two earthquakes rocked eastern Turkey in the early hours of yesterday morning. No damage was reported.

The first quake occurred at 6.38 a.m. in the Gökdere region of Elazığ province and measured 4.3 on the Richter scale, said the Istanbul-based Kandilli observatory. It resulted in panic among residents but no human or material damage was reported.

The second earthquake occurred at 9.02 a.m. in the Patnos region of Ağrı province and measured 3.8 on the Richter scale. No damage was inflicted in this instance either.

Most regions of Turkey are earthquake prone as major fault lines are located in Turkey. Many earthquakes are reported regularly with the 1999 Marmara earthquake in western Turkey among the most devastating recently. Around 20,000 people lost their lives in that quake.

Football: US to Host Turkey in World Cup Warmup

Saturday, 20 February 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

The United States will host Turkey here on May 29 in the Americans' last tuneup before departing for the World Cup in South Africa.

The match will be held at Lincoln Financial Field, home of the National Football League's Philadelphia Eagles and one of the sites included in the U.S. bid for the 2018 or 2022 World Cup.

Turkey, which reached the 2002 World Cup semi-finals, failed to advance to this year's tournament, finishing behind Spain and Bosnia and Herzegovina in their European qualifying group.

The United States is preparing for its sixth straight World Cup appearance. They host El Salvador in a friendly on Feb. 24 in Tampa, Florida, and will add their European-based players to the squad for a March 3 match in the Netherlands.

The Americans will face England on June 12 in their opener in South Africa and also face Slovenia and Algeria in the first round.

COMMENTARY

Mercan: International perspective needed for Armenian protocols

Tuesday, 23 February 2010 09:18

Today's Zaman

Noting that the Armenian constitutional court's recent decision created uncertainty with respect to the protocols, Turkish Parliament Foreign Affairs Commission Chairman Murat Mercan said the only way to overcome this uncertainty would be to produce an in
In an exclusive interview with Today's Zaman, Eskişehir deputy Mercan said a win-win-win process from which Turkey and Armenia as well as Azerbaijan would benefit could solve the problem.

Speaking on Turkey's relations with neighbor Iran, Mercan noted that Turkey will "continue to play a positive role in eliminating the tension regarding Iran." The chairman explaining that the international community should support Turkey's attempts on this issue; however, Iranian officials should pay heed to the rising discomfort of the world. Underlining that politicians' primary goal is ensuring domestic, regional and global peace, Mercan asserted that "political polemics, debates and statements as well as strategic moves and games should not disrupt stability.

"As a politician and as someone who understands how international relations work, I really don't want to lose hope, but unfortunately my hope about Iran is slowly fading," explains Mercan, who gave a tour d'horizon of foreign policy, responding to Today's Zaman's questions.

How do you view assessments that the Armenian constitutional court's decision on the protocols will not have a negative impact on the process and that the connection to the Karabakh issue will not be accepted?

When we look at the Armenian constitutional court's ruling, we see that there are clear provisions in the text stating how the protocols can and cannot be interpreted. After all, it is an agreement between two countries. It is not an international agreement. Only those countries that are party to an agreement are bound by that agreement.

We should also analyze the Armenian constitutional court's decision from the perspective of international law. International legal experts need to assess the issue. While there are some lawyers and some circles who say the court's decision does not constitute the basis of the protocols, others have different opinions. In this respect, there is uncertainty over the issue. At best there is uncertainty. In this kind of a situation, the conditions for implementing an

international bilateral agreement are not completely clear. Take, for example, the issue of opening borders. The court's decision clearly states that "opening the borders does not mean recognition of the Treaty of Kars."

Will this uncertainty affect Parliament's ratification of the protocols?

I think it is very difficult for Turkey to ratify the protocols under these conditions because there is some level of uncertainty. There is no clarity about how the protocols will be interpreted. Without this clarity, we should not expect the Turkish Parliament to ratify the protocols. While there is a negative attitude regarding two critical factors from Turkey's perspective, I don't think it is likely for Turkey to accept just opening the borders.

How will the uncertainty be resolved?

I believe there have been some attempts in the international arena and some diplomatic attempts to resolve this uncertainty. I don't know what kinds of diplomatic solutions these will produce, but I think we need to give these efforts some time. We will be able to make assessments once a solution is devised. The second point is that the international world must consider a very important point, and that is when changing the balances in the Caucasus, it is important to pursue a balance that will benefit everyone. Disrupting other balances while trying to change one balance is like shaking a hornet's nest. There are two main problems in the Caucasus that directly concern Turkey. One of these is relations between Turkey and Armenia, and the other is solving the problems between Armenia and Azerbaijan. When we look at these two balances, if the ratification of the protocols between Turkey and Armenia is going to exacerbate problems between Armenia and Azerbaijan or severely jeopardize Azerbaijan's national interest, then the world should not want it, either. In other words, it's very important to maintain a balance.

Are there benefits in the process that will satisfy all three sides?

If we want a win-win-win situation then it has to be in the following way. It must be beneficial for Armenia to contribute to solving these two problems.

It's important to clearly see what Armenia will gain if the border is opened, if diplomatic relations are established and if the problems between Armenia and Azerbaijan are solved. The advantages that are obvious as of now are Armenia's border to the international world will be opened, Armenia's foreign trade will increase and Armenia will be added to the natural gas and oil pipeline routes originating from Azerbaijan. All these will significantly contribute to Armenia's economy. Azerbaijan's President İlham Aliyev clearly told me that once problems were solved, good economic relations would be established between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well. Armenia is going to obtain a major advantage in terms of economy. On the other hand, Turkey will have made a certain level of progress on the recognition of its borders and on the genocide issue. If the problem is solved and Armenia withdraws from Azerbaijan's territories, Armenia will not lose anything. That is because the international community sees Armenia as an occupier and does not approve of its occupation.

Moreover, the UN has also determined that Azerbaijani territories are under Armenian occupation. In other words, the territories that Armenia is occupying are not recognized as Armenian soil. It is identified as a grey zone under occupation. Armenia's withdrawal from these areas would not constitute a loss.

What will the status of the mountainous Karabakh region be?

At present it is an unrecognized region that has no status. If Karabakh's status were to be determined with these developments, the power balances in the region would be changed in favor of everyone, and everyone would benefit. No one would lose anything. If this does not happen, in other words, if relations between Turkey and Armenia normalize but other balances are not considered, then the international community should be unhappy about this as it will become harder to solve the problems, and conditions that will most likely lead to

conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan will develop. In other words, the risk the international community will face if the problem is not completely solved will be greater than the risk they currently face. Countries in the region, Europe, America and Russia should not want this possibility. It is for this reason that we should not look at the issue as one that only concerns Turkey and Armenia because this would be an incorrect point of view. The failure to show the necessary level of caution and sensitivity could lead the countries mentioned above to sacrifice their own strategic interests and policies for domestic policies. A prudent person would realize the need for caution. Strategic interests should not be sacrificed.

How will this process affect Nabucco?

This is one of the risks I was mentioning earlier. The West's energy security will be at risk.

What is Turkey's strategy regarding Iraq?

Turkey defines its Iraq strategy by taking into account the interests of the international community. The negative effects of instability in Iraq, which has the potential to turn into conflict, will not only affect the countries in the region. The spread of this instability will first pose a serious threat to energy security.

