

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

TURKEY

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Summary-POLITICAL NEWS

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will hold a series of meetings with artists from Turkey's cinema and theater world to seek support for the government's democratic initiative. The Abant Platform is meeting again this week at Ankara's Rixos Hotel to discuss Democratization for a New Societal Consensus. The Abant Platform regularly arranges meetings to discuss some of the most vital issues of Turkey and the world. The individuals from every segment of society are taking participation in these meetings. Sledgehammer coup plan is consisted of 5,000-pages. This Plan contains the names of about 200 senior policemen. The policemen were classified into the

execution group those which could be used in interrogations and possible administrators. These policemen were assigned code names. When the plans were made in 2003, the policemen were on active duty in cities including İstanbul, Kocaeli, Bursa, Balıkesir, Edirne, Tekirdağ and Kırklareli.

According to the Sledgehammer documents, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) had a systematic plan to create chaos in society by bombing mosques and attacking popular museums with Molotov cocktails. The purpose of the attacks was to increase pressure on the government for failing to provide security to its citizens, eventually leading to a military coup. A Turkish court arrested three more soldiers in an investigation over an alleged Sledgehammer plot.

A recent report by the National Police Department's Anti-smuggling and Organized Crime Bureau (KOM) has shown that a significant number of the bureau's operations in 2009 in Turkey were launched in the field of health. Among a total of 154 operations, 61 were launched in the health sector, resulting in the detention of 1,238 people. More than 230 of them were later arrested on corruption charges. Others held the Corruption in the purchase of medicine and medical equipment due to the use of individuals' health cards. According to human rights activists, Turkey's flourishing and ever-growing civil society, with its expanding focus on fundamental rights and liberties, has become a significant agent of social change.

A middle school student, Sebiha Alaş, was removed from her school in the southeastern city of Diyarbakır because she was wearing a headscarf. According to a statement issued by the Presidential Press Center, President Abdullah Gül approved a bill seeking to reduce the waiting period before a proposed referendum is held from 120 days to 60 days. Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON) President Rızanur Meral expressed support for efforts by the government and Parliament to reform the judiciary by arguing that the Ergenekon, Sledgehammer and Erzincan cases must be used as an opportunity to turn Turkey into a country governed by the rule of law.

In Edirne 3.16 kilograms of heroin discovered in electric oven which was to be smuggled out of the country. Turkish narcotic police seized 747 kg of hashish and 175 kg of heroin in three operations. Gender inequality and sexual violence were on Turkey's agenda this March 8, International Women's Day. A United Nations Turkey report released yesterday put forward that almost half of the country's female population has been subject to sexual and physical violence at the hands of their husbands. It also noted that there are only 52 women's shelters in Turkey despite a female population of 35 million.

The number of women holding seats in Parliament also low while the numbers are even lower in terms of municipal seats. The 2007 general elections saw women win 9.1 percent of seats in Parliament, and only 27 of 2,948 mayoral posts -- 0.9 percent -- are held by women.

Turkey came in 101st on a list of 109 countries on the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), which is calculated according to women's participation in economic and political life in their countries.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said his government holds all doors open to women by supporting their right to pursue a political career, during a speech addressing women delivered on International Women's Day. He recalled that his government amended Article 10 of the Constitution by adding to the article the sentences: "Men and women have equal rights. Stating that the government enabled the schooling of nearly 350,000 girls through programs led by his party. The Prime Minister was speaking at the International Women's Rights Summit held at his Justice and Development Party's (AK Party) headquarters. Turkish security forces detained a total of 77 illegal migrants in separate operations.

The illegal migrants were of Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Palestinian, Somali, Afghan and Georgian origin. The detained migrants would be deported following legal proceedings, officials said. The Turkish frigate "Gemlik" has encountered a small skiff in the Gulf of Aden, and captured seven alleged pirates. This naval vessel, which is serving under an international mission to fight off piracy in the Gulf of Aden.

Pirates are reported to have hijacked a Norwegian chemical tanker, the "UBT Ocean" along with her crew of 21. On Monday, March 1, a Saudi-owned tanker was captured, with a crew of 14 aboard.

SUMMARY-GEO-STRATEGIC NEWS

An agreement on civil aviation cooperation was signed by Turkish Transportation Minister Binali Yıldırım and New Zealand's Foreign Minister Murray McCully in Ankara. Under the agreement, both the states will launch direct flights. Both will cooperate with each other in technical, engineering and air traffic issues, which could boost economic relations and tourism. First mobile hospital produced by Turkey was opened in Darfur, Sudan. The mobile hospitals have dental unit, X-ray, pharmacy, blood bank, morgue, reverse osmosis water purification, laundry, generator and kitchen, and they cover 1,500 square meters.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will travel to Saudi Arabia on a formal visit on March 8 to receive the King Faisal International Prize for Service to Islam, popularly known as the "Arab Nobel Prize."

Turkey's Prime Minister said that Israel had accepted that his country again mediate talks with Syria but the Israeli Prime Minister said no decision had been made. While A senior official in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office denied news reports suggesting that Israel had accepted Turkey's offer to resume its role as mediator in peace negotiations with Syria.

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu had talks with senior Syrian officials on Sunday that focused on the Middle East peace process as well as tensions escalating from time to time between Lebanon and Syria.

Israel's military has been forced to significantly reduce its exercises along the borders with Lebanon and Syria amid pressure by the United States, the World Tribune reported. It quoted Israeli officials as saying that the administration of President Barack Obama has warned Israel that its exercises were escalating regional tension. They said Israel's government has responded by canceling or reducing exercises meant to prepare for a war with Syria. Earlier in March, Israel reduced the scope of a major command exercise, Firestones-12, at the request of the United States. "The exercises were planned on the assessment that Syria is likely to join Hizbullah in the next war," the official told the World Tribune. "We are very much aware of Syrian preparations and coordination with Iran and Hizbullah."

A US resolution that branded as "genocide" the World War One incidents will seriously damage US-Turkish relations, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan said on Saturday. NATO member Turkey, an ally crucial to US interests in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and the Middle East, has expressed its outrage at Thursday's non-binding vote in the Foreign Affairs committee of the US House of Representatives and recalled its envoy to the United States for consultations.

The senior official of a Turkish-American association said on Sunday that leading US TV channel CNN should be protested for its recent broadcast on the incidents of 1915.

CNN, which broadcasted a program titled "Scream Bloody Murder" in December 2008, has recently re-run the production which assesses incidents such as the Holocaust, deceased Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's chemical attack against Iraqi Kurds, as well as the incidents that had taken place in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda and Darfour. The program, presented by US journalist

Christian Amanpour, briefly points to the incidents of 1915 as well, and alleges that "Christian Armenian citizens were killed and forced to migrate, and consequently, 1 million Armenian people died at the time".

Relations between Spain and Turkey have flourished in the past decade; nevertheless, as Spain is currently chairing the EU's term presidency, it is of the utmost importance for Turkey to work closely with Spain to open as many EU negotiation chapters as possible.

Operations have been carried out in several European countries against the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) over the last two weeks, with a wide-ranging operation conducted in Belgium on Thursday following anti-PKK operations in France, Germany and Italy.

Turkey may contribute police force to the United Nations' mission in quake-hit Haiti, said a chief aide to the UN secretary-general on Monday. Turkey has already sent a 52-member police team, consisting of inspectors, chief inspectors and heads of police departments to serve as part of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), the UN peacekeeping department's civilian police management coordinator from Turkey, Ata Yenigün, said and added that Turkey was now planning to send up to 160 police officers.

Erdogan called for more South Korean investments in Turkey. Speaking at the Turkey-South Korea Business Forum in Istanbul, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey had been one of the least affected countries by the global economic crisis thanks to the economic reforms and policies implemented by the government. Erdogan called for more South Korean investments in Turkey, saying that the current level of 500 million USD was far from being satisfactory. Turkey and South Korea signed on Wednesday a cooperation protocol to establish a nuclear energy power plant in the northern Turkish province of Sinop.

Turkey and South Korea would sign a memorandum on launching negotiations on a free trade agreement. Two countries could cooperate in contracting, ship construction, defense industry and banking.

After the rubble is cleared in Turkey's Quake-hit Region, Turkey's state housing authority promises, new homes will be built for residents in the affected area. Three more Turkish provinces such as Bursa, İzmir and Antakya at risk of quakes.

Turkey has welcomed Israel's willingness to help in the aftermath of a devastating earthquake in eastern Anatolia, but warned the issue should not become part of a political agenda.

Turkish Premier Recep Tayyip Erdogan met with Parliament Speaker Fehmida Mirza of Pakistan and the accompanying lawmakers. The closed-door meeting lasted for about 45 minutes.

SUMMARY-ECONOMIC NEWS

Turkey's prime minister also thanked the Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists TUSKON for its supportive stance on the government's "national unity project," a name for the AK Party's Kurdish initiative, a plan to extend cultural rights and freedoms of Kurdish citizens to end separatism. He also highlighted the importance of TUSKON in making Turkey's name well-known globally, bringing together businessmen from the East and the West.

International investors see Turkish political climate as deterrent, survey shows International investors in Turkey are looking forward to a mostly stable first half of the year but are see domestic political turmoil as one of the most adverse developments to affect foreign direct investment (FDI). The Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON) has worked hard over the last four years to bring more than 8,500 foreign businessmen to Turkey from more than 135 different nations, resulting in more than \$14 billion in trade for the nation, but is still looking for opportunities in places like Indonesia.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) was the biggest purchaser of Turkey's gold jewelry last year, at \$348.9 million, while the US followed with \$120 million in Turkish gold jewelry imports. Turkey exported \$57.3 million in gold jewelry to Germany, its third-largest market, in 2009, data from the Export Promotion Center (İGEME) released Monday showed. According to the data, Turkey's total gold jewelry exports amounted to \$1.1 billion last year.

According to a research note from the Bahçeşehir University Center for Economic and Social Research (BETAM), female labor force participation in Turkey is a dismally low 26.9 percent, much lower than comparable economies in Latin America, the Middle East and current European Union members.

The strategically crucial Nabucco pipeline got a thumbs up from the Turkish Parliament on Wednesday, breaking legal ground in Turkey for the pipeline connecting the country's eastern neighbors to Austria. Parliament passed a bill approving the Nabucco project and the establishment of a national Nabucco company dealing with issues regarding the new pipeline. The bill, titled "The Acceptance Agreement Regarding the Nabucco Project between Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Turkey," was passed after debate on the floor of Parliament. Turkish State Minister & Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan said on Wednesday that there would not be any negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) regarding the program till May. Turkey owes nearly eight billion USD of debt to IMF. Turkey's debt to International Monetary Fund (IMF) will completely end in 2013.

Turkish State Minister Cevdet Yılmaz departed for Algeria on Tuesday to attend the Turkey-Algeria Joint Economic Committee meeting. Trade volume between the two countries increased to \$5 billion in 2008 from \$1.6 billion in 2003. However, in 2009, it dropped to \$3.8 billion after a fall in Turkey's natural gas and iron products imports. Turkey's exports to Algeria was up 10 percent in 2009 to reach \$1.7 billion.

Turkish people have spent \$27.5 billion for 135 million mobile phone handsets sold in Turkey since 1994, either registered or unregistered, a study showed. Dubai-based developer Emaar Properties plans to launch a \$1.5 billion real estate project in Istanbul, company's CEO in Turkey said on Monday.

Turkish Industry and Trade Minister Nihat Ergun said on Monday country's economy has seen moderate recovery since the second quarter of 2009 after a stagnation caused by the global economic downturn. Turkey's industrial production was up 12.1 percent year-on-year in January 2010. However, industrial production was down 15.3 percent when compared to previous month.

SUMMARY-SOCIAL NEWS

A strong, pre-dawn earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 6 struck eastern Turkey on Monday, killing 51 people as it knocked down stone and mud-brick houses and minarets in at least six villages. The government initially put the death toll at 57 but later lowered it to 51. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan warned people in the eastern province of Elazığ to stay away from the damaged buildings since aftershocks were continuing to shake the region. Prime Minister Erdoğan expressed profound sorrow over loss of lives in the quake. The Mediterranean city of Antalya, the capital of Turkish tourism, has also become popular for theater events, including the 1st International Theater Festival, which will take place in the city from May 10 to 26.

POLITICAL NEWS

PM to discuss Kurdish initiative with actors, directors

06 March 2010, Saturday

EMINE DOLMACI İSTANBUL

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's next gathering in a series of meetings held to seek support for the government's democratic initiative will be with artists from Turkey's cinema and theater world.

The meeting, planned for late March, is expected to host Turkey's most famous and successful actors and directors. Turkish comedians Cem Yılmaz and Ata Demirer will also be invited to the meeting, where the democratic initiative, which aims to raise the standards of democracy, freedoms and respect for human rights in Turkey, will be discussed.

The prime minister also plans to get together with authors and leading figures from the world of literature.

Erdoğan asked artists from Turkey's music industry at a breakfast last month to support the government's democratic initiative. Erdoğan's invitation to leading artists, including famous composers, songwriters and singers, was well received, with many of them expressing hope for the future of the country and thus pledging their support for the democratic initiative.

The democratic initiative was launched by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) last year in order to elevate democratic standards and expand freedoms as well as to better comply with the contemporary understanding of human rights in the country.

In order to prevent it from falling victim to political bickering, Erdoğan and his government embarked on an effort to broaden the appeal of the project and to make it suprapolitical. 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 meetings with artists are also a part of such moves.

The AK Party organized conferences in provinces throughout Turkey last month to explain the initiative to the public. These conferences are expected to continue in March and April.

Abant Platform meets for 'more democratic Turkey'

09 March 2010, Tuesday

EMRE SONCAN ANKARA

TODAYS ZAMAN

The Abant Platform, which regularly convenes to discuss some of the most vital issues of Turkey and the world with the participation of individuals from every segment of society, is meeting again this week at Ankara's Rixos Hotel to discuss "Democratization for a New Societal Consensus."

Some of the country's most significant political scientists, academics, law professors and jurists, including Eser Karakaş, Osman Can, Ferhat Kentel, Mithat Sancar and Levent Köker, are to participate in the discussion. State Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç and State Minister Faruk Çelik will also join the start of the two-day meeting, which will be held on March 12-13.

According to the schedule, opening speeches will be followed by a session on the structural requirements for democratization. Karakaş, Can and Tanel Demirel will be delivering presentations. In the second session, on the cultural foundations of democratization, the panelists

will include Kentel, Ali Yaşar Sarıbay and Arus Yumul. In the first panel of the second day, Ersel Aydın, Köker, Sancar and Vahap Coşkun will be discussing “The Demand for Change and Its Promises.” The second panel of the second day is titled “The Indispensable Common Grounds.” The participants of this discussion will include Baskın Oran, Necdet Subaşı and Hayko Bağdat. In a final session before the closure of the meeting, Hüseyin Hatemi, Süleyman Seyfi Ögün and columnist Leyla İpekçi will present on “A Common Language for a Pluralist Society.”