This is our main and primary concern. Our second view is that stability in the region is for our benefit, and prosperity in the region is for our benefit. That is because we are the first ones to be affected by any unrest that arises.

After the massacre in Halabja, 500,000-600,000 Iraqis sought refuge in Turkey. Therefore, we will do everything that is necessary to ensure stability in the region. And we will do this with accountability.

So when we look at it from this perspective, what is it that we want in the region? We want a structure that will ensure Iraq's territorial and political integrity. There are two main conditions to achieve this. The first is ensuring Iraq's political reconciliation, and the other is strengthening of the bureaucratic foundation as a natural outcome of political reconciliation. Political stability requires all components in Iraq to participate in the democratic political process. If you do not guarantee this, then division and internal conflict will be inevitable.

Does the election commission's decision to veto some names create concern?

Frankly, this concerns us. It would be wrong to say that it doesn't. As you know, the Iraqi Parliament's foreign relations committee chairman, Humam Baqir Hamoudi, and a delegation accompanying him visited us a few days ago. During the visit, we clearly expressed sensitivity about this matter. We drew their attention to banning people from running in general elections and said the ban could lead to a number of complications.

A political ban today does not mean a ban forever. Sunnis need to definitely contribute to the democratic process. Our chairman [Recep Tayyip Erdoğan] could not participate in the first elections after we came to power. But this did not end his political career. We are obliged to maintain the democratic process with confidence. If there is something lacking in this, the consequences will be uncontrollable. We explained this to everyone loudly and clearly.

Turkey meets with all sides, and the one suggestion it makes to everyone is to protect and consolidate the political structure. The other two main issues for Iraqis after political stability are oil and the status of Kirkuk. We try to approach these two issues in a way that does not jeopardize stability not only to the sides in Iraq but to everyone including the US, and we have been receiving very positive results. I must say Turkey has played an active role in the current stability and potential positive developments in the region.

If Turkey had not insisted on determining the future status of Kirkuk, sharing oil revenue and having all political actors engaged in nation-building to ensure stability, the country would have fallen apart, and there would be no country such as Iraq today. Internal conflict could have riddled the entire region, and the region supplying 60 percent of the world's oil could

have turned into a pool of blood. The possibility of all of this happening was not all that far off.

Turkey played and continues to play a major role in the development of bureaucratic structures. It provided training to the military, police and other bureaucratic structures to allow them to improve their standards.

It is said that Turkey's biggest test in foreign policy will be related to Iran. There are serious concerns about Iran's nuclear plan being a program to develop nuclear arms. What's happening on the Iranian front?

Turkey will continue to play a positive role in eliminating the tension regarding Iran as long as it can. My opinion is that the international community needs to support Turkey's attempts on this issue. Likewise, Iranian officials need to pay heed to the increasing discomfort of the world. As politicians our primary goal is ensuring peace for our people and then for the region and the world. We all have a responsibility to contribute to this issue. Political polemics, debates and statements as well as strategic moves and games should not disrupt stability. As a politician and as someone who understands how international relations work, I really don't want to lose hope, but unfortunately my hope about Iran is slowly fading. I hope there will be positive developments related to this issue in the coming days.

If the UN Security Council decides to impose an embargo, will Turkey comply?

First, we need to see the structure of the embargo. There are major debates on whether this kind of decision will be reached. The international community is talking about reserves in countries such as China and Russia. It's impossible for us to know what will be debated at the Security Council. I think these kinds of decisions in politics need to be made when the right time comes. Hopefully, we won't need to make such decisions. I am saying this as a wish for the Iranian people. I am hoping for our neighboring Iranian people that we won't come to that point.

Nuclear Iran to prompt Turkey to acquire atomic weapons
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Lale Kemal

Today's Zaman

Authoritative Turkish sources believe that if neighboring Iran acquires nuclear arms, there will definitely be a strong demand from within Turkey for the country to acquire the same weapons capabilities.

This possibility has for some time been raised by several foreign opinion makers, too.

Perhaps such a danger has also prompted Turkey to get actively involved in efforts to dissuade Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

The world public is confused, in the meantime, over whether Iran is close to acquiring nuclear weapons and whether it has the ability to do so. But it seems that it is too late to focus on whether it has the ability or not since world powers, primarily the US, have already brought Iran to a point where no effort seems to be stopping Tehran from a nuclear standoff with the international community. Even relatively liberal Iranians engaged in fierce street demonstrations against the Tehran regime appear to have united behind the regime on Iran's nerve-wracking standoff with the world in the nuclear weapons debate.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu was in Tehran last Tuesday to see whether Ankara can persuade the country that Turkey can serve as the venue for an exchange of Iranian nuclear fuel in an effort to ease tension between Iran and Western countries over its nuclear program. Davutoğlu's visit took place in the midst of tensions that rose last week

when Iran announced it had started the process of producing 20 percent enriched uranium, defying Western threats of fresh sanctions.

Iran is not expected to listen to Turkey nor any other country unless a mutually acceptable solution is found by the West and Iran.

Official Turkish sources are of the belief that an Iran possessing nuclear arms will be disastrous not only for Turkey but also for the already volatile Middle Eastern region, which will turn into an area where countries will engage in a nuclear arms race.

“Voices will increase tremendously in Turkey for the acquisition of nuclear arms as a means of deterrence against Iranian nuclear arms,” a Turkish diplomat said.

Unlike the West, which prepared to impose tougher sanctions on Iran, Ankara insists the standoff can be solved through dialogue, believing that economic sanctions or military action against Iran will have severe repercussions in the region.

Turkey officially argues that if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, this does not mean Turkey will follow suit. Turkey is part of NATO's nuclear umbrella and that is sufficient, Ankara argues. But behind closed doors, Turkey is highly concerned about nearby Iran possessing nuclear arms. So the possibility that Turkey will also acquire nuclear weapons is highly possible. Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ told the Habertürk daily last week that Iran having nuclear arms will be a development against Turkey and will affect the country. He, however, stopped short of going into details.

The Turkish government's efforts to dissuade Iran from acquiring nuclear arms should also be interpreted as a reflection of Turkish concerns over Tehran's dangerous game.

Turkey is also of the opinion that maintaining an unidentified number of US nuclear weapons -- deployed during the Cold War -- at İncirlik Air Base in southern Turkey will definitely continue to serve as a deterrent for Ankara against nuclear arms possessed elsewhere.

It is hard to know how the years-long standoff between Iran and Western powers will be resolved. But if it is resolved, this will put Turkey in a beneficial position. It will then be able to tell the domestic public as well as the Islamic world that it did its best in lessening tension between Iran and the international community while criticizing Israel for acquiring nuclear weapons.

But if the standoff is not resolved and Iran ends up possessing nuclear arms, Turkey will have no choice but to acquire similar weapons, contributing to a new and highly dangerous arms race in the region.

Is Israel misreading Erdoğan?

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Abdulhamit Bilici

Todays Zaman

Israel is apparently uneasy about the rising waves of criticism against it. But it seems that it is making a serious mistake in assessing these criticisms. Since they are reluctant to rectify this mistake, it becomes increasingly difficult to restore the relations back to their natural course. This basic error stems from reducing criticisms voiced by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to two false assumptions. First, they assume that Erdoğan acts in this way and makes use of every opportunity to harshly criticize Israel in order to boost his popular support inside the country. Second, they believe that Erdoğan and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) voice these criticisms because of their Islamist identity.