Sledgehammer’ planned to use 200 policemen

06 March 2010, Saturday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

The Balyoz (Sledgehammer) Security Operation Plan allegedly includes a list of policemen to be used in a possible military intervention, a Turkish newspaper has reported.

The 5,000-page plan, which was first revealed by the Taraf daily in January, contained the names of about 200 senior policemen who were on active duty in cities including İstanbul, Kocaeli, Bursa, Balıkesir, Edirne, Tekirdağ and Kırklareli when the plans were made in 2003, the Milliyet daily has revealed.

The daily’s investigation shows that policemen were assigned code names and plan also classified the policemen into “the execution group,” “those which could be used in interrogations” and “possible administrators.” Some of the policemen named continue to hold important positions today.

According to the Sledgehammer documents, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) had a systematic plan to create chaos in society by bombing mosques and attacking popular museums with Molotov cocktails. The purpose of the attacks was to increase pressure on the government for failing to provide security to its citizens, eventually leading to a military coup.

The plan was drawn up in 2003 and discussed in a seminar held at the General Staff’s Selimiye barracks in March of that year. The General Staff has denied that the Sledgehammer plot was the subject of a seminar, saying it had no record of such an incident. It defended itself by claiming that the Sledgehammer plan was merely a war game.

As with 35 journalists whose names were on a previous revealed “to be arrested” list included in the Sledgehammer plan, the policemen were likely unaware that they were to be used in such an event. After the list of journalists was revealed, many of them filed a criminal complaint against individuals who prepared the plot.

There are also allegations that the policemen were selected from among a number of policemen who were either directly or indirectly contacted by the 1st Army Command, which prepared the Sledgehammer plan.

More than 50 retired and active duty military officers have been detained in the probe into Sledgehammer; some of them have been arrested while some have been released pending trial. Former 1st Army Commander Gen. Çetin Doğan, retired Gen. Engin Alan and retired Col. Altan Batıbay are among them.

More Turkish soldiers arrested under coup plot

Wednesday, 10 March 2010 19:14

World bulletin

A Turkish court arrested three soldiers in an investigation over an alleged plot to topple the AK Party government, state-run news agency Anatolian reported

A Turkish court arrested three soldiers on Wednesday in an investigation over an alleged plot to topple the AK Party government, state-run news agency Anatolian reported on Wednesday.

The soldiers were among scores of military officers detained in February on suspicion of planning a coup in 2003. The three were subsequently released but were brought back to court for questioning on Wednesday.

In all, close to 40 serving and retired officers, including a four-star general, have been charged.

Turkey's military has unseated four governments of various hues over the past fifty years.

Erdogan calls the dozens of arrests and indictments a painful, necessary process promoting democracy in the EU-candidate country, but most believe the days of coups in Turkey are over.

Health sector tops 2009 list of corruption

06 March 2010, Saturday

Today's Zaman

A recent report by the National Police Department's Anti-smuggling and Organized Crime Bureau (KOM) has shown that a significant number of the bureau's operations in 2009 in Turkey were launched in the field of health. Among a total of 154 operations, 61 were launched in the health sector, resulting in the detention of 1,238 people. More than 230 of them were later arrested on corruption charges.

Most operations in the health field were because of the widespread use of individuals' health cards by others and corruption in the purchase of medicine and medical equipment. The largest number of police operations against corruption was launched in the southeastern province of Şanlıurfa and in İzmir.

Second to operations in the health sector were those into local administrations. More than 430 people were detained in 29 such police operations. Corruption investigations in local administrations were followed by those in judicial services, finance, education, public works, energy and agriculture. A total of 951 people were arrested and jailed in operations in those areas.

The KOM report showed that police operations against corruption have seen a steady increase in the past three years. The number of detainees in anti-corruption police operations also increased. When compared with the figures of 2008, the number of detainees increased 129 percent last year. The Turkish cities that witnessed the most anti-corruption operations were Şanlıurfa, İzmir, Konya, Ankara, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, İstanbul, Kocaeli and Şırnak.

Stronger civil society forces Turkey to democratize

07 March 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's flourishing and ever-growing civil society, with its expanding focus on fundamental rights and liberties, has become a significant agent of social change, according to human rights activists.

Experts in the field highlight that a stronger, focused and more diverse civil society is contributing to Turkey's transformation to a stronger democracy.

Speaking to Sunday's Zaman on the recent developments that have improved Turkey's democracy, Association of Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed Peoples (MAZLUMDER) head Faruk Ünsal said civil society organizations are now pushing for change in Turkey, adding his opinion that the country's European Union process has contributed significantly to the reform process. Ünsal emphasized that civil society organizations have transformed themselves while transforming the political system in an interactive process. "About 12-14 years ago, some professional unions and chambers were acting against the government as part of a chain-of-command system during the Feb. 28 process," he said, referring to the period during which an unarmed military intervention on Feb. 28, 1997 forced a government out of office. "Now the situation is much different, because Turkey is developing. A remarkable development has taken place in the past decade. I think the EU process has also opened the country's horizons."

Ünsal said another major difference between the state of civil society now and 15 years ago is the improvement on the part of the political establishment in listening to these voices. Saying that the sensitivity of the executive branch has increased civil society's self-confidence, Ünsal said: "Civil society organization saw that their efforts were not in vain and they were able to obtain results, and in turn they developed themselves. Social change, political transformation and developments in civil society turned into a symbiotic nurturing process. This process has brought along a very big improvement in terms of higher standards of democracy and human rights."

Akın Birdal, a Diyarbakır deputy of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), sums up the recent dynamism in the country's civil society movements as "un-focusing on the military and refocusing on emancipation." Sharing his views on the issue, Birdal said the traumatic 1980 coup d'état and the establishment's attempts to maintain the tradition of coups in Turkey have created a counter-awareness. Underlining that the legal system brought by the 1980 coup and others has placed all segments who do not agree with the official ideology under siege, Birdal said: "The coups Turkey had to go through has forced this society into a steel corset. People were made to remain silent about their most fundamental rights, freedoms, language, identity, culture and beliefs. That corset eventually became worn by rust and has cracks all over it. Now it can't resist the increasing demands from civil society."

BDP deputy Birdal said people who have been subject to unfair treatment are now sensitive towards similar incidents happening to others and are motivated to fight alongside others who have been victim to the same problem. Thanks to greater diversity in civil society and the growing capacity of empathy in individuals, Turkey is now nearing universally accepted criteria regarding human rights. Birdal also noted that civil society groups have come a long way in a very short period of time. "In every sphere society's demand becomes focused on a particular issue, people come together, join forces and organize and act together. I think a great distance has been covered in terms of the methods used. There has also been greater diversity. People who have shared the same fate, who have become victims of similar injustices, are now marching together. Their roads intersect at some point, as well as their longings, hopes and grief. They are making an effort to make sure that others do not have to live through what they went through. This is a very important and very positive quality. We are at a time of nearing the universal criteria -- in fact even contributing to the universal criteria and enriching them -- regarding civil society and democratic hearts."

Birdal recalls: "In our time, there was an intense state of war. It was a time when militarism made itself felt in every sphere, much more strongly than today. Both our human rights struggle and the activists were defenseless." He says as the grievance of more and more individuals came to be shared by the society, the overall social conscience became more readily manifest.

“Grievances suffered at the hands of coup stagers and the cover-ups stonewalling any real investigation into perpetrators of certain crimes have disturbed the conscience of many. There is now a growing call to find the real perpetrators behind unsolved crimes and confront the past coups and those who staged them. People acting in unison to voice this demand, standing together, strengthens civil society. Civil society organizations are now realizing this strength, and they are expressing themselves more freely and in more universal terms.”

He said when the Human Rights Association (İHD) was founded in 1986 there was little diversity in civil society. However, he stated that there has been an important diversification in the past few decades. He said society’s perception has also changed. “The perception that the safeguard of democracy is the military has been replaced with the understanding that freedoms are the safeguard of democracy.” He also stated that people have now realized that the more the democratic developments, the better the economy will be. “Despite having started way later than many countries in terms of civil society organizations, we are now ahead of many countries.”

Another important aspect of civil society, according to Salih Yaylacı, secretary general of the Journalists and Writers Foundation (GYV) -- a part of the faith-based Gülen movement -- is its emphasis on the culture of “living together.” The foundation’s honorary president is Fethullah Gülen, founder of the movement. The GYV works with various organizations both at home and internationally to cultivate the culture of living together among diverse groups. “We can meet and be together with everyone we live with, who we share universal values with. We can make joint efforts to meet societal demands through peace and dialogue.”

“Our mission is to emphasize universal values for a stronger democracy and a society based on human rights, equality and multiculturalism. We are trying to do our best to improve dialogue between diverse groups,” Yaylacı said

He also said that in addition to cultivating a culture of living together, the GYV was a strong supporter of the European Union and has been organizing meetings under its Abant Platform program for the past 12 years in this regard.

Girls who don headscarf removed from school in Diyarbakır

08 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The number of girls dismissed from school because they wear the Islamic headscarf is increasing daily. A middle school student, Sebiha Alaş, was removed from her school in the southeastern city of Diyarbakır because she was wearing a headscarf.

Alaş would arrive at school and take off her headscarf outside the building as Turkey’s headscarf ban applies to all schools and universities, public and private, and government buildings and public institutions.

The Students’ Attitude Assessment Committee in the school criticized Alaş and tried to force her not to wear a headscarf outside school, something she refused to do. Even though Alaş had been removing her headscarf before she entered the school building, the committee claimed she had been wearing it inside and decided to penalize the student by removing her from her current school, transferring her to another one a long way from home. Necmettin Alaş, Alaş’s father, has filed a complaint.

İbrahim Gökdemir, the secretary general of the Human Rights and Freedom Association (HÜR-DER), said it was insulting behavior to remove a girl from school who wants to be there. Stating that the decision of the committee was neither judicial nor ethical, Gökdemir noted that France,

regarded as the homeland of secularism, does not have a headscarf ban as in Turkey, underlining that nobody has the right to prevent girls wearing headscarves from attending school. Büşra Ayata was also among the girls who were forced to take off their headscarves. Ayata, also a middle school student, has been wearing a headscarf for approximately three years. Her father, Sezai Ayata, said the committee at his daughter's school decided to send her to another school as they do not want students wearing headscarves. "The school's management told me that my daughter does not need to come to school and that she should choose a dersane or cram school rather than a public school," he stated, emphasizing the committee's unethical decision.

President Gül approves bill seeking to shorten wait before referendum

08 March 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN WITH WIRES İSTANBUL

According to a statement issued by the Presidential Press Center on Monday, President Abdullah Gül approved a bill seeking to reduce the waiting period before a proposed referendum is held from 120 days to 60 days.

We fully support judicial reform, says TUSKON president

08 March 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

The Ergenekon, Sledgehammer and Erzincan cases must be used as an opportunity to turn Turkey into a country governed by the rule of law, Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON) President Rızanur Meral has said, expressing support for efforts by the government and Parliament to reform the judiciary.

Speaking at the third TUSKON general assembly on Saturday, Meral spoke out in favor of the government's preparation to push for judicial reform. Describing recently revealed coup plans as "conspiracies against the nation" and stressing that the authenticity of the plans has been confirmed repeatedly, Meral said the court cases dealing with these plans are an opportunity to become a state governed by the rule of law. He also added that the judicial process should be cleared of any kind of influence including pressure from higher courts.

Noting that claims such as "The coup period now is a history" and "Can there be a coup in the Turkey of 2010!?" are emotional statements not based on rational realities, Meral said activities to establish a junta through forming judicial alliances and adopting legal changes that handicap the government must immediately be eradicated. "Shutting down parties and threatening to shut down a party that the nation voted for in consecutive elections does not suit Turkey's current level.

Political maturity in Turkey raises certain excitement in the Turkish and Islamic world through solving problems within democratic rules, particularly displaying that democracy can survive alongside Islam. Steps for more democracy and for becoming a fully social state governed by the rule of law do not mean progress only for Turkey but also serious progress for all of humanity," Meral said during a speech before 5,000 businessmen and industrialists who gathered in İstanbul. Emphasizing that deputies in the Turkish Parliament from both the government and the opposition carry a historic responsibility on their shoulders, TUSKON President Meral said the 1982 Constitution, which was prepared amid the paranoia-based political system during the Cold War and a protectionist economic system closed to the outside world, does not fulfill the needs

of today's Turkey. "Now it is an emergent job to prepare new constitution that will meet the needs and desires of all our citizens with modern legal changes. The process that was launched with Alevi workshops should be completed," Meral said, adding that the headscarf ban, which puts the future of the youth in danger, should also be lifted.

Speaking extensively about a judicial reform package Parliament is expected to vote on soon, Meral said judicial reform is a top priority for Parliament, which our nation elected for a freer, more democratic Turkey. "We want necessary steps to be taken by both our government and Parliament for a freer Turkey with a higher standard of living," Meral stated. "We once more state clearly that we will lend support of any kind in this."

Explaining that freedom and democratization efforts in both Europe and Turkey in recent past have gone hand-in-hand with economic advancement, the TUSKON president said that a Turkey where democracy is consolidated, where citizens are sure that political changes will take place within stable and regularly functioning rules and where people are not anxious about their future would be a rapid developing Turkey.

3.16 kilograms of heroin discovered in electric oven

09 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN EDIRNE

A search of a passenger bus in Edirne has resulted in the discovery of 3.16 kilograms of heroin allegedly to be smuggled out of the country.

Teams from the Edirne Provincial Gendarmerie Command, acting on a tip, stopped the bus, traveling from İstanbul to Macedonia, at the Edirne tollbooth on the TEM Highway. With the aid of a sniffer dog named Abrek, the team located the heroin, which had been hidden in an electric oven in the baggage compartment. One Albanian citizen, I.B., was taken into custody in connection with the incident. The gendarmerie's investigation into the event is still under way.

Police seize huge amount of illicit drug in eastern Turkey

09 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish narcotic police seized 747 kg of hashish and 175 kg of heroin in three operations, officials said on Tuesday.

Police chief in the eastern province of Van told reporters that it was the largest amount seized so far in 2010.

747 kg of hashish was confiscated stashed in a truck and in a house both belonged to the same person, police chief Rafet Mert said.

Some 175 kg of heroin was impounded in two separate operations in downtown Van, Mert said.

A total of nine people were arrested in these operations, police said.

Inequality, violence hot issues on International Women's Day

09 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Gender inequality and sexual violence were on Turkey's agenda this March 8, International Women's Day. A United Nations Turkey report released yesterday put forward that almost half

of the country's female population has been subject to sexual and physical violence at the hands of their husbands. It also noted that there are only 52 women's shelters in Turkey despite a female population of 35 million.

The number of women holding seats in Parliament also low while the numbers are even lower in terms of municipal seats. The 2007 general elections saw women win 9.1 percent of seats in Parliament, and only 27 of 2,948 mayoral posts -- 0.9 percent -- are held by women.

Turkey came in 101st on a list of 109 countries on the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), which is calculated according to women's participation in economic and political life in their countries. Turkey is followed by Tonga, Iran, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bangladesh and Yemen.