For those who tend to define the problem in this way, there is only one way to regain Turkey: to get rid of the AK Party and Erdoğan. This inevitably urges one to think that there might be

cooperation between those who think in this way in Israel and the anti-AK Party groups in Turkey.

Oddly, the Turkish wing of this coalition tends to accuse Erdoğan of doing a service to the Greater Middle East Project and other US and Israeli projects with the intention of discrediting him. Isn't it interesting that some authors, including Ergün Poyraz, who went so far as to claim that Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül were originally Jews, today stand trial as defendants in the Ergenekon case? It is a big contradiction to accuse Erdoğan of serving the US and Israeli interests in Turkey and the Middle East on the one hand and claim that he is against Israel because of his Islamist identity on the other, isn't it?

Another point that must be explained by those who think in this way is how Erdoğan's attitude prior to the massacre in Gaza could be explained if he is claimed to be acting with considerations for domestic politics or his Muslim identity. If this were the case, as has been claimed, would Erdoğan personally try to make peace between Israel and Syria?

It is a well-known fact that Prime Minister Erdoğan closely monitored this process and invested great effort for its successful completion. Before he became the foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, too, exerted great effort for this reconciliation process. Rumors had been going around that significant progress had been made between the parties, which indirectly met four times.

Indeed, there were very minor glitches left in the fifth meeting held in Ankara and attended by former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. If these could be overcome, the two countries would start direct talks. Before he left Ankara, Olmert had promised to take care of these glitches in Israel. Erdoğan's only demand was that Israel should not trigger any tension with Lebanon or Palestine that would undermine this process.

You know the rest. Four days later, as Erdoğan was waiting for good news from Olmert about the process, the Gazan massacre began. This was a far nastier scandal than arranging for the Turkish ambassador to sit on a lower sofa in Israel. It meant that Israel played both with Turkey and with Erdoğan. Those who did not believe Olmert was uninformed about the attack plan even tried to give the impression that Turkey knew about Israel's intentions. Work hard, toil and sweat so much, and be left with such a picture in the end. Everyone in Turkey and around the world, be they rightists or leftists, revolted against what was done in Gaza. Those Israelis who wonder why Erdoğan raised his voice louder than any world leader should take into consideration this sense of disappointment and deception.

Finally, Olmert, who takes the greatest share in the responsibility for the massacre in Gaza and this humiliation afforded to Turkey, recently made some interesting remarks about Erdoğan. Saying that it is possible to have peace with Syria, Olmert called Erdoğan "a fair mediator." He also spoke wisely when he said: "It's too easy being angry at Erdoğan, but it would be wise to reconcile with him. ... We need negotiations with Turkish mediation." It would be better for Olmert to state whether he knew about the attack on Gaza when he came to Ankara, but what Israel should do is look in the mirror instead of focusing on Turkish domestic politics in search of a scapegoat. The sympathy Turkey earned by tidying up its home although it was being criticized by the whole world until as recently as five to 10 years ago may serve as a model. Moreover, restarting the half-finished process with Syria seems to be the fastest way to normalize relations with Turkey.

The US and the Muslim world: just talk?

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Ibrahim Kalin

Today's Zaman

In an effort to turn a new page in US-Muslim world relations, a large group of prominent Muslim and American leaders and intellectuals came together in Doha, Qatar, on Feb. 13-15. Their message and appeal was the same: more understanding, more respect, more cooperation between the US and the Muslim world.

While this is a noble target, it remains a daunting task and an evasive goal. The reason is that despite all the good rhetoric, US-Muslim world relations remain low on the agenda of both the US and Muslim countries. Without a substantial change in US foreign policy and the peaceful transformation of Arab regimes, talk of more respect and more understanding remains just that: talk.

The 7th annual US-Islamic World Forum, organized by the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar on Feb. 13, featured Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan; US President Barack Obama, who joined the opening session with a videotaped message; Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber al-Thani; the Algerian prime minister; US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton; US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry; and US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke. Many prominent American and Muslim scholars and community leaders were also present.

All speakers underlined the urgency of improving US-Muslim world relations, and they did it with style and eloquence, for which I applaud them all. But if mutual understanding and cooperation is so vital for the future of Islam-West relations and if we have all these leaders committed to that goal, why don't we see progress on the ground? Why are we still talking about the "need" to improve relations, overcome misunderstanding, increase cooperation? If we have the hearts and minds of these leaders truly committed to this historic mission, why are the realities on the ground still so depressing?

President Obama turned a new page in US-Muslim world relations since he took office in 2009. In his two speeches in Turkey and Cairo as well as on other occasions, he called for a "fresh start" and outlined a new vision to improve relations. In his videotaped message on Feb. 13, he admitted that "the United States and Muslims around the world have often slipped into a cycle of misunderstanding and mistrust that can lead to conflict rather than cooperation." To break this cycle, the new US administration launched a series of programs. But, given the enormous size of the problem and the insignificant amount of resources devoted to it, this is not enough.

However, what is more important is to address the core issues that deeply divide the US and the Muslim world. In his address, Prime Minister Erdoğan did just that and spoke about two key issues: Islamophobia and the Middle East peace process. He condemned Islamophobia as a form of racism and a crime against humanity just like anti-Semitism. He called on world leaders, communities, religious leaders, artists, media people and educators to confront Islamophobia. Second, he underlined the urgency of the Middle East peace process and the need to find a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. He referred to the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in the occupied territories and in Gaza. He also reiterated his willingness to restart the Syrian-Israeli talks if and when the Netanyahu government decides to take the offer.

It is always good to hear political leaders say the right things because there are times when they cannot even get it right. But we need more than nicely crafted, inspirational speeches to address one of the most urgent issues of our age. The way forward is clear: The Obama administration must continue to change the main parameters of US foreign policy and US involvement in Muslim countries. The US cannot talk about peace while keeping thousands of combat troops in scores of Muslim countries.

At the same time, Muslim countries must transform themselves into governments and societies governed by the rule of law, justice and accountability. They must stop the blame game and overcome the sense of victimhood. They must face up to their realities and stop blaming the US or Israel for the state in which they find themselves.

“Mutual understanding” means “mutual change.”

Gen. Başbuğ must be dismissed

Monday, 22 February 2010 15:14

Bulent Kenes

Today's Zaman

First, let us sweep aside certain underdeveloped countries that have failed to complete their political evolution like Niger, where a major overthrew the government last week. Then, let us objectively ponder the question “Is there any country other than Turkey that can still call itself civilized although its agenda is continually occupied with illegal and antidemocratic activities by members of the army?” Or, in what other country that calls itself a civilized and democratic country governed by the rule of law can generals who are immersed in politics, conspiracies and crimes -- barring all the commanders who perform their duties with dignity and honor -- appear in the headlines or new stories on TV channels or newspapers every day as they do in Turkey? In which democratic country guided by the rule of law can the generals who have made hypocrisy, lies and illegalities a norm through their actions and statements go unpunished? In which civilized and democratic country can a chief of general staff whose insincerity is well advertised easily brazen through all the disgrace and continue to occupy the highest position of the military, which is surely a position characterized by dignity?

Is there any greater trouble that can befall any country than the one caused by a chief of general staff who rushes to automatically afford protection to all antidemocratic illegal networks within the army and the crimes committed by these networks and who ridicules the law and ignores the popular will and those selected by that popular will?