While pointing out that women are oppressed socially, Middle East Technical University (ODTÜ) Professor Mehmet Ecevit said at an Ankara Chamber of Industry (ASO) meeting yesterday that the situation stems from hierarchical and male-dominated relationships.

Highlighting that women are not seen as equal with men from the time of their birth, Ecevit said women cannot be free unless unequal relationships change, noting that social privileges must be given to women, including quotas for women in Parliament. The UN Turkey report also revealed that more than 9 percent of Turkish women are illiterate.

Scientific research carried out at a number of universities also supports the UN Turkey report on violence against women in Turkey while revealing that a noticeable part of women exposed to violence put the blame on themselves.

Research conducted by Erciyes University in Kayseri involving 355 women revealed that 52.1 percent responded that there are situations in which women deserve violence. A total of 49.9 percent of the women surveyed said they were exposed to violence and 38.6 said they were guilty. Furthermore, 46.1 percent of the women said they would do nothing and accept the situation if they were subjected to violence.

A study conducted by Sivas's Cumhuriyet University involving 591 married women found that 48.1 percent of the women are at risk of psychological disorders.

Research by Gülşah Deniz and Serap Selver Babacan, both of whom are affiliated with the Fethiye State Hospital in Muğla, showed that 42 percent of women are exposed to physical domestic violence while 68.7 stay married for the sake of their children. Also, 58 percent of the respondents say the marriage should continue if the violence does not amount to torture.

A study on domestic violence toward women carried out in Denizli province discovered that 43 percent of women who are exposed to violence suffer from violent incidents once a week while 29 percent are subject to violence every day.

Research involving female members of the Altı Nokta Association for the Blind revealed that disabled women are also victims of domestic violence. A total of 11.7 percent of disabled women who are members of the association were found to have been subjected to violence at the hands of their husbands or other family members.

'A woman's place is in the home'

A survey conducted by Reuters/Ipsos of 24,000 adults, aged between 18 and 34, in 23 countries and released on the eve of International Women's Day showed that people from India, Turkey, Japan, China, Russia, Hungary and South Korea were most likely to agree that women should not work. In the survey, conducted between November 2009 and January, 52 percent of Turkish respondents agreed that "a woman's place is in the home."

However, the majority, 74 percent, of those polled believe a woman's place is certainly not at home. "Over the past century, women, collectively, have made great gains not only in terms of

societal participation -- from politics to the workplace to sports and the media and to intellectual pursuit -- but there are still barriers to many,” said John Wright, senior vice president of market research company Ipsos.

Women’s place in Turkish workforce

While noting that women face serious problems in both entering and holding positions in the business world, the UN Turkey report also revealed that a majority of Turkish women are employed in jobs that pay less and offer no health insurance. In Turkey, only about 25 percent of the labor force is composed of women, which is far below the global average of 52.6 percent. Seventy percent of women in rural Turkey work in their houses as free laborers.

It is very important for women, who comprise half of the population in Turkey, to participate in the labor force in the country in order for Turkey to have an internationally competitive economy, Ankara Chamber of Industry (ASO) President Nuri Özdebir said yesterday. Speaking at a meeting held at the ASO headquarters in Ankara, Özdebir also noted that women do not sufficiently take part in the country’s economic, social and political life.

“As agricultural employment drastically fell, women employment decreased accordingly. Women who work in this sector cannot participate in the workforce when they are not involved in agriculture or migrate to the city,” Özdebir said, noting that women must be transferred to other sectors.

Marking International Women’s Day, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said at a summit held by the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) women’s branch in the party headquarters in Ankara that the burden on women is heavier than that felt by men. He said women are the first targets in terrorist attacks, as they lose their husbands or children and are the first to be laid off when an economic crisis hits.

Prime minister says all doors open to women in politics

09 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said his government holds all doors open to women by supporting their right to pursue a political career, during a speech addressing women delivered on International Women’s Day.

The prime minister was speaking at the International Women’s Rights Summit held at his Justice and Development Party’s (AK Party) headquarters yesterday. “We have always opposed male-female discrimination and continue to do so,” he said, addressing the women who were present at the meeting, held by the AK Party’s women’s branches.

Noting that contributions by women have made the AK Party more powerful, Erdoğan said the AK Party government had strengthened male-female equality through constitutional amendments. He recalled that his government amended Article 10 of the Constitution by adding to the article the sentences: “Men and women have equal rights. The state has the obligation to ensure that this equality exists in practice.” The prime minister said the government amended the Turkish Penal Code (TCK) to fight against domestic violence, which in turn decreased domestic violence.

Stating that the government enabled the schooling of nearly 350,000 girls through programs led by his party, he added that thousands of women also learned how to read and write. Erdoğan also said the number of female deputies had increased thanks to AK Party policies.

Commenting on a recent protest by supporters of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) in Mersin last Wednesday, the prime minister called for respect for everyone's clothing. Last week, a group of CHP members met in Mersin to commemorate the 86th anniversary of the abolishment of the caliphate. Among them were Havva Ongunsel, head of the CHP women's branches, and the CHP provincial chairman in Mersin, Yılmaz Şanlı. The group vowed to protect the principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic. The gathering suddenly turned into an anti-chador campaign when female participants started to rip up and step on black chadors they took out of their purses. The chador is widely used both as traditional and religious attire in Anatolia.

Recalling CHP leader Deniz Baykal's chador initiative in which Baykal caused surprise by giving a woman wearing a chador a CHP badge last year, Erdoğan called on everyone to be sincere. "Let people wear what they want. Let us show respect to all," he said.

UN Says 42 P.C. Of Women In Turkey Face Domestic Violence

Monday, 8 March 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

The United Nations (UN) Representation in Turkey announced on Monday that almost half of women in Turkey faced physical and sexual violence from their husbands.

The representation released a statement on the March 8 International Women's Day and said 42 percent of women in Turkey were facing physical and sexual violence from their husbands.

"There are only 52 shelters for women despite 35 million women population in the country," the statement said.

The statement said women were still facing serious problems in labor force due to negative prejudices stemming from social and economic obstacles, and women in Turkey had lower wages than men and were being employed in low-quality jobs without any guarantee.

According to UN Representation's figures, the rate of men's participation in labor force was 70.5 percent, while the rate of women's participation in labor force was 26 percent in 2009. This figure was below the global rate of 52.6 percent.

Around 70 percent of women living in rural areas were working as "cost free laborers" in family businesses, and 59 percent of women employees did not have any social security according to figures of 2009.

The UN representation said the number of women parliamentarians increased by two-folds in 2007 and reached 9.1 percent, however this figure was too low in local administrations.

Only 0.9 percent of mayors in Turkey are women (27 of 2,948 mayors). 3.2 percent of provincial assemblies are comprised of women (110 of 3,379 members), and women constitute only 4.2 percent of municipal assemblies (1,340 of 31,790 members).

Turkey is ranked the 101th among 109 countries according to the gender empowerment measure (GEM). This means that Turkey is only ahead of Tonga, Iran, Morocco, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bangladesh and Yemen.

The UN also said illiteracy among women in Turkey was over 9 percent, and the most important obstacle before girls' education was lack of classrooms.

In the statement, the UN representation said that women should participate more in decision-making mechanisms, violence against women should be prevented and sexual-based negative cliches should be eliminated in order to ensure gender equality.

The statement said the UN was appreciating and supporting Turkey's steps to improve women's rights.

Security Forces Capture 77 Illegal Migrants

Wednesday, 10 March 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkish security forces detained a total of 77 illegal migrants in separate operations conducted in central Anatolian province of Kayseri, Kusadasi coastal town of western Aydin province and northwestern province of Edirne on Tuesday.

The illegal migrants were of Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Palestinian, Somali, Afghan and Georgian origin. The detained migrants would be deported following legal proceedings, officials said.

Turkish Frigate Captures 7 Pirates, Another Ship Hijacked

Sunday, 7 March 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

The Turkish frigate "Gemlik" has encountered a small skiff in the Gulf of Aden, and captured seven alleged pirates.

The naval vessel, which is serving under an international mission to fight off piracy in the Gulf of Aden, encountered a suspicious boat in the security corridor used by commercial shipping, some 60 kms offshore.

Turkish SAT Commandos (the Underwater Assault Team) boarded the small boat and seized the seven men, along with an assault rifle and equipment used in pirate operations, according to the Turkish Military Headquarters web site on Saturday.

The group has been detained, suspected of preparing to launch attacks on commercial vessels in the area.

Meantime, pirates are reported to have hijacked a Norwegian chemicals tanker, the "UBT Ocean" along with her crew of 21. On Monday, March 1, a Saudi-owned tanker was captured, with a crew of 14 aboard.

There were several reported incidents on March 4 and 5, as the pirates take advantage of calm seas to launch their attacks, and have engaged in a flurry of activity in anticipation of the onset of the rainy season.

In the most serious skirmish on Friday, six pirates attacked a vessel before breaking away and chasing a French fishing boat, said Cmdr. John Harbour, spokesman for EU NAVFOR, the joint European naval protection force.

The French Defense Ministry reported that one of its frigates had intercepted 22 suspected pirates Friday in two separate operations. It said the pirates are currently aboard the vessel along with their skiffs.

Friday's clashes followed a firefight on Thursday between pirates and private security contractors onboard a Spanish fishing vessel. The pirates hit the ship with a rocket-propelled grenade and the guards returned fire.

There were no casualties, but the International Maritime Bureau has expressed its fear that the increased use of armed contractors could trigger an arms race between fishermen and pirates, who are firing at ships with increasing frequency.

The 5 Bulgarians and the remainder of the crew of the "St James Park" remain in captivity. One of the Bulgarians succeeded in calling a Bulgarian newspaper, asking for help, and describing the situation as desperate. Negotiations are continuing for the safe release of the ship and her crew.

The other ship with Bulgarian crew members, the "Asian Glory", was released by pirates on February 19, on payment of a USD 5 M ransom.

GEO-STRATEGIC NEWS

Turkey, New Zealand sign civil aviation agreement

06 March 2010, Saturday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

An agreement on civil aviation cooperation was signed by Turkish Transportation Minister Binali Yıldırım and New Zealand's Foreign Minister Murray McCully at a ceremony in Ankara on Thursday.

Speaking during the ceremony Yıldırım said the two countries had agreed to exert efforts to launch direct flights, which could boost economic relations and tourism. "The agreement not only regulates flights between the two countries, it also includes technical cooperation, engineering and air traffic issues," Yıldırım noted.

McCully said that a significant number of New Zealanders come to Turkey every year to commemorate Anzac Day in Çanakkale and that the New Zealand government was trying to encourage its people to travel to Turkey to take advantage of tourist opportunities in other seasons of the year. He said the agreement, which includes cooperation on aviation, security and air transportation services, was just a beginning.

Despite there being a considerable distance between Turkey and New Zealand, Yıldırım said they had got together to "shorten" it. Speaking about the agreement, Yıldırım said this is the first, yet important, step. The Turkish minister said he had already agreed with McCully to promote certain institutions in their respective countries to launch direct flights between the two.

First Turkish-made mobile hospital opens in Darfur

07 March 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

First mobile hospital produced by Turkey was opened in Darfur, Sudan.

Turkmaks Construction and M.C.C. Ltd, subsidiaries of ALKE Companies Group, manufactured the mobile hospital for Darfur which is under the administration of the joint U.N./African Union. Turmaks Construction and M.C.C Ltd issued a statement and said two mobile surgery hospitals each having 40 beds, ordered by Nigerian Defense Ministry, were shipped to Nigeria's Lagos port in August 2009.

The statement said a 10-people Turkish team erected in the hospital El Geneina city of Darful region of Sudan in a week.

The mobile hospitals have dental unit, X-ray, pharmacy, blood bank, morgue, reverse osmosis water purification, laundry, generator and kitchen, and they cover 1,500 square meters.

The statement said the second mobile hospital, which was delivered to Nigeria, would be erected in Chad or Liberia in Africa.

ALKE Companies Group was founded in the southern province of Antalya in 1955, and it undertakes construction projects in Africa, Middle East, South America and Central Asia.

Prime Minister Erdoğan due to Saudi Arabia to receive King Faisal Prize

07 March 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will travel to Saudi Arabia on a formal visit on March 8 to receive the King Faisal International Prize for Service to Islam, popularly known as the "Arab Nobel Prize."

Prime Ministry issued a statement and said King Faisal Foundation would present the award to Erdoğan for his success in politics and administration, efforts for political and economic reform process, endeavors for Palestinian people and for a fair and permanent solution in the Middle East.

Erdoğan will also hold bilateral meetings during the visit, the statement said.

Prior to his visit, Erdoğan, who spoke to the International Islamic News Agency, said that he considered the prize was awarded not only to him but also to Turkish nation and Turkey.

The prize, which is given every year by Saudi Arabia's King Faisal Foundation, is presented to scientists and people who create positive differences in the world and make contributions to Islam.

This year, eight people from seven countries were announced winners of the prize in different categories such as, Service to Islam, Medicine, Arabic Language and Literature, Islamic Studies, and Science.

Davutoğlu suggests new paradigm in Turkish-Egyptian relations

07 March 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The world is changing very rapidly; these changes require a new paradigm for Turkish-Egyptian relations," Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu told Egyptian intellectuals and journalists who met with him to discuss his opinions, especially his vision of the Middle East

During a two-day visit to Egypt last week, Davutoğlu frequently underlined that it is not the time for competition but cooperation and that if Turkey and Egypt are able to set common planning and preferences, this will have a determining effect for the future of the region.

Davutoğlu's visit to Egypt on Tuesday and Wednesday had two areas of focus: bilateral relations within the framework of strategic dialogue, and the Arab League ministerial meeting. Davutoğlu frequently highlighted the importance of both.

According to him, too much time has been wasted on the Middle East peace process, and the decisions by the Arab League will be very important for the future of the region.

Within this framework he met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, his Egyptian counterpart, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, and Omar Suleiman, the head of intelligence service and minister without portfolio. Davutoğlu had opportunities to address prominent Egyptian intellectuals including former Secretary-General of the United Nations Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Egyptian journalists and students at the American University in Cairo. He was also quite pleased to inaugurate the Yunus Emre Cultural Center in Cairo.

He invited a small group of Turkish journalists to cover his visit, including Sunday's Zaman. The energetic foreign minister started to talk about the importance of Turkish-Egyptian relations on the plane en route to Sharm El Sheikh for a meeting with President Mubarak:

"The most influential triangle in our region is Turkey-Iran-Egypt. Relations between Iran and Egypt are not good, but we have relations with both of them. We are re-establishing the balance in the region," he told journalists on the plane.

But as he frequently underlined in all of his speeches in Egypt, he does not mean competing against, counterbalancing or being skeptical about each other, but just the opposite -- maximum cooperation.

Especially in his speeches to Egyptian intellectuals and journalists, Davutoğlu frequently highlighted the importance of cooperation for a better future.

"In the region we are expending our energy to offset each other, but if we were cooperating, the situation would be totally different," he said, adding that "this might be a utopia for you, but imagine that for the next 20 years we have stability in the region without any tension. Then we would be richer than any other emerging powers."

He stated that countries cannot change their history and geography but can reinterpret and rediscover them and that it is time for the countries in the Middle East to do it and leave the Cold War mentality behind:

"If you concentrate on risks and imaginary threats, you will always see danger. We are trying to eliminate these imaginary risks and reintegrate the region. Of course, there are risks, but our perception should not be based on crises but on being vision oriented," he said.

Davutoğlu added that this vision has four principles: economic interdependence, a common security system, high-level strategic dialogue and the coexistence of multicultural multi-religious life.

Davutoğlu, both in his bilateral meetings and in his speeches to Egyptian intellectuals and journalists, underlined that economic relations between Egypt and Turkey are developing, with trade volume reaching \$3 billion and Turkish investments in Egypt at around \$1 billion, and that both are increasing.

As a sign of the importance of cultural relations, Davutoğlu inaugurated the Yunus Emre Cultural Center in Cairo and stated that no matter how much diplomatic relations develop, if they are not supported by cultural relationships the relations will not be sustainable.

"We consider Cairo the brain of the Arab world. We are hoping that Turkish and Egyptian intellectuals will meet at this cultural center, which should be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to give people a place to meet for cultural talks and to exchange ideas," he said.

Davutoğlu also frequently drew attention to the rising powers of the world and the foreign influence in the region but highlighted that the region's destiny is in the hands of the people and the leaders of the region.

According to him if the countries of the region are not cooperating in a way that will bring prosperity, it is inevitable that the region will turn into a scene of the struggle among rising powers.

"The region belongs to us. We should not blame others, their colonialism and their imperialism. We should take our destiny into our own hands, and for this we need full cooperation and regional integration. I don't mean that we will not have problems, but we can develop our relations in a way that they will not produce problems but a suitable atmosphere to solve them. Reintegration is the most important issue for us. The foundation for it is in our history and geography," he says, adding that "in our region, will we compete and fight with each other so all

these powers will be richer and richer by controlling our resources and manpower, or will we combine our assets in order to bring back the golden era, which produced many important world civilizations.”

Davutoğlu has talks with Assad in Damascus

08 March 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN WITH WIRES İSTANBUL

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu had talks with senior Syrian officials on Sunday that focused on the Middle East peace process as well as tensions escalating from time to time between Lebanon and Syria.

Davutoğlu had separate closed-door meetings with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Assistant Vice President Hassan Turkmani. Later in the day, he was also expected to meet with his counterpart, Walid al-Moallem.

Israel and Syria held four indirect rounds of peace talks with Turkish mediation in 2008, but they were suspended following the deadly Israeli offensive in Gaza at the end of 2008. Ankara says it is willing to resume mediating indirect talks between Syria and Israel only if both parties clearly voice their will for such mediation. Last week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he was prepared to meet with Assad immediately and without preconditions. In response, Moallem reiterated that Israel must first declare its intention to withdraw to its 1967 borders before any talks can take place.

Turkish, Syrian cabinets to meet on Latakia-Mersin ferry

09 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish and Syrian government officials will hold their second cooperation meeting this autumn, on a ferryboat between the Syrian and Turkish port cities of Latakia and Mersin, Turkish officials have announced.

A Turkish-Syrian joint cabinet meeting was convened in October in Aleppo, Syria, and Gaziantep, Turkey, under an earlier agreement to create a High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council between the two countries. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and his Syrian counterpart, Waled al-Moallem, walked across the border as they headed from Aleppo to Gaziantep for the second session of the talks, during which the two countries agreed to lift visa requirements. The Turkish side was represented by 10 Cabinet ministers, while there were 15 ministers attending the talks from the Syrian side.

The second meeting, scheduled for September, will review the implementation of dozens of cooperative agreements signed during the first joint meeting of the Turkish and Syrian governments last year. The ministers will discuss what additional steps can be taken to further improve bilateral cooperation and properly implement the deals signed. New cooperation agreements are also expected to be signed during the talks on the ferry.

The second meeting will be held ahead of a visit by Syrian Prime Minister Naji Otri, planned to take place in October. Syrian President Bashar Assad is also expected to visit Turkey after Otri's visit, but a date has not been set yet.

Assad on Sunday had talks with Davutoğlu in Damascus, discussing a possible revival of Turkish-mediated talks between Israel and Syria. Davutoğlu said Ankara was determined to

resume indirect peace talks between Syria and Israel, but Assad was pessimistic, saying during the meeting that there is no Israeli partner willing to achieve peace. Ankara mediated several rounds of indirect negotiations between the Mideast rivals in 2008, but the discussions made no significant headway. Syria suspended the talks in response to Israel's military offensive in Gaza. The Turkish-Syrian agreement to create a High Level Strategic Cooperation Council is similar to a strategic mechanism established between Turkey and Iraq. The Turkish government considers the model a useful tool to expand cooperation with neighboring countries. The countries in the region are also warming to the mechanism, according to Turkish officials: Syria and Libya, which has also signed a deal with Turkey to scrap visa requirements, are considering instituting a similar mechanism for talks between their governments. "Perhaps one day we will see three-way governmental talks between Turkey, Syria and Libya, this time on a ferry between Latakia, Mersin and Tripoli," a Turkish diplomat told Today's Zaman.

Report: Turkey to again mediate Syria-Israel talks

09 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

A news report quotes the Turkish prime minister as saying Israel has accepted that Turkey will again mediate talks with Syria.

Turkey's NTV television quotes Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as telling reporters in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday that the stalled talks may resume soon.

An Israeli government spokesman had no immediate comment about the report.

Turkey mediated several rounds of indirect negotiations between the Mideast rivals in 2008, but little progress was made.

Syria later suspended the talks in response to Israel's military offensive in Gaza, and Israeli officials said Turkey's scathing criticism of Israel's role in the conflict had disqualified it as a mediator.

NTV quoted Erdoğan as saying the Syria-Israel talks can begin "any minute."

Turkey says Syria-Israel talks may restart

09 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's prime minister said Tuesday that Israel had accepted that his country again mediate talks with Syria but the Israeli prime minister said no decision had been made.

"Syria wants Turkey's mediation," the state-run Anatolia news agency quoted Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as telling journalists during a visit to Saudi Arabia. "Israel has accepted this."

"I hope that we can start the new process," the agency also quoted him as saying.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office issued a statement saying "No decision has been taken to renew the Turkish mediation."

It added: "but if these comments reflect Turkey's desire to strengthen its relations with Israel and to contribute to peacemaking in the region -- then Israel would clearly welcome that aspiration."

Erdoğan's spokesman could not be reached for comment.

Turkey mediated several rounds of indirect negotiations between the Mideast rivals in 2008, but little progress was made.

Syria later suspended the talks in response to Israel's military offensive in Gaza, and Israeli officials said Turkey's scathing criticism of Israel's role in the conflict had disqualified it as a mediator.

Israel says Turkish-mediated Syria talks not imminent

11 March 2010, Thursday

TODAY'S ZAMAN WITH WIRES ANKARA

A senior official in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office on Tuesday denied news reports suggesting that Israel had accepted Turkey's offer to resume its role as mediator in peace negotiations with Syria.

Israel has yet to make a decision on the matter, the official said, but he called the news reports a sign that Turkey was interested in improving its relations with Israel and advancing peace in the region.

"No decision has been made on resuming talks with Syria under Turkey mediation, but if these remarks represent Turkey's desire to improve relations with Israel and contribute to the advancement of peace in the region, then it is obviously a welcome aspiration," said the official. Syria has said it is ready to restart peace talks with Israel mediated by Turkey, and there are some positive signals from the Israeli side, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said earlier on Tuesday during a visit to Riyadh.

Erdoğan said his government was assessing whether to resume its role. "Syria wants Turkey's mediation. Israel sometimes gives positive signals on it. The situation will be evaluated,"

Erdoğan was quoted as saying by the Anatolia news agency. "If we reach a positive conclusion, I hope we will start the process," he added. An aide to Erdoğan told Reuters that no formal request for mediation had been received from the Israeli government.

Turkey mediated several rounds of indirect negotiations between the Middle East rivals in 2008, but little progress was made. Syria later suspended the talks in response to Israel's military offensive in Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009.

Some Israeli politicians had aired reservations in recent months about Turkey's suitability as relations soured after Erdoğan's repeated criticism of the Israeli offensive in Gaza. The Israeli coalition appears divided over whether to resume peace talks with Turkey acting as mediator. Ankara says it is willing to resume mediating indirect talks between Syria and Israel, if both parties clearly voice their will for such mediation.

Israeli-Palestinian talks

Meanwhile, Turkey welcomed an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, in meetings with US Middle East envoy George Mitchell this week, to resume peace talks. In a statement released on Wednesday, the Foreign Ministry said peace in the Middle East would be achieved if peace efforts are revived on all fronts, a reference, among others, to the Israeli-Syrian peace efforts. The Foreign Ministry also stated that Turkey would continue its "active contributions" to the peace efforts.

SUMMARY

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has strongly criticized Israel's decision to designate two shrines located in Palestinian territory as Israeli national heritage sites. "Al-Aqsa mosque, the Cave of Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb will never be Jewish sites, but rather Islamic ones," Erdoğan was quoted as saying in remarks published on Sunday in Saudi newspaper Al Wattan.

while some Israeli media outlets have interpreted his remarks as a continuation of his “verbal attack” on Israel.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Speaking to reporters in Saudi Arabia said that Turkey wanted the whole Middle East purified from nuclear weapons. Iran was an important country in the region. We support dialogue and diplomacy in solution of the problem about Iran's nuclear program. During the solution process, Iran should be given the right of having civil nuclear energy with peaceful means.

The European Court of Human Rights on Friday ruled that the Immovable Property Commission (IPC) of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (KKTC) is a valid domestic judicial remedy whose jurisdiction extends to Greek Cypriots. The verdict means that from now on Greek Cypriots will not be able to launch court cases against Turkey at the European court prior to seeking redress with the IPC and sets a precedent for approximately 1,500 property cases pending at the European court. The ruling is also significant in that for the first time a Turkish Cypriot commission has been recognized by Europe's top human rights court, boosting the international legitimacy of the KKTC. It is expected that the European court ruling will play a decisive role in the ongoing negotiations on the divided island. Property disputes are considered one of the most difficult topics to negotiate.

The top European court's recognition of the Immovable Property Commission (IPC) of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (KKTC) as a valid domestic judicial remedy whose jurisdiction extends to Greek Cypriots is a “historic” decision that needs to be well comprehended, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has remarked.

Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat has declared his candidacy in next month's presidential election in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC.) According to a statement released by the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) on Sunday, UN SG's Special Advisor on Cyprus Alexander Downer would pay a visit to Ankara in order to hold talks with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu.

Israel calls off maneuvers near Lebanon, Syria

Wednesday, March 10, 2010

TEL AVIV - The World Tribune

Hurriyat

Israel's military has been forced to significantly reduce its exercises along the borders with Lebanon and Syria amid pressure by the United States, the World Tribune reported. It quoted Israeli officials as saying that the administration of President Barack Obama has warned Israel that its exercises were escalating regional tension.

They said Israel's government has responded by canceling or reducing exercises meant to prepare for a war with Syria.

"We are receiving daily phone calls from the Americans, who want to know details and schedules of exercises, what weapons will be used and in what scenarios," an Israeli official told the U.S. newspaper which focuses on international news.

Earlier in March, Israel reduced the scope of a major command exercise, Firestones-12, at the request of the United States. The training maneuver excised a scenario in which Israel and Syria fought a regional war, and instead focused on a limited conflict with Hizbullah.

Officials said the administration also pressed Israel to cancel plans for massive troop mobilization to enhance readiness for a regional war. They said the White House warned that this could trigger conflict with Hizbullah and Syria.

"The exercises were planned on the assessment that Syria is likely to join Hizbullah in the next war," the official told the World Tribune. "We are very much aware of Syrian preparations and coordination with Iran and Hizbullah."

Erdoğan harsh on Israel 'heritage' move

09 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN ANKARA

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has strongly criticized Israel's decision to designate two shrines located in Palestinian territory as Israeli national heritage sites, while some Israeli media outlets have interpreted his remarks as a continuation of his "verbal attack" on Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government has added two shrines in the West Bank to Israel's list of national heritage sites. The move, announced last month, has sparked Palestinian protests and has drawn criticism from other quarters, including the United Nations. "Al-Aqsa mosque, the Cave of Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb will never be Jewish sites, but rather Islamic ones," Erdoğan was quoted as saying in remarks published on Sunday in Saudi newspaper Al Wattan. His remarks, made during a meeting with Palestinian reporters, were republished by the Israeli media.

Voicing support for the Arab League's decision to promote indirect talks between Israel and the Palestinians through US mediation, Erdoğan added: "Our withdrawal from the negotiating table will not contribute to our interests, but our determined and unchanging stance is very important. We must fight for our right to be united and protect this right. Sitting at the negotiating table does not mean failure, and the power of the negotiators will deliver us to the outcome we hoped for."

Ankara had already warned last month that the announcement by Israeli authorities that certain historic sites in the West Bank, some of which are of importance to the Islamic world, will be accorded "Israeli cultural heritage" status would create serious distrust between parties. The Foreign Ministry stated that it would harm the intensified efforts made in this critical period to revive the negotiations for the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has been a source of grief for the people of the region for years.

Reiterating Turkey's constant call to bring the siege of the Gaza Strip to an end, he said: "I always say that Palestine is an open-air prison and the entrance of a case of tomatoes into this prison requires Israel's approval. Can we speak of human rights in such a state?" Erdoğan, meanwhile, also called on the Palestinians to end the rift between Hamas and Fatah.

Turkish PM wants whole Middle East purified from nuclear weapons

09 March 2010, Tuesday

Today's zaman

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that Turkey wanted the whole Middle East purified from nuclear weapons.

Speaking to reporters in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, Erdoğan assessed the recent developments in the region and said that Iran was an important country in the region.

"We believe there should be cooperation, not polarization, in the region. We support dialogue and diplomacy in solution of the problem about Iran's nuclear program. During the solution process, Iran should be given the right of having civil nuclear energy with peaceful means. On the other hand, we want the Middle East to be turned into a region which is purified from nuclear weapons," said Erdoğan.

Noting that Lebanon was another country which had a critical importance in the region, Erdoğan said that Lebanon's peace and stability concerned the whole region.

Erdoğan said that establishment of national consensus government in Lebanon in the end of 2009 was an important step to settle peace and stability in that country. He added that consultations and coordination between Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Syria also became influential in reaching this result.

Governor says incident at Ukrainian consulate did not have a political motive

09 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The governor of Turkey's megacity, Istanbul, said that the incident at the Ukrainian Consulate General did not have a political motive.

Muammer Güler told reporters, "a Turkish citizen whose wife is of Ukrainian descent, attempted to enter the consulate building with a package in his hand. When security forces asked about the content of the package, he told them there was a bomb in it. Then, he tried to enter the building by shooting randomly. Police had to shot him. He is injured, but not in critical condition."

"Since witnesses informed the security forces that there were cables coming out of the package, they are trying to blow up it. The incident does not have any political motive. A full investigation is under way," he added.