It should be noted that the greater the ranks of corrupt military staff, the greater will be the danger they pose to democracy, the rule of law and peace in the nation. Shouldn't the civilian administration of a normal and smoothly operating democracy take the necessary administrative and legal measures? In which democratic country governed by the rule of law will a chief of general staff who is an experienced liar be allowed to distract the general public with gilded words in respect to democracy and the rule of law? How can he be allowed to set up ambushes on the national will behind the scenes while hypocritically trying to look pretty for the nation? In which democratic country governed by the rule of law can a chief of general staff who has assigned his subordinates to commit an open crime against a deputy prime minister who was elected to office and who has praised the crime and who has humiliated his subordinates for failing to perform their assignment properly continue to occupy that honorable position for another moment? I wonder, is there any country governed by the rule of law that cannot touch a chief of general staff who has confessed the grave crime he has committed.

There is much more to be said about Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ's voice recording that was posted on some Web sites on the Internet on Friday and that contains confessions of the offenses he committed. But, to tell you the truth, I am tired of talking about these depressing matters. Perhaps due to this fatigue of mine, I cannot keep myself thinking that “he has expressed exactly my thoughts” when I saw on Sunday the written statement

Freedom Association (Özgür-Der) President Rıdvan Kaya made on Saturday. I would like to quote this statement with which I fully agree, although I do not personally know Kaya:

“The voice recording of Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ, posted on some Web sites on the Internet, exposes the hypocrisy and deception hidden behind the chorus, 'There is an ongoing asymmetrical war against the TSK [Turkish Armed Forces].’ This recording, which the General Staff confirmed belonged to Başbuğ, contains bad language, threats and most importantly, the confession that the nation and the government are being fooled.

“As you will remember, in late December last year, Turkey heatedly discussed that Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç was being followed by military officers from the Special Forces Command. During the debates that lasted for several weeks, the advocates of militarism in the media and politics insisted that this claim was false and said instead the government was trying to present itself as a victim by manufacturing such scenarios. Some of them even went further to label Arınç as paranoid. In its first statement about the debates, the General Staff had declared that the military officers in question had gone to Çukurambar to fill a cartridge, but when this statement was found strange by the general public, it modified the statement, saying they were actually following a military officer who was leaking information.

“For the groups who tend to view the General Staff’s statements as divine commandments, this matter was clarified and closed. However, as was understood from the voice recording, the matter was not about following a military officer who was leaking information but an operation ordered by the General Staff. We wonder what sort of explanation pro-military groups will provide as the essence of the matter was disclosed.

“Gen. Başbuğ is talking about 'the rotten' inside as he usually does and draws attention to those who infiltrate the army. So, the problem is not about the effervescing junta activities in the barracks but about how to keep this information from leaking.

“Again, Başbuğ stresses that 'there is time for everything' or 'no one should think that we just watch the development from afar,' and this is another important matter. Like his previous warning that 'there is a limit to our patience' he had made on several occasions, this is a typical threat. We should ask Başbuğ: 'What will come in time?' and 'What will you do when the time comes?’

“We underline once again: Turkey is under a comprehensive militarist threat. The problem is not about several juntas acting freely. There is a multifaceted military blockade guided by the General Staff at its center. Gen. Başbuğ’s words already confirm this. The chief of General Staff has lied to the people, trying to deceive the prime minister, to whom he is subordinate, and is trying to purge not the junta but the those who disclose their subversive activities. What he implies in this sentence that 'we will know what should be done when the time comes' are open threats to everyone living in this country.

This scene confirms the misery of militarism. The contradictions, deviations and stalemates created by the efforts to cover up a rotten system of injustice with threats, deceptions and lies are obvious to everyone. It is the duty of the government to take measures against this decay. Those who falter must be called to account. Thus, it is inevitable to call Başbuğ to account for his remarks.”

The basis of the estate in trouble

Monday, 22 February 2010 15:12

Gurkan Zengin

Today's Zaman

In all courtrooms in this country, you can see the following inscription on the wall behind the judge's chair: “Justice is the basis of the estate.” Here, “estate” means “country.”

In Turkey, justice has long lost its characteristic as “the basis of the estate.” The tragic bit is that it is the members of the judiciary who have shaken this basis.

Who is authorized to investigate or try the Erzincan chief prosecutor? Is the chief prosecutor of the closest province or the Supreme Court of Appeals entitled to follow up on this matter? There may be practical meanings or consequences to these questions, but the matter goes much deeper than it seems.

Members of the judiciary should not be offended by us, but we don't think that the legal profession is a meaningful job.

Political science, the history of modernization, the relations between society and politics, etc., are much more serious and meaningful topics.

Why?

Because there is the tragic modernization process of this country that lies at the heart of all fundamental debates in Turkey. All current debates that appear to be “legal” will reveal themselves to be “political” upon closer examination. We have lived through such a distorted adventure of modernization that concepts like “rule of law” and “universal principles of law” cannot find room for themselves amid the ongoing chaos.

Thus “law,” which is supposed to act as an adjudicator in all political conflicts or tensions, soon became a side or tool of those conflicts.

A majority of the members of the judiciary issue decisions not based on facts or principles, but depending on the people involved.

One of the striking examples of this was seen during the presidential election. The top judges who ruled that Abdullah Gül could not be elected as president based their decision on “law.” But under the same “law,” many previous presidents had been elected. And Gül was able to become president only after the elections of July 22 changed the political balances.

According to the “book,” the Constitutional Court cannot review the essence of constitutional amendments, but it did and it annulled them. They did it by looking everyone in the eye. They said that they relied on the “law” while doing so. But everyone knew what they actually relied on.

Where is the law? Which law?

The Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors' (HSYK) decision to strip the Erzurum chief public prosecutor of his powers is a new example of such distortions.

This decision effectively maimed the investigation that was being conducted in Erzincan -- and was left unfinished -- and the Erzurum prosecutor's probe into the Erzincan chief prosecutor. After this stage, who will believe that the process is going on “naturally”?

The basic value that ensured that the Ottoman Empire survived for several centuries was justice. It is disheartening to see the progress we have made as the generations who inherited the state tradition of regarding justice as the basis of the country.

We are in a pitiful situation.

We want to believe in Erzincan Chief Prosecutor İlhan Cihaner and Erzurum prosecutor Osman Şanal, not because they are representatives of a particular ideology, but because they are the first-class prosecutors of the state. But do we really believe? No.

Do we have trust in the top judges in Ankara? Can we accept the decisions of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court of Appeals as indisputable judicial decisions that we must accept whether or not we like them? No, absolutely not. We search for a trap even in the decisions that are in line with our political views.

Consciences are long wounded. The media's being “pro-something” is a matter of democracy, and it can be overcome. But justice being “pro-something” is a matter of everything with whomever it sides.

Judgment versus judgment

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Monday, 22 February 2010 15:23

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The current situation is not only a crisis for the judiciary although this is how it seems. The crisis is much bigger and deeper than that. There is a judicial oligarchy within the judiciary's power. This oligarchy is integrated with the tradition of military coups in Turkey.

It is the military that has created this oligarchy. The receding armed tutelage has left the judicial oligarchy defenseless against the government. The prosecutors and judges in Erzurum did nothing but implement legal procedures. It was not the judge against the judge. The conflict emerged between the rule of law and the judicial oligarchy. The result is something that can be found in jokes.