Earlier, police shot and injured an armed man as he attempted to enter the Ukrainian Consulate General. He was identified with his initials V.D. who is 29 years old.

Turkey trains Sudanese police ahead of elections

09 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Turkey's Interior Ministry is training Sudanese police to deal with security during the upcoming elections in Sudan, to be held April 11-18, when the Sudanese will cast their votes to elect representatives for a variety of posts, ranging from neighborhood officials to the president.

This will be the first time the Sudanese will go to the polls in such an extensive election since the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur. Despite a deal that the two conflicting sides sealed in Doha several weeks ago, many parts of southern Sudan still remain unsecured. In some places, the Sudanese will vote to elect officials to eight and in some places 13 public posts. Results from the complicated and lengthy elections will be available in a week. Speaking to the Anatolia news agency, Turkish Ambassador to Sudan Erdoğan Kök said Turkey would do its best to help Sudan tackle this complex electoral process. Terming the period "critical for Sudan," Kök said Turkish police are training Sudanese police to ensure security during the elections.

Turkish premier: All western countries demand Turkey's cooperation in Afghanistan

09 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that all western countries demanded cooperation of Turkey in settlement of security in Afghanistan.

Speaking to reporters in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, Erdoğan said that international community appreciated Turkey's efforts to restore security, stability and prosperity in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

He said that Turkish soldiers and civil officials who were under mission in Afghanistan were embraced by all Afghan people, adding that all western countries demanded Turkey's cooperation in Afghanistan.

Noting that Turkey was also closely interested in the condition in Darfur, Erdoğan said that everybody should undertake responsibility to recover the humanitarian situation in Darfur.

Erdoğan said that Turkey supported efforts to settle peace and consensus in Darfur, and was ready to contribute every type of efforts.

Erdoğan recalled that Turkey would co-chair, together with Egypt, OIC's Donors Conference for Darfur which would take place in Cairo on March 23, 2010.

Bomb at Turkish Embassy in Greece proves false alarm

11 March 2010, Thursday

TODAY'S ZAMAN WITH WIRES İSTANBUL

A phoned-in bomb threat at the Turkish Embassy in Athens has been proven false, the Anatolia news agency reported yesterday. Turkish Ambassador to Greece Hasan Göğüş said, "We received a threatening phone call, but it turned out to be a hoax."

An unidentified person called the Elefterotipiya newspaper, published in Athens, at 11:30 a.m. yesterday and claimed that a bomb at the Turkish Embassy would explode within 15 minutes.

Police took immediate security measures, evacuating the embassy building and closing the streets in the surrounding area to traffic after the threat. A thorough search at the embassy proved that the threat was false, as no bomb or explosives were found. Police records show that there have been numerous bomb threats in Athens recently.

TURKEY AND CYPRUS ISSUE

Top European human rights court recognizes Turkish Cypriot commission

07 March 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The European Court of Human Rights on Friday ruled that the Immovable Property Commission (IPC) of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (KKTC) is a valid domestic judicial remedy whose jurisdiction extends to Greek Cypriots.

The verdict means that from now on Greek Cypriots will not be able to launch court cases against Turkey at the European court prior to seeking redress with the IPC and sets a precedent for approximately 1,500 property cases pending at the European court. The ruling is also significant in that for the first time a Turkish Cypriot commission has been recognized by Europe's top human rights court, boosting the international legitimacy of the KKTC.

It is expected that the European court ruling will play a decisive role in the ongoing negotiations on the divided island. Property disputes are considered one of the most difficult topics to negotiate.

KKTC President Mehmet Ali Talat described the decision as “historic” and added that it will help the ongoing reunification talks with Greek Cypriots since it draws clear lines for the negotiations on property rights.

Law experts hailed the European court's decision, which accepted the IPC as an internal legal body, as a positive development for the Turkish Cypriot side and stressed that in time all Cypriot property cases could be referred to the commission for arbitration.

In the European court's admissibility decision regarding Demopoulos vs. Turkey and seven other cases, the court pointed out that “even though the international community regarded Turkey as being in illegal occupation of the northern part of Cyprus, this did not mean that, when dealing with individual complaints under the Convention concerning interference with property, its discretion as to the manner in which it executed a judgment should not be respected.”

Commenting on the decision, Professor Mehmet Hasgüler told Sunday's Zaman that the IPC had been established by the KKTC as a mechanism to protect the property rights of Greek Cypriots and called the verdict very important because it points to the commission as an address for a solution. The commission has received applications from many Greek Cypriots for the restitution of their property in the north and has concluded some of those cases.

Hasgüler further noted that after this decision, Greek Cypriots might be inclined to show goodwill if the European Union lends its support to the solution as well. “Only after that will Greek Cypriots enter into negotiations as one of two equal partners,” he added.

The IPC functioning within the framework of the European court's suggestions made in March and December 2005. The commission was set up with the aim of creating an internal legal procedure for property issues in line with “The Law on Compensation, Exchange and Restitution of the Immovable Property,” which after many debates was approved and put into force on Dec. 19, 2005. The commission is responsible for implementing the law, which envisages compensation, exchange and restitution for properties owned by Greek Cypriots in northern Cyprus.

According to new legal provisions, all natural and legal persons claiming rights to immovable or movable property can bring a claim before the IPC, provided they submit title deeds or proof of ownership. As of November 2009, the number of cases brought before the IPC stood at 433. Of these, 85 had been concluded, the vast majority by means of friendly settlement. In more than 70 cases, compensation had been awarded. Some 361,493 square meters of property had been restituted and approximately 47 million euros paid in compensation.

Turkish Cypriot leader launches re-election bid

07 March 2010, Sunday

TODAY'S ZAMAN WITH WIRES İSTANBUL

Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat has declared his candidacy in next month's presidential election in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC.)

Talat on Saturday launched his campaign for the Apr. 18 poll in a speech to supporters at a rally in Lefkoşa.

Cyprus was divided into a Greek Cypriot south and a Turkish Cypriot north in 1974 when Turkey intervened by using its guarantorship rights after a coup by supporters of union with Greece.

President Talat and Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias, have been holding reunification talks for the past 18 months, with only marginal progress.

Opinion polls show Talat trailing to a hardline rival candidate, but he is closing the gap.

UN head's Cyprus advisor to visit Turkish capital

08 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

UN Secretary General's special advisor on Cyprus will arrive in the Turkish capital on Monday to meet with Turkey's minister of foreign affairs.

According to a statement released by the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) on Sunday, UN SG's Special Advisor on Cyprus Alexander Downer would pay a visit to Ankara in order to hold talks with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu.

As part of his visit, Downer is also expected to get together with several other Turkish officials, the statement said.

Turkish Cypriot leader to seek second term

08 March 2010, Monday

TODAY ZAMAN

Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat has said he would seek a second presidential term in the election next month, pitting him against a popular hard-liner in a vote crucial to the reunification process on divided Cyprus. The winner of the election, scheduled for April 18, will be mandated to continue peace negotiations with THE Greek Cypriots, a complex process that could be pivotal to Turkey's bid to join the European Union.

"It is my mission to create the conditions where we can live together alongside Turkey, the Greek Cypriots, Europe and the international community," Talat told supporters on Saturday at a stadium in Lefkoşa.

Cyprus has been split since a Turkish military intervention in 1974 triggered by a brief Greek-inspired coup aimed at uniting Cyprus with Greece.

Talat's key challenger is Derviş Eroğlu, now prime minister of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (KKTC), recognized only by Ankara. Eroğlu advocates a two-state settlement for the division of Cyprus, a prospect rejected by THE Greek Cypriots.

An opinion poll published in the Kıbrıs daily on Saturday put Eroğlu in the lead, giving him 52.9 percent of the vote over Talat's 47.1 percent. Talat and Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias, both viewed by diplomats as moderates, have been holding peace talks since September 2008.

"We have come a significant way towards a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus problem and our integration with the international community. However, I will not be satisfied until the job is complete," Talat said.

Turkey's bid to join the EU partly hinges on progress in Cypriot reunification talks because Greek Cypriots represent the island in the bloc and can obstruct that process.

Ankara hopes Greek Cypriots learn from IPC decision

08 March 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN ANKARA

The top European court's recognition of the Immovable Property Commission (IPC) of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (KKTC) as a valid domestic judicial remedy whose jurisdiction extends to Greek Cypriots is a "historic" decision that needs to be well comprehended, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has remarked.

Friday's judgment by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) means that from now on Greek Cypriots will not be able to launch court cases against Turkey at the European court prior to seeking redress with the IPC and sets a precedent for approximately 1,500 property cases pending at the European court. The ruling is significant in that for the first time a Turkish Cypriot commission has been recognized by Europe's top human rights court, boosting the international legitimacy of the KKTC.

The judgment should play a "facilitating and positive role" in the ongoing UN-led reunification negotiations between Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders on the divided island, Davutoğlu said. He was speaking to Turkish journalists on Saturday in Cordoba where he attended a working dinner with foreign ministers of other European Union candidate countries during an informal half-yearly meeting of EU foreign ministers.

"Along the negotiation process, certain progress had been made about governance issues. From now on, [the judgment] will provide a significant advantage in regard to arriving at a fairer solution on property issues," Davutoğlu said. Property disputes are considered one of the most difficult topics to negotiate.

The Foreign Ministry, in a written statement released late on Friday, emphasized that "it is imperative to handle the property issue, which constitutes the most complex aspect of the Cyprus problem, as a whole in a comprehensive settlement and to solve this issue within the UN parameters."

Reiterating Ankara's support for the comprehensive settlement negotiations on the island conducted under the auspices of the UN within this understanding, the ministry, however, noted: "Despite the efforts of the Turkish side to reach a just and lasting solution as soon as possible, the Greek Cypriot leadership fails to show the same determination. We believe, by drawing necessary lessons from the judgment of the ECtHR, the Greek Cypriot Administration will eventually realize that all aspects of the Cyprus question, including the property issue, should be solved through negotiations with the KKTC."

While, as of Sunday afternoon, there was still no official comment from the Greek Cypriot administration on the issue, Greek Cypriot media interpreted the ruling as "a defeat" for the administration.

Compromise on Cyprus necessary, Belgian ambassador says

Wednesday, March 10, 2010 DÖNDÜ SARIŞIK

Ankara-Hürriyet Daily News

The EU, which attaches high importance to joint energy security policies with Turkey, is looking for ways to unblock the energy chapter. Belgian Ambassador to Ankara Pol De Witte, whose country will soon assume the rotating EU presidency, calls for more compromises on Cyprus. "I

know it is not easy, but in order to have a solution and to unblock chapters, some gesture are needed between Cyprus and Turkey”

Although it is unfair that Turkey’s European Union accession process and the Cyprus issue have become linked, Belgium’s ambassador admitted their de facto linkage made it necessary to find a quick solution on Cyprus.

“We are looking for ways to open new chapters and to help the Turkish government,” De Witte said in an interview with the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review, noting his country, as one of the founding fathers of the EU, is also ready to provide technical assistance to Turkey. Question on the chapters blocked due to political concerns, De Witte admitted that energy “has great importance for both the EU and Turkey.”

Spain is holding talks to unblock the energy chapter, according to the ambassador.

“Energy security is extremely important for European countries. It is definitely a high priority for the Spanish presidency, but it has not done a deal yet. You can be sure that if it is not solved by the end of June, our government will try to put things in order,” he said, noting that it would otherwise be impossible to proceed with negotiations.

Asked if there is a way out of the deadlock in Turkey’s accession talks, De Witte admitted that Cyprus’ veto had made Turkey’s EU accession complicated.

“Time is running out at this moment because the presidential elections will be held in the second half of April in the Turkish part of Cyprus,” he said, adding that he hopes Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders can reach at a settlement through at least a partial compromise.

“In the first place, those on the island are responsible for finding a solution for themselves,” De Witte said, asserting that Ankara and Athens have taken responsibility by encouraging the two sides.

He also said, “In any case, the only solution will be through compromises between the two sides. I know it is not easy, but in order to have a solution and to unblock chapters, some gesture is needed between Cyprus and Turkey.”

Admitting that the Cyprus question is complicating the accession process, he said it was not appropriate that accession negotiations and the Cyprus issue were linked. “But it is de facto linked. It is difficult to go further on accession talks unless a solution is found on Cyprus.”

EU expects Turkish Parliament to focus on legislative reforms

The Belgian ambassador said the Turkish Parliament should focus on legislative reforms to open a number of new chapters. “Food safety can be open before the end of Spanish presidency. Competition and public procurement is also available. These two areas require further legislative work by the Parliament.”

Noting an approaching recess, De Witte said: “We hope that the legislative work will be adopted before the summer leave of parliamentarians. In that case, our presidency could work further on this.”

Belgium seeking joint projects of energy and construction

De Witte praised Turkey for its balanced foreign policy that both focuses on EU integration and developing political and economical relations with Middle Eastern neighbors. “You have extremely active diplomacy and I’ve seen a very energetic foreign minister.”

He continued, saying: “For us, Turkey is a very important bilateral partner both in political and economic respects.”

Noting that the bilateral trade volume is over 5 billion euros, 20 percent lower than 2008’s amount, he vowed to encourage joint investments. “One of my challenges will be to come back to the previous level as soon as possible.”

Energy and construction are promising sectors, De Witte said. "Turkey is outstanding in construction and we have particular niches dealing with telecommunications and transport," he said, adding that mutual investments and joint projects for third countries are possible. Thanks to its harbors, Belgium can be a bridge for transaction of goods between Turkey and Europe, he said.

TURKEY AND ARMENIA

Turkish PM says US vote to "greatly harm" ties

07 March 2010, Sunday

REUTERS WITH TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

A US resolution that branded as "genocide" the World War One incidents will seriously damage US-Turkish relations, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan said on Saturday.

NATO member Turkey, an ally crucial to US interests in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and the Middle East, has expressed its outrage at Thursday's non-binding vote in the Foreign Affairs committee of the US House of Representatives and recalled its envoy to the United States for consultations. "The decision of the Foreign Affairs Committee will not hurt Turkey, but it will greatly harm bilateral relations, interests and vision. Turkey will not be the one who loses," said Erdoğan, speaking at a summit of Turkish businessmen.

The Obama administration made a last-minute appeal against the resolution and has vowed to stop the vote, which was broadcast live on Turkish television, from going further in Congress. Turkey has said the resolution could jeopardise a fragile drive by Turkey and Armenia to end a century of hostilities and lead to further instability in the south Caucasus, a region crisscrossed by oil and gas pipelines to Europe.

Turkey's ambassador to the United States told journalists upon his return on Saturday it was unclear when he would head back to Washington following his talks with the president, prime minister and foreign minister.

"I will return when the time is right ... We will have to wait and see," Namık Tan said. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu was quoted in a media report as saying that the consultations could last "a long time."

The resolution urges Obama to use the term "genocide" when he delivers his annual message on the Armenian massacres in April.

Turkey accepts that many people were killed from both sides but denies that up to 1.5 million died and that it amounted to "genocide."

Some analysts fear the vote may alienate Turkey at a time when there are concerns that its warmer ties with Syria, Iran and Russia, could herald a shift away from its traditional Western allies.

Commentators had said the bill could affect Washington's use of the İncirlik air base in southeast Turkey. İncirlik is vital in logistical support for US troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Turkey is a transit route for US troops going to and from Iraq, and the country has 1,700 non-combat troops in Afghanistan.

Ankara has also played a key role in Obama's strategy to get Afghanistan and Pakistan to work together in fighting al Qaeda and Taliban militants in their borders and has hosted high-level talks between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Genocide' fatigue: newest hurdle in normalization process

07 March 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Could this spring be one of discouragement, even though the season is usually associated with feelings of hope?

This seems to be the case among the public in Turkey, as people overwhelmingly feel exhausted from annually watching a foreign legislative panel attempting to call their ancestors perpetrators of genocide against Anatolian Armenians, with whom they lived for centuries. Whether or not it is scientifically accepted, maybe it is a kind of a "spring depression" that could be seen as linked to Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Yet, this year's public anxiety is different than that of previous years, when similar resolutions recognizing claims of genocide against Anatolian Armenians under Ottoman rule during World War I were voted on in various US congressional committees -- thus it can't be defined as a seasonal disorder.

This year's irritation stems from the fact that this year, for the first time, there has been an ongoing process of normalization of ties with estranged neighbor Armenia -- efforts which also include a framework for contemplating historical facts and facing whatever the reality was in Anatolia during World War I.

As an opinion piece in The Wall Street Journal on Friday titled "But Who Needs Allies? Congress poisons US-Turkey relations" summarized: "The diplomats at the House Foreign Affairs Committee yesterday [Thursday] adopted a view on the urgent matter of world events that transpired 95 years ago. By a 23-22 margin, the committee declared that the mass deportations and serial massacres of Armenians by Ottoman forces during World War I ought to be called a genocide. The vote has sparked a full-blown diplomatic spat with Turkey -- with Ankara recalling its ambassador to Washington -- but that's really no big deal, says Foreign Affairs Chairman Howard Berman (D., Calif.)."

Berman has a point in declaring that the vote's outcomes are "really no big deal" vis-à-vis US-Turkey bilateral relations. Yet, "a big deal" has apparently emerged regarding the future of the normalization process between Armenia and Turkey, though Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu stated that Turkey would push on with efforts to normalize ties with Armenia despite the US vote.

"We are determined to press ahead with the normalization of relations with Armenia," Davutoğlu told a news conference, while also emphasizing that the parliamentary ratification of the peace accords with Armenia was at risk, referring to the two protocols signed by Armenia and Turkey in Zurich on Oct. 10 -- the "Protocol on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations" and the "Protocol on the Development of Bilateral Relations."

The deals, seen as crucial to obtaining long-term peace in the volatile Southern Caucasus, must be ratified by the parliaments in Ankara and Yerevan.

Normalization is a process that will be carried out by a mutual exchange of views between the two nations, Davutoğlu said, adding, "Further intervention by third parties will render this normalization impossible."

What about April 25?

The fatigue observed among the public is best summed up with commonly encountered expressions -- the people are saying: "OK, what is the point? Let them pass this resolution so we can get rid of this tension forever."

These feelings, nonetheless, also carry a tone that hints at a tendency that victimizes the normalization process as well, since the feeling of US pressure on Turkey is acceptable neither for the public nor the government.

Leaving aside what Armenia has or hasn't done to advance the normalization process, and given that the current issue seems to be an urgent bilateral matter between Ankara and Washington, it may be useful to examine what Turkey and the United States have and have not done, or what they have been promising to do or not do.

Despite a strong expression of commitment from Ankara, it is still unclear how the normalization process can be dealt with under these circumstances, when Ankara will apparently have to exhaust much of its energy -- at least until April 24 -- on preventing US President Barack Obama from calling the Anatolian Armenians' killings "genocide" in an annual White House statement on the day marking Armenian remembrance. Ankara will also have to mount a significant campaign to keep the resolution from being brought to the House floor for a vote.

As for April 25, Ankara hasn't given any clues about its plans for moving forward with the normalization process if both a resolution on the House floor and Obama's use of the g-word are avoided. The normalization process has already been crippled by Turkey's insistence on parallel progress on the Nagorno-Karabakh territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as by a ruling by the Armenian Constitutional Court. In January, while upholding the legality of the protocols, the court underlined that they could not contradict Yerevan's official position that the alleged Armenian genocide must be internationally recognized.

Now, Turkey is expecting a written document or assurance either by Armenia or a third party that would be acceptable to both Armenian and Turkish sides that would state that the protocols are valid.

The fact that neither the US nor Switzerland -- which mediated closed-door talks between Armenia and Turkey that were held for more than a year on ways to restore diplomatic relations and open their mutual border before the two parties announced on April 22, 2009 that they had reached an agreement on a road map to normalize their relations -- are sympathetic to Ankara's demand for such assurance poses further ambiguity regarding the future of the process.

And hypothetically assuming that such assurance is provided, how will Ankara fulfill its promise to push for the ratification of the protocols at the commission level when there is no improvement on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue?

US 'awareness'

It would be naïve to believe that the US administration really reckoned that a last minute effort would be effective on the House committee members.

While making clear that the Obama administration was against the resolution and noting that they called Berman on Wednesday to try to persuade him to shelve the vote, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Thursday: "We think that [the protocols] is the appropriate way to manage the problems that have stood in the way of normalization between the two countries. Within the protocols, there was an agreed-upon approach to establishing a historical commission to look at events in the past."

The "Protocol on the Development of Bilateral Relations" says the two countries have agreed to "implement a dialogue on the historical dimension with the aim of restoring mutual confidence between the two nations, including an impartial scientific examination of historical records and archives to define existing problems and formulate recommendations."

That brings to mind another question: Wasn't the US administration aware of the content of the protocols when they let the US congressional committee go ahead with their plans since Berman

first announced on Feb. 5 that he intended to call a committee vote on the non-binding resolution on March 4?

It's hard to believe how the US administration failed to consider that the adoption of the vote would be seen as pressure on Turkey -- both on the public and the government -- over ratifying the protocols.

This is not the first time that hopes for a long-awaited new spring coming to Turkey, this time freshened up by the normalization process, have been crushed.

Back in October 2005, an İstanbul court's conviction of Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink for insulting "Turkishness" -- a conviction which indirectly led to his assassination in January 2007 -- led to the same kind of feelings.

Tens of thousands of people marched during his funeral with tears. Those thousands and more in Turkey now need to be persuaded that Dink's death will not be forgotten and that Turkey must continue its efforts to not let this country turn into a wasteland. Otherwise, bitterness among the public might yet turn into dangerous indifference to ties with their Armenian siblings.

Turkish-American association reacts to US TV's broadcast on 1915 incidents

08 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The senior official of a Turkish-American association said on Sunday that leading US TV channel CNN should be protested for its recent broadcast on the incidents of 1915.

CNN, which broadcasted a program titled "Scream Bloody Murder" in December 2008, has recently re-run the production which assesses incidents such as the Holocaust, deceased Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's chemical attack against Iraqi Kurds, as well as the incidents that had taken place in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda and Darfour.

The program, presented by US journalist Christian Amanpour, briefly points to the incidents of 1915 as well, and alleges that "Christian Armenian citizens were killed and forced to migrate, and consequently, 1 million Armenian people died at the time".

Releasing a statement on CNN's program, Ali Çınar, vice president of the Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA), said that the timing of the broadcast was significant, and called on everybody to protest the TV channel immediately.

Çınar said "US TV channels' displaying a unilateral stance with the Armenian diaspora's financial support did not comply with objectivity and journalistic ethics".

Noting that CNN's broadcast would harm Turkish-US relations, Çınar said associating the incidents of 1915 with the Holocaust and with what had happened in Cambodia, Rwanda, Iraq and Darfour was a "major ignorance".

Çınar also said that the Turkish-American community would continue to react against the unilateral stance displayed by the US media on such matter.

Switzerland says history should be discussed by Armenia, Turkey

11 March 2010, Thursday

TODAY'S ZAMAN ANKARA

Armenian and Turkish officials should come together and resolve their disagreements to facilitate the ongoing normalization process between the two countries, Swiss Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey said on Tuesday.

The minister spoke after Mario Fehr, a Social Democratic member of the Swiss National Council, submitted a motion to the federal government on Monday asking whether the recent conviction of three Turkish citizens by a Swiss court for denying the alleged Armenian genocide would have any particular impact on the federal government's approach toward the issue of the killings of Anatolian Armenians during World War I.

Switzerland mediated closed-door talks between Armenia and Turkey for over a year on ways to restore diplomatic relations and open their mutual border before the two parties announced on April 22, 2009, that they had reached an agreement on a road map to normalize their relations.

Calmy-Rey, in her answer to Fehr's motion, first noted that the federal government was not in a position to comment on legal decisions in line with the principle of separation of powers.

Recalling an earlier statement on the issue dated March 13, 2009, Calmy-Rey reiterated, "The federal government had stated that Armenia and Turkey should be encouraged to discuss these historical issues in a constructive manner that would also facilitate the ongoing rapprochement between the two countries." She added, "The federal government notes with pleasure that the two countries signed two protocols aimed at the normalization of these two countries' relations on Oct. 10, 2009, in Zurich."

Ankara-based sources told the Anatolia news agency that Calmy-Rey's answer is meant to emphasize that the killings of Anatolian Armenians during World War I should be dealt with in line with the protocols, which contain an agreement to establish a historical commission to look at the 1915 events.

Turkey critic's ties to US State Department questioned

11 March 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

For the US government to allow a known Turkey-bashing analyst who recently increased his unwarranted attacks on the country's ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) to retain his official job at the State Department has irked many senior members of the party as well as officials in the government.

"It is simply difficult to understand how in the world a prestigious institution at the State Department has a known Turkey-basher on its payroll teaching courses on developments taking place in key regional ally Turkey," a senior deputy in Parliament and one of the founding members of ruling AK Party has said.

In an apparent reference to Soner Çağaptay, a strong critic of Turkey in what many see as biased and misleading articles he wrote, Murat Mercan, head of the parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee, questioned his position as chair of the Turkey Advanced Area Studies Program at the State Department's Foreign Service Institute (FSI). As FSI is charged with training members of the US foreign affairs community in Washington, the concern here in the Turkish capital that Çağaptay has uniquely positioned himself to unduly influence US diplomats against Turkey with a well-known bias against the current government.

"Çağaptay is well known for writing articles targeting only one political party in Turkey and his opinions are not objective. I find it very wrong that such a controversial person is allowed to give lectures on Turkey to officers and personnel of the US foreign affairs community," Mercan told Today's Zaman. "I don't think it will serve US interests well and think it gives the wrong signals to the Turkish side as well," he said, adding that he is concerned that Çağaptay will feed US

diplomats wrong information and unsubstantiated claims as if they were true. “I sincerely hope US authorities will ponder this wrong,” Mercan noted.

Çağaptay is also the director of the Turkish Research Program at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), a Washington think tank closely associated with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). While the latter works to ensure that Congress remains pro-Israeli using massive election campaign contributions that it coordinates and directs, WINEP aims to influence the media and the executive branch through experts and publications and to tilt public opinion in Israel’s favor.

In an interview with Today’s Zaman, former CIA officer Philip Giraldi, a contributing editor to The American Conservative and a member of the American Conservative Defense Alliance, argued that “WINEP pretends to provide objective analysis regarding the Near East, but in reality it is only interested in supporting the Israeli point of view. When Turkey is perceived as a close friend of Israel, it will provide positive commentary on Turkey. When it is not, the analysis will be critical.”

Giraldi also points out that Çağaptay is the key player in this game as he is the Turkey “expert” at WINEP and through WINEP has access to the mainstream media in the United States. “For some time now, he has been emphasizing that Turkey is becoming Islamicized and is no longer a reliable partner for the West. Both of those contentions are inaccurate, but they reflect the Israeli point of view.”

Though it makes sense for a WINEP fellow to attack the Turkish government over deteriorating relations with Israel, Çağaptay’s other hat at the federal government institution baffles many Turkish officials and raises eyebrows among the leadership of the AK Party. “What is more wrong than appointing a known biased researcher to lead the chair on Turkish studies at FSI? Mistakes like this do not contribute to helping friendly relations between Turkey and the US, they seriously damage the prospect in a negative sense as well,” Salih Kapusuz, AK Party deputy chairman for public relations, said.

“From the perspective of US interests, there is no point in preferring Çağaptay, who looks at Turkey from a narrow ideological standpoint and offers biased viewpoints on Turkey,” Kapusuz told Today’s Zaman. He expressed hope that the US administration will not turn a blind eye to a Turkey-basher who might potentially harm US relations with Turkey.

In a series of op-ed pieces he authored mostly for the US media, Çağaptay charges that Turkey under AK Party governance turned its back on the West and abandoned its commitments to US policy. He holds the government responsible for strained relations with the right-wing Israeli government after the Gaza onslaught last year, which left over 1,400 Palestinians dead and many more wounded. Turkey, along with the international community, condemned the attacks carried out by the Israeli military and harshly criticized Israeli policies on Gaza as well as on the expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

Giraldi believes Israel is angry because Ankara has become critical of many Israeli actions, most particularly the January 2009 invasion of Gaza and subsequent developments with Syria and Iran. “Turkey is rightly concerned that Israel is intending to attack Iran. As an American I am particularly concerned that the United States will be drawn into such a war, making it regional, so I share the Turkish concern,” he told Today’s Zaman.

Providing a venue for Çağaptay in the State Department institution to channel distorted facts to diplomats-in-training is like shaping US policy towards Turkey through Israeli optics, Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, professor of international relations at Ankara’s Gazi University, said. In an interview with Today’s Zaman, Erol drew attention to the hazards of such an approach as

adopted by FSI. “In a way, it tells the Turkish government that the US will judge you by the actions taking place on the Ankara-Tel Aviv line,” he said, adding to that “such a message would not be received well in the capital and might potentially inflame public opinion as well.” Erol further cautioned that the timing is worse for the US as Washington is struggling to pick up the pace in boosting a positive image of the US among Turks.

Giraldi sees there is a clear conflict of interest in Çağaptay working for FSI while also working for a think tank that is funded by a lobby that represents foreign interests. “He should be replaced,” Giraldi said. Asked about the hiring practices, ethics and code of conduct for lecturers and instructors at FSI, the State Department had not responded to Today’s Zaman inquiries by the time this article went to print.

Giraldi said, however, that the impact of Çağaptay’s discourse would not be that great. “His influence over young diplomats would likely be limited. When the officials arrive in Turkey, they quickly discover that many preconceptions about Turkey as seen through the US media and individuals like Çağaptay are false. Turkey has a vibrant democracy, a strong sense of identity as a nation and is a popular and welcoming environment both for American tourists and diplomats. Most American diplomats in Turkey understand very well that Ankara is the key to stability in the Near East region, and they appreciate the positive role that Turkey has played,” he said. The tension between Turkey and Israel has not only played out in the US media outlets recently, at the behest of pro-Israeli lobby groups like WINEP, but also made it to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs proceedings which oversaw the narrowly adopted Armenian genocide resolution. The committee is strongly pro-Israel, and unlike in the past when Turkey and Israel had friendlier relations and Israel had quietly lobbied against the resolution, pro-Israel lobbies worked for the adoption of the resolution this time.