The investigation being conducted by the prosecutors and judges in Erzurum is very important. The arrest of the Erzincan chief public prosecutor signifies the importance of this investigation. By stripping the prosecutors of their special powers, the Supreme Board of Prosecutors and Judges (HSYK) did nothing but prevent the investigation. The reason for the HSYK decision was the arrest of the chief public prosecutor. The chief prosecutor is still under arrest, and the HSYK does not have the authority to take him out of jail. The picture is perfectly cartoon-like. The prosecutors were stripped of their powers because they caused the arrest of Chief Public Prosecutor İlhan Cihaner but the chief public prosecutor could not be released. Does this result signify the strangeness of the situation?

Legal cover

We are not discussing a complex civil case. A chief public prosecutor who is accused of committing serious offenses, such as membership of a terrorist organization and the defamation of citizens, was arrested as a result of an investigation that another chief public prosecutor had been conducting for several months. It was not a personal decision of a single person. The chief public prosecutor indicted another prosecutor, presented the evidence and the court decided to arrest him. On the other hand, without having any idea about this evidence, the HSYK stripped these prosecutors of their powers.

Article 138 of the Constitution reads: "No authority, organ, institution or person can issue orders or instructions or circulars or advice to courts or judges in the exercise of judicial powers and authorities." Weren't "orders or instructions" given? Wasn't "advice" given? During the last three years, this was done by many people, particularly the military. But, all in vain. Investigations continued to make progress. Advice did not work.

What happened in Erzincan was extremely scandalous. It is likely that the state's authorities that are responsible for maintaining security may conspire to manufacture false evidence to set traps for innocent citizens. It is possible that the members of the National Intelligence Organization (MIT) and high-ranking members of the gendarmerie, who are supposed to maintain public peace, the prosecutor who is expected to protect public order for the sake of the people, and a general commanding an army may come together to prepare plots against people. They may use their power and authority and the facilities and privileges available to them to implement these conspiracies. They may give assurances to bad people to convince them to give false testimonies. Yes, they may do all of these.

All of them are possible. But were they really done? We do not know. The judiciary is investigating. What happens if they are implemented?

The prosecutors conducting the Erzincan probe assured us that we should not be worried but continue to have trust in the rule of law even if we face such a large, scandalous conspiracy.

The HSYK, on the other hand, has undermined that trust. The government rushed to prop up judicial independence and impartiality while the judicial oligarchy shook this trust.

Essence of the matter

The real reason behind the ongoing scandal is 3rd Army Commander Saldıray Berk, the true mastermind behind the Erzincan conspiracy. Let us remember the main theme of the investigation under which several MİT staff members, members of the gendarmerie and a chief public prosecutor were arrested. To secretly plant weapons in the houses of devout people to give the impression that they are members of a non-existent terrorist organization and then to indict these people for membership in a terrorist organization, thereby defining religious communities as terrorist organizations. To create material support to the “threat of an armed reactionary revolt against the republic” and to give legitimacy to the military authorities' interventions and demand for power. For this purpose, an “Action Plan to Fight Reactionaryism” was drafted in the General Staff headquarters in Ankara. In Erzincan, the state's intelligence organization, the Gendarmerie and the prosecutor's office worked together to implement this plan. This is the reason why the intelligence and gendarmerie staff and the Erzincan chief public prosecutor were arrested and jailed under the investigation conducted by the specially authorized prosecutors. The evidence to support these claims and arrests implies that an armed terrorist organization has been established to conduct smear campaigns against citizens. Finally, the chief public prosecutor was arrested on charges of being a member of a terrorist organization. So who is the leader of this organization? Who makes the assignments, gives orders, provides coordination and executes the plan? Isn't it the 3rd army commander?

Here is another and clearer question. If, as in the case of the chief public prosecutor and other officials, there is clear evidence about Gen. Saldıray Berk, and there is a very high probability that this evidence might be obscured, and if this general has to be arrested because of this offense that is not of a military nature, what will happen? The answer to this question is very important for us to understand the true nature of the current crisis.

The destination that the ongoing investigation is taking Turkey to will be a place where the rule of law is asserted in practice. States are governed by the rules. If there is strong circumstantial evidence that the person to whom you entrusted an army has committed a crime, this pasha must be suspended from duty according to these rules. Why? Because a person who wields so much power will use this power in order to prevent the investigation against him. Indeed, if the prosecutor is not allowed to enter the army headquarters, what other reason can there be? The option to suspend from duty is particularly suitable for such cases.

The General Staff must immediately suspend the 3rd army commander from duty. If it fails to do so, the government must act directly and dismiss the commander. Isn't it a serious threat against fundamental rights and freedoms and the rule of law to allow a person who is being investigated on charges of conspiring against citizens and who tries to block this investigation to continue to command so many soldiers and weapons?

The real crisis is taking place not within the judiciary, but within the military. This is the military behind the irregularities of the judiciary. The criminal networks nested within the army are being investigated. The scandals in the judiciary are intended to prevent these investigations. Will the new specially authorized prosecutors to be appointed to Erzurum be able to sweep the ongoing investigation under the carpet or destroy the collected evidence? No, this is impossible because law works based on rules, not on certain people. When you put the principle of the “publicity of the trial” and the principle of “military secrecy” side by side, you see why the answers to these two questions are different. The new prosecutors who are appointed to replace the prosecutors who were stripped of their powers in the judicial scandal

have no other option than to let the legal process follow its course. The investigation phase is confidential, but during the public trial phase, all their errors, if any, will be exposed. These are the very principles that enable us to rely on the rule of law. The logic of the law makes sure that all possibilities for error are minimized. At this stage, external inference with the investigation in Erzincan will only effect a delay, but no change.

A tangible indicator of this conclusion will be Gen. Saldıray Berk going to the new prosecutors and answering their questions like a well-behaved child. Is it possible otherwise? No, according to the law. Yes, according to politics. Then, the government must step in and force this pasha to an ex officio retirement before sending him to the prosecutors.

Will Berk come and testify in the investigation under which the Erzincan chief public prosecutors were arrested? Yes, he will. What if he needs to be arrested? Yes, he will be arrested. Is there any other possibility? No. Then, there is nothing to worry about.

Turkish-Iranian Relations and Recent Development in the Region

Mr. Director

Distinguished audience

Distinguished colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen

Iranian Ambassador to Turkey Bahman Hosseinpour

USAK PUBLICATIONS

It is my pleasure to attend this meeting on Iran-Turkey relationships organized by the USAK. First I would like take this opportunity to thank Prof. Dr. Sedat Laçiner, Director of USAK and his colleagues to give this chance to express my views over Iran-Turkey relationship. On the basis of the historical records, Iran and Turkey were great powers and had a very significant experience in case of nation-state-oriented and administrative system focusing on how to deal with ruling and regulating different parts of their vast territories and domains. 400-year peace and stability on the Iranian-Turkish Borders, indicates positive and progressive relations in the fields of political, economic and cultural arena between two countries.

This above mentioned stability of the borders is unique throughout the world. And we are proud of such friendly and peaceful relationship which has been recognized as considerable record in the International Relations history.

The said situation has been raised remarkable ties between both nations.

In this regard, both nations benefited so many common grounds because of two close cultures.

This common cultural grounds are the main factors in strengthening ties in one hand and promoting economic and political affairs on the other hand.