Giraldi believes the pro-Israel lobby pressured some lawmakers to vote for the resolution behind closed doors to exact revenge for the Davos spat between Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Israeli President Shimon Peres. “AIPAC did not instruct anyone how to vote, but it did make sure that its allies in Congress would understand that a vote against Turkey would be appreciated to punish Ankara for its cooling relations with Israel,” he said. Labeling the Armenian genocide resolution a meaningless charade, Giraldi argued that it serves no good for Armenia or for Armenians and is only designed to punish and humiliate Turkey.

Spain’s EU presidency an opportunity for Turkey

07 March 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Relations between Spain and Turkey have flourished in the past decade; nevertheless, as Spain is currently chairing the EU’s term presidency, it is of the utmost importance for Turkey to work closely with Spain to open as many EU negotiation chapters as possible.

Turkey and Spain are the most similar countries in Europe in terms of political development, economic situation and EU membership bids. The advent of democracy in Spain occurred late, just as in Turkey, and it was also difficult for it to join the EU. Spain is a largely agricultural country with vast production of subtropical products similar to Turkey and is the biggest rival to Turkey in terms of tourism from North America. However, Spain is a staunch supporter of Turkey’s EU membership and plans to open at least four chapters during its six-month presidency.

“Turkey’s European Union membership bid has always been 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 Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

“Spain will try to open four new chapters in Turkey’s membership negotiations,” he said. According to Zapatero, the energy chapter, which is currently blocked by Greek Cyprus, is one of those that Spain will attempt to open.

Speaking to Sunday’s Zaman, Boston University-based expert Deniz Bulut Ture said under the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government, Turkish-Spanish relations had gained remarkable momentum. “As the two Mediterranean countries at the periphery of Europe, the two countries finally realized their potential in political and economic cooperation,” Ture said.

“Bilateral relations between Spain and Turkey have been upgraded to the highest level possible since last year,” Eduard Soler i Lecha, research fellow at the Barcelona Center for International Affairs, told Sunday’s Zaman.

Speaking about the importance of last week’s visit, Soler i Lecha said Spain only has such high-level governmental summits with its neighbors and with “so-called” big EU countries. Thus, Soler i Lecha noted, as Spain believes that Turkey should become a full member of the EU in the future, it is logical to start this cooperation as soon as possible.

“These kinds of meetings are opportunities to discuss and foster bilateral cooperation projects but also share impressions on European and foreign policy issues,” the Spanish expert said. Also speaking about the significance of the meeting, Ture said this comprehensive meeting with a large group of ministers is a sign of the determination to push cooperation to the next level and utilize these strong ties in Turkey’s accession talks with Europe.

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu was expected to attend the working dinner with foreign ministers of other candidate countries on March 6 in Cordoba, Spain, where the EU foreign ministers convene in an informal half-yearly meeting.

Traditionally called a Gymnich meeting since the first meeting was held during the German presidency in 1974 at Gymnich Castle, Davutoğlu was expected to discuss issues related to regional and international affairs and the Western Balkans in particular. On his two-day visit, Davutoğlu will also meet with his counterparts from the EU and high officials from the European Council and the European Commission on the sidelines of the Gymnich meeting.

The first such meeting to be held under the Treaty of Lisbon, the EU foreign ministers meet informally once every six months in the country holding the presidency. In an interview published on the Spanish EU presidency Web site, Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos said, “Along with the candidate countries, we will tackle the Western Balkans -- a matter of interest to Croatia, Macedonia and Turkey -- and prepare the high-level meeting which the Spanish presidency would like to hold at the end of its six-month tenure.”

Along with political cooperation, Spain and Turkey also have a growing amount of trade and economic activity between the two countries. Stressing Turkey’s role in the Middle East, cultural, political and economic relations were among the issues discussed during bilateral talks in Madrid, Zapatero said. Spanish companies in Turkey have grown and there are strong relations between Turkish and Spanish companies, Zapatero stated at a joint press conference with his Turkish counterpart. 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. “Turkey is Spain’s third most important trade partner outside the EU after the US and Mexico,” Ture stressed. Emphasizing

Spain's huge leap forward in past the five decades, Nurettin Bilici from Hacettepe University, who is also the author of a book related to Turkish-EU relations, comparing it to Spain, said to Sunday's Zaman that Spain was similar to Turkey in terms of economic and social problems in 1960. Bilici stated that while income per capita in Spain was \$267 in 1955, it was \$286 in Turkey in 1955. "Today, Spain is the ninth largest economy in the world with over 800 billion euros in [gross domestic product] GDP," Bilici said.

Speaking about the painful road of Spain's drive toward EU membership, Bilici said Spain was a poor country and that there was a great fear that the poor masses would move to northern Europe. "Spain has conducted long-range policies with patience; sometimes it stepped back," Bilici said. He also stressed that the "forcing influence" of the EU for reform in candidate countries is one of the most important benefits of membership negotiations.

Speaking about the Alliance of Civilizations, which both countries co-chair, Soler i Lecha said in recent years Spain and Turkey have been building a strong alliance and that these summits are good opportunities to substantiate this alliance. He continued, saying the high degree of consensus among Spain's political class to support Turkey's EU membership is noteworthy.

Europe realizes real threat of PKK, experts say

08 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Operations have been carried out in several European countries against the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) over the last two weeks, with a wide-ranging operation conducted in Belgium on Thursday following anti-PKK operations in France, Germany and Italy.

The Belgian authorities launched orchestrated raids on premises suspected of belonging to the PKK late on Thursday and detained dozens of senior members of the outlawed group, including two of its leading figures, Zübeyir Aybar and Remzi Kartal. Another 20 people were detained after about 300 police officers raided 28 addresses across the country, including the offices of pro-PKK television station Roj TV, as part of a three-year investigation into PKK activities.

Later on Thursday, Belgian security forces announced they had detained 18 people, although some media outlets reported the number as 22. The raids took place in five major cities in Belgium with the Belgian police officers being assisted by Italian and French police. A diplomatic source noted that European governments had previously failed to take measures against PKK members in Europe but that because of increased intelligence sharing, Europe no longer supports pro-PKK groups.

Ercan Çitlioğlu, president of Bahçeşehir University's Strategic Research Center, said he regards the operations as an international development. Stating that the operations' primary aim is to cut off the PKK's funding sources in Europe, Çitlioğlu noted that the existence of the PKK troubles Europeans as well as Turks.

"We have regarded the outlawed PKK as a terrorist organization for many years because it does not choose to express the problems of the Kurdish people living in Turkey through democracy and politics, but through the use of violence. Therefore, we can easily say that these operations, which have won praise from Turkey, are late," said Murat Bilhan, the vice chairman of the Turkish-Asian Center for Strategic Studies (TASAM). Bilhan noted that European countries have now realized the real threat of the PKK and that for this reason they have launched various operations. Bilhan stated that people should view the Kurdish problem and innocent Kurds separately. It means that not all Kurds should be associated with the outlawed PKK. Bilhan also

noted that Europe had previously seen the PKK as freedom fighters; however, they have now discovered that the organization's activities may also harm Europeans.

Sinan Ogan, the president of the Turkish Center for International Relations and Strategic Analysis (TÜRKSAM), noted that he expects similar operations. "Many countries around the world are starting to rethink Turkey and its very real problem with the PKK. Belgium's stance following the example of Italy and France is obvious; they are trying to freeze the PKK's funds in Europe," Ogan pointed out. There may be further operations as many countries are not happy about the PKK's activities. Ogan added that a consensus is forming in the world to stop the terrorist threat posed by the outlawed organization.

Turkey planning to send police task force for UN's Haiti mission

08 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey may contribute police force to the United Nations' mission in quake-hit Haiti, said a chief aide to the UN secretary-general on Monday.

Ann-Marie Orlor, new police advisor for the UN Department of Peacekeeping Missions, said Turkey had offered to send a 140 to 160-strong riot squad for the United Nations' Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).

Orlor said effort was underway with Turkish officials to draft a protocol, adding that a Turkish team last week visited the country for logistic groundwork.

The UN police advisor said the Turkish squad was planned to deploy in Haiti by the end of April.

Ata Yenigün, the peacekeeping department's civilian police management coordinator from Turkey, has confirmed the Turkish proposal for contribution to the UN mission.

Yenigün said France, Italy, Bangladesh and Rwanda were also to join Turkey to send riot police to Haiti.

Yenigün said the UN expected the Turkish police force to deploy in Port-au-Prince, the capital city, to participate in the security tasks.

Turkey to send up to 160 riot police to Haiti

10 March 2010, Wednesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Turkey will boost the police force in Haiti to help local authorities maintain security in the quake-hit country, UN officials told reporters on Monday.

Turkey has already sent a 52-member police team, consisting of inspectors, chief inspectors and heads of police departments to serve as part of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), the UN peacekeeping department's civilian police management coordinator from Turkey, Ata Yenigün, said and added that Turkey was now planning to send up to 160 police officers.

Ann-Marie Orlor, the newly appointed police adviser in the department of peacekeeping operations, said Turkey, for the first time, had pledged to contribute riot police to MINUSTAH, during her speech at the UN headquarters on March 8.

Speaking about the extrajudicial killing of looters and escaped prisoners by peacekeepers, Orlor said the UN has no executive mandate to make arrests and that member states, including Turkey,

will contribute to the police force in Haiti. She also added that the priority now was to find French-speaking personnel.

The committee that Turkey sent to Haiti to prepare the logistics for the incoming Turkish police officers was expected to return home on Tuesday, Yenigün said. Along with security, Yenigün said, Turkish police forces will also assist with food distribution and other activities. Rwanda, Italy, France and Bangladesh are the leading countries in sending police assistance to Haiti. Turkey has provided a hospital in Port-au-Prince, Yenigün said and riot police will also provide security for the hospital. Yenigün also stressed that this would be the first time that Turkish riot police have served abroad.

Turkish foreign minister in World's four Kissingers list of FP magazine

10 March 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

US Foreign Policy magazine included Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in its world's four Kissingers list.

FP is foreign policy, diplomacy and strategy magazine of Washington Post-Newsweek group. The magazine listed four figures under "World's Kissingers" which took its name from Nobel Peace Prize winner Henry Kissinger, former State Secretary of US, who was an influential name in US foreign policy for over 50 years and architect of many important international initiatives. FP states, "a country's foreign policy is often defined less by its elected leader than its behind-the-scenes operators and elder statesmen. There are four figures setting the global agenda for the world's emerging powers, just as Henry Kissinger set US's for over 50 years."

The magazine, which included Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu in the list, wrote for him as, "a keen student of history, the brash and outspoken Davutoğlu believes in restoring Turkey's Ottoman glories so that Turkey once again carries weight in the Middle East. Under his guidance, Turkey has strengthened its ties with Arab governments and sought to play the role of mediator in Arab-Israeli conflicts."

Noting that Davutoğlu supported Turkey's eventual membership in the European Union, FP quoted him as "Turkey can be European in Europe, and Eastern in the East because we are both." Singapore's former prime minister 86-year-old Lee Kuan Yew "who shepherded Singapore to unprecedented economic growth", Brazil's Foreign Minister Celso Amorim "who managed the nigh-impossible balancing act between the United States and Brazil's leftist neighbors in Venezuela and Cuba", and Saudi Arabia's former ambassador to Britain and the United States as well as ex-director of the Saudi foreign-intelligence service Turki al-Faisal "who worked as ambassador to the United States in the years following September 11 attacks" are the other three figures in the list.

Foreign Policy is a bimonthly magazine founded in 1970. It won the 2009, 2007, and 2003 National Magazine Award for General Excellence. Its topics include global politics, economics, integration and ideas.

PM addresses Turkey-South Korea Business Forum

Wednesday, 10 March 2010 16:41

World bulletin

Erdogan called for more South Korean investments in Turkey.

Turkish prime minister said on Wednesday that Turkey's growth forecast for 2010 was 3.5 percent, however, international organizations expected the country to reach a much higher rate. Speaking at the Turkey-South Korea Business Forum in Istanbul, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey had been one of the least affected countries by the global economic crisis thanks to the economic reforms and policies implemented by the government.

Pointing to the remarkable structural reforms carried out in Turkish economy and important arrangements made in banking and financial sectors, Erdogan said Turkey's exports reached 102 billion USD while there had been a serious shrinking in global trade in 2009.

Erdogan said Turkey was one of the 17 countries whose credit notes had been upgraded since the beginning of the global crisis in September 2008.

"Our growth forecast for Turkish economy is 3.5 percent for 2010. However, numerous international organizations such as IMF, World Bank and OECD have much higher estimations for Turkey. Such organizations also say that Turkey will be one the fastest growing economies in the world not only in 2010, but also in 2011," Erdogan said.

Erdogan also said the AK Party had introduced groundbreaking changes that strengthened and facilitated a suitable environment for national and international investments.

The Turkish premier said foreign investments in Turkey had climbed up to 22 billion USD in 2007 from 1 billion USD in 2003, adding that Turkey had placed ninth among developing countries in 2008 with an inflow of 18.2 billion USD in foreign direct investments.

Erdogan said FDI figures in Turkey for 2009 had seen a drop due to a global recession down to 7.6 billion USD.

Erdogan called for more South Korean investments in Turkey, saying that the current level of 500 million USD was far from being satisfactory.

Erdogan said they aimed to bring Turkey into a league of top ten economies of the world by 2023, the centennial anniversary of the foundation of modern Turkey.

Turkish prime minister also said that Turkey would become a more stable, reliable and economically strong country once it completed its current transformation process.

"I believe, the rapid transformation process Turkey has been experiencing nowadays should be evaluated well by investors," Erdogan said.

Turkey, South Korea sign protocol on nuclear power plant

Wednesday, 10 March 2010 15:32

World bulletin

Turkey and South Korea signed on Wednesday a cooperation protocol to establish a nuclear energy power plant in the northern Turkish province of Sinop.

Turkey and South Korea signed on Wednesday a cooperation protocol to establish a nuclear energy power plant in the northern Turkish province of Sinop.

"We have to produce at least 10 percent of our energy from nuclear plants by 2020" Turkish Energy and Natural Resources Minister Taner Yildiz said during the signature ceremony in Istanbul.

Two countries signed the protocol on the sidelines of a Turkish-South Korean Business Forum. "We will set up working groups and try to prepare an agreement within three or four months," Yildiz said.

South Korea actually has 20 nuclear power plants, and is constructing eight others in its

territories. It aims to raise its nuclear energy to 40 percent till 2020.

Turkey is also cooperating with the Russian Federation to construct a nuclear power plant in Akkuyu hamlet of the southern province of Mersin.

Turkey has long been eager to build nuclear power plants.

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 says South Korea trade ties on the rise

Wednesday, 10 March 2010 13:47

World buletin

Babacan said there were 160 companies, with Korean capital, operating in Turkey.