Although, both countries were in the western camp in 1970's, bilateral trade exchanges were stopped on 30 million dollars.

However, after the Islamic Revolution in Iran bilateral trade relationships reached the record 3 billion dollars after just 5 years.

Distinguished audience,

Different mechanisms considered which regulates the relations in different aspects such as political, economic, security, parliamentarian and cultural etcetera.

After the Islamic Revolution, my country gave first priority to extend the relationships with the neighboring countries specially Turkey. In the comparison with the past, relations with Turkey relatively progressed.

I said "relatively" because the real potentials and capabilities of both countries have remained unrecognized.

In my opinion all political, economic, security and parliamentary potentials left untouched or if it is taken into consideration remained unimplemented.

In addition to the efforts of two countries officials, recognition of more potentialities is needed and think Tanks such as USAK should try their best to pave the way in finding the forgotten and unknown potentialities and making new initiatives in these regards.

Distinguished audience,

As the ambassador plenipotentiary of the Islamic Republic of Iran since the beginning of my responsibility I have tried to recognize and implement the new potentials in different fields.

In this regard, projects such as trade exchanges based on national currencies, establishment of industrial zones next to the common borders, launch the transit line between Bandar Abbas and Trabzon ports, mutual investment in energy and economic projects I thank God some of them came into operation.

I would like to say that if any serious plan or feasible project offered by USAK or any other Iranian and Turkish institutes, it would not only be prized but also be introduced to the relevant authorities of both countries and after feasibility study and final approval, it would be implemented.

The most important thing in relations between two countries is confidence, which should be observed with mutual benefits.

Fortunately we have this item available and of course there is need to execute and implement some mutual strategic projects institutionalize this conception.

Talking about boundaries of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Republic of Turkey which is known as peaceful borders, should not be just as a slogan. But in reality we should follow it as matter of implementation.

How come European countries despite centenary wars which made serious differences among them, now they came together to remove all these obstacles and cooperate in all fields like political, economic and cultural.

In spite of 400 year- peaceful borders, Iran and Turkey still need to take the advantage from these potentialities and capabilities.

I believe that the only and just only way to reach this goal is effort, effort, and effort in all arenas and the responsibility should be burden on the shoulders of all who love two countries. Regarding regional cooperation's, also the two countries have close and appropriate cooperation, the situation in the most critical region of the Middle-East, in some area like Afghanistan is extremely matter of concern.

Our country received more than 3 million refugees from Afghanistan during the past 30 years and has paid a lot of costs materially and spiritually for this matter.

We strongly believe that the solution for Afghanistan is not occupation or invasion, but respecting to the will of Afghan nation which is possible by cooperation among countries of this region.

In this regard, fortunately we have considerable consultation cooperation between the two countries.

Our countries have benefited from natural consultations regarding the issue of Iraq, Caucause, and other regional and international affairs which are productive.

Regarding Ghaza, which is one of the most important issue in the Islamic World, fortunately H.E. Mr. Erdoan esteemed Prime Minister, as well as the people and the government of the Republic of Turkey always take the side of Ghaza and support legitimate right of them.

Hereby, I appreciate such stance has been taken by.

Also, I declare the said position not only has strengthened Turkey stand among the Muslim Nations, but also has been praised by the International Community.

The position of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding Palestine is also to support the oppressed people of this country and the idea of setting up the justice for them.

I take the opportunity once again to express gratitudes to my best friends in USAK specially Prof. Dr. Laçiner for preparing this meeting.

I wish all the best for the prosperity and success in every aspect of life of the two nations and governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Turkey.

May Allah bless both countries.

Thank you.

A farewell to rulers in arms

Tuesday, February 23, 2010

Mustafa AKYOL

USAK PUBLICATIONS

For decades and decades, Turkey's powerful generals, even if they often remained behind the scenes, ruled the country. And every Turk knew that. They also knew that if the elected politicians make the generals angry, the latter would come down and teach them a damn good lesson.

I got my own share of this national wisdom when I was 8 years old. That was the time when the military coup of 1980 was launched, and all active politicians, including my father, were arrested by the military. Almost all of them were tried for "high treason," and similar nonsense, and the military prosecutors had asked for their execution.

As a kid, then, I really wasn't getting what all this meant. I just knew that my father stopped coming home, and started to stay "at a hotel-like place" as my mom told me after his arrest. For weeks, I insisted to join her during her weekly visits to this "hotel." And, one day, she took me with her.

Saving us via torture

The place was the military prison in Mamak, a destitute neighborhood in Ankara, and it really did not look like a hotel. It rather resembled, to be honest, Auschwitz. There was barbed wire everywhere, besides watchtowers with machine guns, and lots of soldiers with rifles. We waited behind a corridor of barbed wire, at 7 a.m. on a snowy day, and then my father, along with a dozen other men, showed up in the distance. Their heads were shaven, and they were made to walk in a straight line while singing some military march. Then they lined on the other side of the corridor. I just remember that my father looked warmly at my scared eyes and said, "Don't worry, I will come home soon."

He could come home only after spending 14 months in prison, a long-term arrest for no reasonable reason. Thousands of other politicians or activists were also jailed for months, and sometimes years, and often suffered terrible treatment. Unlike Auschwitz, to be fair, Mamak had no gas chambers. But, along with other military prisons in Istanbul and Diyarbakır, it had torture chambers. Some people died under the unbelievable agony they went through, which included notorious "techniques" that I don't have the stomach to talk about.

The Turks who have gone through all this don't know what to say when some presumptuous foreigners, such as Israeli president Shimon Peres, utter incredible words like this:

"Turkey is the only country in the world where a non-democratic institution, the Army, was in charge of preserving democracy. And they did it."

The Army, of course, was not "preserving democracy." It was rather preempting it. It was also preventing us from finding non-military solutions to our acute problems such as the

Kurdish question or the stalemate in Cyprus. Besides the military coups and interventions — in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997 — it was perpetually limiting the scope of democratic politics with the “red lines” it drew on all these big issues.

The officers, to be sure, were doing all this to heroically “save” our nation from various threats. But this self-designated saviorship was very much intertwined with their arrogance. “Harbiye graduates are never fooled,” read a popular slogan among them, referring to the top military academy. This self-righteousness blinded the generals from realizing that the authoritarian policies they pursued were often the very reason why we had so many “threats.” By banning the Kurdish language, they fuelled violent Kurdish nationalism. By imposing a tyrannical form of secularism, they made some religious conservatives anti-secular.

The third stage

But, well, everything changes in this world, and even so does Turkey. Since 2002, there has been a government of which we know that the generals are not a fan. But unlike in the good old days, they can’t overthrow it. Moreover, now some of them are even facing justice for attempting to overthrow it. The recent arrest of 50 commanders, including 14 retired generals and four active admirals, is all about that.

This shows that Turkey is entering a third stage in terms of the military-civilian relationship. In the first stage, between 1960 and 2002, the military was clearly dominant and untouchable. In the second stage, from 2002 to the beginning of the Ergenekon case in 2007, it lost its dominance but preserved its untouchability. In 2005, a prosecutor in Van, who dared to point to a top general in his indictment about a bombing of a pro-Kurdish bookstore, was not just stripped of his duties, but also totally excommunicated from the legal profession by the Supreme Board of Prosecutors and Judges, or HSYK. After all, institutions such as the latter, as our top judges often proudly say, exist in order to “protect the regime” – and not to protect the people from the regime.

Yet with the Ergenekon case, we are moving into the third phase, because the military is losing its untouchability, too. The officers, whose brainstorming sessions on how to launch coups have been exposed, are now being questioned.

This is good news for Turkey. For a farewell to arms, and rulers in arms, is a must for democracy

Turkey’s Persian test

Wednesday, February 24, 2010

Eldar Mamedov

HURRIYAT

The time is fast approaching for Turkey to decide where it stands in the West’s confrontation with Iran over the country’s nuclear program and domestic repression. Turkey’s position matters, not least because it is a non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council until the end of 2011.

Like its Western allies, Turkey opposes a nuclear Iran. But it does not perceive the Iranian threat with the same sense of urgency. Ankara has significant and growing economic and energy ties with Tehran. Bilateral trade is worth \$10 billion a year. Both countries share concerns about Kurdish separatism. It was because of this new friendship that Turkey’s foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu visited Tehran a few days ago, in a clear effort to broker a compromise between the West and Iran that would avoid new sanctions.

However, if the pattern of serial deception and evasion by the Islamic Republic regarding its nuclear program is anything to go by, the success of this effort is far from assured. Just a few days after Davutoğlu’s visit, the International Atomic Energy Agency, or IAEA, released a

report that for the first time explicitly acknowledged the existence of the military component in Iran's nuclear program. There is nothing to suggest that the current Iranian regime can be a credible negotiator on the nuclear issue, with Turkish mediation or without.

At the same time, the attention of the international community is increasingly shifting toward the brutal repression of the Iranian protesters in the aftermath of the fraudulent presidential elections of 2009. Here, Turkey failed to join its Western allies in their condemnations of the crackdown. In fact, Turkey was one of the first (and few) countries to congratulate Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on his "re-election." Prime-Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan disgracefully called Ahmadinejad "a friend," while Davutoğlu referred to the post-election Iranian developments as an example of a "healthy political process."

To be sure, Turkey's good relations with the official Tehran do help Iranian people, as opposed to the regime, in some important ways. Turkey is one of the few countries in the world Iranians can enter without visas. As a result, more than a million of Iranians who visit Turkey every year are able to enjoy an environment free from the strictures of the Islamic Republic. Women, for example, happily discard the oppressive hijab. Turkey has become a valuable escape route for many Iranians fleeing repression. According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, there are currently 4,242 Iranians in Turkey awaiting political asylum in third countries – an 80 percent increase compared with the same period in 2009. But the new political landscape in Iran ensures that preserving the status quo in its relations with that country is no longer an option for Turkey. Recent demonstrations, especially during the holy day of Ashura in December, have shown that the regime has so far failed to crush the opposition Green movement. Iran's growing and expanding opposition is spearheaded by a vibrant and well-educated civil society which has seen its desire of individual freedoms, economic and social progress stifled for far too long. As the regime refuses to compromise, it is bent on repression as the chief means of retaining power, which further undermines its legitimacy and deepens rifts within the regime.

In these circumstances, supporting Iranian opposition is not just a moral imperative, but also the most realistic policy. For the first time in three decades, there is a possibility of real change in Iran, and this is an opportunity not to be missed. It is a long process, but the reward would be an Iran that not only treats its citizens better, but also acts more responsibly on the nuclear issue and is a force for stability in the region. On the other hand, a policy of befriending Tehran's rulers would not only send a discouraging message to the Iranian people; it would also be highly divisive in Turkey's domestic political context, fueling further suspicions about the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP's, doubtful commitment to democracy and human rights.

The best policy for Turkey would be to use its growing regional influence, its cultural and historical links with Iran and its current position in the U.N. Security Council to help promote democratic change in Iran. It should oppose sanctions that are likely to hurt the ordinary people more than the regime itself. But it should join its Western allies in introducing targeted sanctions, like travel bans and freezing of assets, on those responsible for the repression – in addition to those involved in the nuclear program. This should include the supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the heads of the law enforcement agencies, the judiciary and the leadership of the notorious Revolutionary Guard and the Basij militia. Given Turkey's close relations with Iran, the enforcement by Ankara of such types of sanctions could really bite. This would enhance Turkey's position in the Euro-Atlantic community. Most importantly, it would save a lot of lives in Iran by sending a clear message that there is a cost attached to the repression.

- Eldar Mamedov is a political adviser to the Socialists and Democrats group in the European Parliament, but is writing in a personal capacity.

From the Bosphorus: Straight - Time to 'think small' on economic reform

Wednesday, February 24, 2010

HURRIYAT

We note with concern the survey, reported here Wednesday, by the American Business Forum in Turkey on the difficulties of doing business in Turkey. The survey, of more than 100 executives at U.S. companies operating here, sounded a note of optimism toward the future but lamented the sluggishness of the bureaucracy and the slow pace of microeconomic reform.

An attractive business climate for investors is important. But a list of needed reforms represents an even greater potential virtue for Turkish businesses and consumers. We also note the work done on the issue two years ago by the think tank TEPAV, referred to in English as the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey. This is the best study to date on the need for "second generation reforms" beyond the macroeconomic restructuring that followed the 2001 economic crisis. It is available at www.tepav.org.tr.

The basic issue is that while 2001 spurred Turkey, and later the new government of the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, to deal with a host of long-neglected problems, this effort all but stopped at the level of fiscal and banking reform.

Turkey is still resisting the formation of an independent tax authority. The thrust of labor law remains the protection of jobs, not workers. The result is extraordinary levels of taxation on labor while the unregistered economy is neglected. Tax evasion by small businesses through off-the-books activity means the accounting transparency needed for access to credit does not exist. This creates a vicious cycle encouraging primitive enterprises, depressing job creation and further hollowing out the tax base which drives collections back again to the obvious wage-earners.

The link between education and economic development is another area of neglected reform. Political expedience demands opening of more and more university faculties with scant regard for the job prospects of graduates – who often finish school poorly prepared.

Vocational education, intermediate technology skills, tourism expertise and even language skills are urgently needed by the economy. The education system does little to respond and unemployment remains in double digits as employers complain of worker shortages.

It is now relatively easy to start a new business in Turkey. It is devilishly difficult to close one. Bankruptcy rules are punitive, cumbersome and vague. Even the lack of phytosanitary standards and inspection facilities within the agricultural system is a brake on the growth of prosperity. Export agriculture can only grow to its potential when fears of chemical, pesticide and other residues have been eliminated by a body of rules and structures that does not presently exist.

We certainly support the "big" reforms of recent years. Now it is time to focus on the "small" reforms.

Is this democratization or dissolution?

Thursday, February 25, 2010

Semih Idiz

HURRIYAT

One is tempted to look on the latest dramatic developments in Turkey and maintain that there is a serious democratization process underway. But this is Turkey and one has to leave room for doubt in order to get a correct fix on what is going on.

Neither should one take too seriously bleary-eyed Europeans who derive some kind of surreptitious pleasure from seeing the troubles of the Turkish military and the Kemalist camp. While they too believe that a process of democratization is underway, one has to take their often superficial views on Turkey with a serious pinch of salt.

The reason is that Europeans often dig into their bag of clichés concerning Turkey, and produce "overused" views even if these are out of touch with the Turkish reality.

One question that such Europeans have to answer is clearly embedded in the latest "Eurobarometer" poll on Turkey.

That poll shows that the Turkish military is still considered the most reliable institution in Turkey by 77 percent of Turks, while only 52 percent consider the government trustworthy. The same poll also indicates that 68 percent of Turks trust the judiciary, which thus is in second place in terms of the most trusted institutions in the country.

This poll was most probably conducted prior to the latest division that surfaced in the judiciary so it will be interesting to note what the next poll says on this. All of this returns us to a point that we have brought up time and again.

Turkey is too complex a country to be deciphered by means of clichés and preconceived notions. It is because of this that it is not certain whether Turkey is currently undergoing a historic process of democratization, or if it is in the throes of some kind of dissolution, given that the country, including the judiciary now, is seriously divided.

The latest "Balyoz" (Sledgehammer) Operation investigation is of course a valid one in essence. It is also a fact that the military has been unable to deny the existence of documents that caused this legal investigation to be initiated.

The military claims that those documents do not amount to a coup plan, but represent a certain scenario for a military contingency. But what serious contingency plan would incorporate items such as the bombing of mosques or the downing of one of Turkey's own jets over the Aegean, the apparent aim in both cases being to discredit the government and justify a military takeover?

Such documents would be investigated in any country that claims to be a democracy based on the rule of law. However the way prosecutors have been acting in this case points to the fact that there is more than just a simple judicial procedure underway.

For example, the only thing missing in the way the highest military officers were arraigned for questioning, had their houses searched, and later arrested, were handcuffs. Whether the public approves of an almost vindictive "it is our turn now" approach emanating from these arrests, even if the legitimacy of the investigation is admitted, remains to be seen.

Given that the military is the most trusted institution, there is the possibility that the manner in which the investigation is being conducted will backfire politically on the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, not out of sympathy for the indicted generals, but for the harm it is felt the process is giving to the country's most trusted institution.

Aware of this, the AKP is now investigating two deputies whose remarks clearly reflect a "settling of past accounts" attitude, which indicates that the government is not as honest as it claims to be about democratizing the country.

One of these deputies openly said recently that it is the AKP's turn now to keep tabs on those who had kept tabs on them for decades. The other AKP deputy claimed that anyone who does not support the AKP has bad blood flowing in his or her veins.

Such remarks are taken by many as "Freudian slips" which reflect what lies near the surface in the "collective subconscious" of the AKP. No doubt it was this perception that also led to the meeting of the highest ranking commanders of the Turkish Armed Forces, or TSK, a few days back.

All the one-sentence statement about the meeting issued later said was that “the commanders of all the forces had met to discuss the latest grave situation.” This was immediately interpreted by the AKP camp as a “threat to intervene in politics” and a statement by a senior party spokesman warned the military indirectly not to interfere.

It was in this tense environment that President Abdullah Gül held yesterday’s emergency meeting with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ. While little came out of this meeting that will change the overall equation, the fact that it was held at all showed that President Gül is worried about the course of developments. What compounds the difficulty is that there is fresh talk about a new closure case against the AKP, and the chief prosecutor has already admitted that he is investigating the party. A new case would be disastrous for the country of course, but who thinks of this in today’s politically charged environment?

Inevitably this general environment has now revived talk of early elections. As for Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of the opposition Nationalist Movement Party, or MHP, he has called, not for early elections, but “immediate elections” because, he says, this is the only way to prevent the country from drifting into further chaos.

The ruling AKP faces a dilemma here. Should it go for early elections, it is not for sure that the latest developments will guarantee a win. Many claim that it will because the public is happy about the beating the military and the Kemalist camp are getting at the present time. But, if as the Eurobarometer poll indicates, the military is the most trusted of institutions, then is the public actually happy about what it going on, or is it worried that the AKP is dragging the country to chaos?

It is not certain, therefore, that the government will come out of from early elections successfully. A hung Parliament on the other hand, would most likely deepen the present acrimonious infighting.

The shame of all this is that the AKP has squandered the strong mandate it received from the electorate, because of the impression it has created that it is out to settle old scores, rather than enhance democracy while maintaining unity in a country that is seriously divided and with major issues to resolve.

European adventure

Thursday, February 25, 2010

MİTHAT MELEN

HURRIYAT

As Turkey has a never-ending adventure with Europe, we are again in Brussels. Although Europe is struggling with her own problems she cannot help herself from criticizing Turkey. Presently Greece is on the brink of declaring bankruptcy. Ireland, Spain, Portugal are expected to be next in line.

The European Commission is advising Greece to tighten her belt and is trying to draw strict guidelines for Greek banks and other financial institutions. Although mainland Europe's banking system is stricter compared to the Anglo-Saxon one, the problems getting out of hand are creating shock waves for the system. However insistent the United Kingdom and the United States get on market banking, the European Parliament is adopting strict measures after the deep crisis in Greece.

The real problem in Europe is sovereign debts. Governments whose debts almost equal their GDP are now trying to solve the problem by getting more loans. Consequently this state of affairs is affecting interest rates. On top of all, the pressure by the public sector on the private sector is having a negative effect on the private sector, hindering investments.

To pass the test has become a must for Greece. Initially, Greece will stop her public expenditures. Secondly, to enable Greece to abide by the Maastricht criteria, the EU Commission will increase her controls over the country. If, until 2012, Greece fails to return on an even economic keel, it is not clear what will happen. The interesting development is Germany admitting she will be unable to take the EU burden anymore and will be willing to have a share of ownership with France on the euro, as it is owned by none of the EU members and if something happens to it the foundations of the EU may crash.

As the somber atmosphere is getting dimmer in Europe our counterparts in the European Parliament are preaching to us to solve the Cyprus problem and say, "Otherwise forget about full accession." They also add, "Also it is high time you changed your Constitution."

Turkey, on the other hand, is on another track. Every morning as soon as we wake up we are confronted with a new incident. In the judiciary, in the Turkish Military there is some sort of activity. The public opinion in Turkey is unable to understand what is happening in the country and why. The man in the street is worried and hopeless about his future. Turkey at any time can go to early elections. In Cyprus there is an upcoming presidential election. The Turkish economy is not in good shape. Markets are in difficulty.

In such an atmosphere can we prepare a new Constitution? Can we struggle to solve the Cyprus problem? Let's say we did it. Then how will it be possible to deal with the Greek Cypriot side which said "no" to the Annan Plan and which the EU granted accession to put Turkey in a fix? The key for stability in the Eastern Mediterranean is not in the hands of Europe.

Europe, who for years pretended to give accession to Turkey now is in deep economic problems and doesn't know how to overcome them. I am sure Europe today is thinking about what will happen to her in the near future. Turkey, who for 40 years was mistakenly led to believe in EU accession, will now hopefully learn how to stand on her own two feet by herself. If the state of affairs continues as they are, Europe will become non-existent by the time for Turkey's accession comes.

The targets and duties of international institutions are changing in this transforming world. Probably it will be inevitable for the system to be restructured. The EU Commission and the Council are unable anymore to control the euro. A European Monetary Fund has to be created. But who will create it, is the billion dollar question. This need creates another need for a new political authority. For 38 years I have been dealing with all European institutions, including the EU Commission and Parliament, but today I realize nothing has changed. The reports, the people, the names, the meetings, the issues, all remain the same. Maybe the only change is in our ages. Every day we get older but our European adventure is continuing.