Turkish State Minister & Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan said on Wednesday that there was some decrease in Turkey's trade volume with South Korea in 2009 with the impact of global crisis.

"Despite this regression, trade figures more than 3 billion USD is in question," Babacan said while addressing the opening of Turkey-Korea Business Forum.

Babacan expressed belief that the forum would contribute to improvement of economic and commercial relations.

"Despite the geographical distance between Turkey and Korea, there are close relations between the two countries. The solidarity displayed in a difficult period in the history constituted basis of the relations," he said.

Babacan said Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to South Korea in 2004 added a new momentum to bilateral relations, and indicated that Korean President, foreign and trade ministers visited Turkey after Erdogan's visit to this country.

"Economic and commercial relations are particularly on the rise. South Korea is currently the second important trade partner of Turkey in the Far East," he said.

Babacan said there were 160 companies, with Korean capital, operating in Turkey and their registered capitals are around 550 million USD.

Babacan said number of Korean tourists has risen in the recent years adding that Turkey was eager to sign Free Trade Agreement with South Korea.

Turkey, South Korea to sign deal on free trade talks

Wednesday, 10 March 2010 13:07

World bulletin

The Turkish minister said two countries could cooperate in contracting, ship construction, defense industry and banking.

The Turkish state minister for foreign trade said on Wednesday that Turkey and South Korea would sign a memorandum on launching negotiations on a free trade agreement.

Turkey's State Minister Zafer Caglayan said South Korean trade minister would visit Turkey in the following week.

"I will sign with my Korean counterpart a memorandum on launching negotiations on a free trade agreement," Caglayan said during Turkish-South Korean Business Forum in Istanbul.

Caglayan said he believed two countries would sign the free trade agreement till the end of this year.

The Turkish minister said two countries could cooperate in contracting, ship construction, defense industry and banking.

Caglayan said Turkish-Korean trade was unbalanced, and two countries should raise their trade volume in a balanced way.

The Turkish minister said two countries should launch initiatives to raise their trade volume to 10 billion USD in the following few years.

The trade volume between the two countries was 4.3 billion USD in 2008, however it fell to 3.3 billion USD in 2009 due to global crisis.

Rebuilding Begins in Turkey's Quake-hit Region

Wednesday, 10 March 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Sleeping in tents and being fed by the Red Crescent, survivors from Monday's earthquake in Elazığ count their losses, often including their homes and much of their livestock, an important source of income in the region. After the rubble is cleared, Turkey's state housing authority promises, new homes will be built for residents in the affected area. Read more in "Quake survivors in Turkey start to rebuild their lives."

Three more Turkish provinces at risk of quakes.

The provinces of Bursa, İzmir and Antakya are also at risk of being hit by an earthquake, an expert has warned after the deadly quake in the eastern province of Elazığ, daily Radikal reported Tuesday. Not more quakes, just more people in quake zones

First the ground shook in Haiti, then Chile and now Turkey. The earthquakes keep coming hard and fast this year, causing people to wonder if something sinister is happening underfoot. It's not.

Ankara Welcomes Israeli Message on Elazığ Earthquake

Tuesday, 9 March 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkey has welcomed Israel's willingness to help in the aftermath of a devastating earthquake in eastern Anatolia, but warned the issue should not become part of a political agenda.

"Everything becomes secondary when a humanitarian issue appears on the agenda," Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu told a joint press conference with his Mauritanian counterpart late Monday after being asked to comment on Israel's offer.

As tensions in Turkish-Israeli relations have been on the rise recently, Davutoğlu said the Israeli statement was a welcome one, but added that the offer should remain a humanitarian move and not become a political tool.

In a written statement after the earthquake Monday, the Israeli Embassy in Ankara said Israel

stood at the side of Turkey's government and people in the face of the disaster and expressed its sympathy and solidarity.

"Israel also wishes to send its condolences to the bereaved families of those who lost their lives during the disaster and is ready to extend any kind of assistance that might be needed," the statement said.

The earthquake, which measured 6.0 on the Richter scale, struck at a depth of five kilometers below Elazığ's Karakoçan district, according to the Istanbul-based Kandilli Observatory. The strong quake killed 51 people and injured a few dozen more.

Turkish Premier Meets With Pakistani Parliament Speaker

Monday, 8 March 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

Turkish Premier Recep Tayyip Erdogan met with Parliament Speaker Fehmida Mirza of Pakistan and the accompanying lawmakers. The closed-door meeting lasted for about 45 minutes.

Mirza will be received by President Abdullah Gul on Tuesday.

She is also set to meet with Turkish Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali Sahin.

After partaking in a luncheon to be hosted by Sahin in her honor by, Mirza will hold talks with Murat Mercan, chairman of the Turkish Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, and Burhan Kayaturk, chairman of Turkey-Pakistan Inter-parliamentary Friendship Group.

Mirza and the accompanying Pakistani lawmakers will proceed to Istanbul on Wednesday.

They are expected to depart from Turkey on Friday.

ECONOMIC NEWS

TUSKON has helped globalize Turkey's name, says Erdoğan

08 March 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

The Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON) has played a great role in increasing Turkey's reputation in the world and building bridges with various foreign countries in line with the government's constructive foreign policy agenda, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said.

Speaking at a TUSKON summit on Saturday, Prime Minister Erdoğan said in every country he visits, he is almost certain to meet some very successful businessmen, adding that the leaders and most senior politicians of those countries talk of these businessmen highly and with praise. He said it was a great source of happiness for him to see the work created by Turkish businessmen in different parts of the world. "When they tell me, 'This road was built by a Turkish company or that mall is owned by a Turkish businessman,' I feel an indescribably great sense of happiness and excitement. I would like to thank all businessmen who make us proud in this way."

The prime minister said businessmen had to face problems wherever they go in the world, noting that it was their primary duty to solve these problems. He said the capacity and efforts of Turkey's business people had brought Turkey up to 17th place from 26th in the ranking of worlds' biggest economies. He thanked Turkey's businessmen who helped make his possible. He noted that in the past two months, four international credit rating agencies had increased Turkey's ratings.

“These things are happening as a result of strategy, determined policy and courageous implementation. We started out believing in the greatness of Turkey. We believed in the hardworking quality of this nation, in the fertility of our soil, and we have achieved these results.”

The prime minister also thanked TUSKON for its supportive stance on the government’s “national unity project,” a name for the AK Party’s Kurdish initiative, a plan to extend cultural rights and freedoms of Kurdish citizens to end separatism.

He also highlighted the importance of TUSKON in making Turkey’s name well-known globally, bringing together businessmen from the East and the West.

Armenian resolution won’t harm Turkey

A US resolution that branded as “genocide” the World War I incidents cannot damage Turkey, Erdoğan said, expressing outrage at the non-binding vote in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US House of Representatives passed last week.

“The Foreign Affairs Committee’s decision will not hurt Turkey, but it will greatly harm bilateral relations, interests and vision. Turkey will not be the one who loses,” Erdoğan said.

“We will not act based on grudges, ire and enmity. We will continue with a constructive stance that aims to win over hearts.”

He said while great states learn their lessons; they also look into the future. “The US Foreign Affairs Committee adopted the Armenian resolution with 22 to 23 votes. Who is the winner now? Is it the US or Armenia? Now history is being rewritten. They played out such a scenario in the Foreign Affairs Committee that it is really a farce. For God’s sake, is this how one looks at history? Is it the politicians’ role to look back at history like this? How many of those people who voted ‘yes’ for that resolution in Congress can actually point to Armenia on a map? I am warning once again. Turkey is a great country. Those who fail to understand its greatness, eventually will.”

Korea, Turkey to cooperate on Sinop nuclear power plant

11 March 2010, Thursday

TODAY’S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

An agreement of cooperation to complete feasibility and technical studies for a nuclear power plant planned for the province of Sinop on Turkey’s Black Sea coast was signed by South Korea and Turkey during the Turkey-South Korea Business Forum in İstanbul yesterday.

The agreement was drafted by Turkey’s Electricity Generation Holding Company and Korea Electric Power Corp (KEPCO), a state-controlled utility provider.

Energy and Natural Resources Minister Taner Yıldız, speaking about the agreement, stated that it “will create a working group and they will work to bring the agreement to maturity within three to four months. If we can come to an agreement on certain points and are able set a target price for the electricity produced then the partnership will develop even further.”

Yıldız stated that South Korea’s 40-year-long experience with nuclear power plants has resulted in 20 nuclear power plants and eight more currently under construction, with at least 55 percent of its energy by 2020 planned to be covered by nuclear power alone. “By 2020 we hope to be able to cover 10 percent of our total energy consumption by nuclear energy,” Yıldız said. He added that this would mean 8,000 to 10,000 megawatts being produced by the two nuclear power plants being planned for Sinop and Akkuyu in southern Turkey.

Trade needs to expand given nations' potential

Trade between the historically linked South Korea and Turkey exceeded \$3 billion in 2009 despite taking a hit due to the global financial crisis but “needs to grow,” says State Minister Ali Babacan.

Speaking at the opening of the Turkish-South Korean Business Forum yesterday, Babacan stated that the economic potential of the two nations and their historical ties would contribute to an increase in the trade volume between the two nations.

“South Korea is our second most important trading partner in the Far East, and even though our trade took a hit from the global economic crisis, it’s still above \$3 billion. When taking into account the economic potential of the two countries, however, this figure is in serious need of improvement,” said Babacan. He also stated that there are currently 160 South Korean firms in Turkey and that their total registered capital in Turkey is more than half a billion dollars. Regarding a free trade agreement between the two nations, he added that although double-taxation agreements and investment support and protection agreements have been signed between the two nations, a free trade agreement is also on the agenda.

Banking regulation won't be relaxed'

Speaking about the Turkish banking sector, Babacan was quick to note that banking could not be taken up by just anybody anymore, unlike previous periods in Turkey. He stressed that a relaxation of banking regulations would not occur and that regulations would get stricter if the economic situation called for it.

“There are currently whispers and speculation as to whether we will be relaxing ‘this or that’ in the banking sector. No. The banking framework is set in Turkey; the rules regarding who can open a bank and how they can run it are fixed. This framework will not be relaxed, but will be tightened if need be. ... We’re the only nation in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] that didn’t have to intervene in the banking sector. We didn’t even have to change our deposit guarantees, and while some countries had to guarantee 100 percent of deposits, we’re still going strong on the deposit guarantee guidelines set in July 2004.”

Regarding the Medium-term Economic Program (OVP), Babacan stated that this program is what sets Turkey apart from much of Europe, as it specifically outlines steps and targets and they are working towards meeting them. **Istanbul Today's Zaman**

Political turmoil currently on minds of investors in Turkey

11 March 2010, Thursday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

International investors see Turkish political climate as deterrent, survey shows International investors in Turkey are looking forward to a mostly stable first half of the year but are see domestic political turmoil as one of the most adverse developments to affect foreign direct investment (FDI).

According to the results of the biannual Barometer Survey conducted by the International Investors Association (YASED) among its members, a greater majority of international investors in Turkey expect growth from Turkey more than they expect the global economy to improve. The results show that 47 percent of those surveyed expected Turkey to grow in the next six months, with 40 percent expecting growth to remain stable. Those expecting growth in the global economy, however, were lower at 30 percent, with 60 percent expecting global economic growth to stabilize at current levels. The matter at the forefront of everyone’s minds, however, was

domestic political turmoil, as it was the highest-ranked potentially adverse development to affect FDI.

Employment, one of the hot topics both domestically and globally, was also in the spotlight. The survey showed that of the 120 respondents, 34 percent had decreased the number of employees in the previous six months on their payroll, while 22 percent had increased them. When asked about their expectations for the first six months of 2010, 29 percent said they would increase their current number of employees, with 54 percent saying they would keep the number of employees unchanged. Whether this is a reflection of general investor expectations in the national economy is uncertain.

YASED also revealed a new Investors' Expectation Index (IEI) that combines expectations regarding economic stability, legal framework, taxes, competition and political stability among other indicators to form a single index of investor expectations. The index, for which retrospective calculations have been made and which takes 2002 as its base year, is at 70.01 for the first quarter of 2010, up more than 12 points from a year before. In addition, 29 percent of respondents stated that the effects of the global financial crisis have come to an end, while 56 percent stated that the effects will come to an end by the end of the year.

Turkey makes largest amount of gold jewelry exports to UAE in 2009

09 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) was the biggest purchaser of Turkey's gold jewelry last year, at \$348.9 million, while the US followed with \$120 million in Turkish gold jewelry imports. Turkey exported \$57.3 million in gold jewelry to Germany, its third-largest market, in 2009, data from the Export Promotion Center (İGEME) released Monday showed. According to the data, Turkey's total gold jewelry exports amounted to \$1.1 billion last year. The figures showed a \$500 million decline compared to 2008, which the center attributed to a global credit crunch. Turkey's gold jewelry exports jumped from \$384.2 million in 2000 to a robust \$1.6 billion in 2008.

The list of countries with the highest gold jewelry imports from Turkey also included Iraq with \$43.2 million and Russia with \$39.9 million. Kazakhstan, Israel, Italy, Azerbaijan and Libya rounded out the top 10 countries importing gold jewelry from Turkey in 2009.

Turkey has expanded its presence in the global gold jewelry market in the past 10 years. The country is currently among the top three gold jewelry producers, along with Italy and India, and it was the world's 11th largest gold jewelry exporter in 2008. Some 70 percent of Turkish gold jewelry is exported, while the remaining 30 percent goes to domestic customers. The annual gold jewelry production in Turkey is around 300 tons. The gold jewelry sector in Turkey provides jobs for 250,000 people. Ankara and İzmir have the biggest share in Turkey's gold jewelry production.

Female labor force participation still weighty problem for Turkey

08 March 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

As International Women's Day celebrates economic, political and social achievements around the world and throughout history, economic independence stemming from women's participation in the labor market seems like a distant dream in Turkey.

According to a research note from the Bahçeşehir University Center for Economic and Social Research (BETAM), female labor force participation in Turkey is a dismally low 26.9 percent, much lower than comparable economies in Latin America, the Middle East and current European Union members. While the male labor force participation rate was a healthy 74.6 percent in 2008, comparable to the group of countries in BETAM's note, Morocco was the closest to Turkey with a 29 percent female labor force participation rate.

EU member Portugal led the pack, with 69 percent of its women in the workforce. The Latin American countries in the group -- Brazil, Argentina and Chile -- were all leagues ahead of Turkey.

The note stated that from 1989 onward, the labor force participation rate of women in Turkey has been steadily dropping as industrialization meant a decreasing population dependent on agriculture for their income. Using data from the Turkish Statistics Institute (TurkStat), the note showed that the participation rate fell from 36 percent in 1989 to 26.9 percent in 2008, though the rate improved slowly in the high-growth years starting in 2003. The decrease stems from the industrialization of Turkey and the fact that women who had worked on farms lacked the skills needed in an urban economy -- especially poignant given the country's rapid urbanization in the 1990s.

Education, according to the note, did not do much to address this problem. BETAM highlighted that serious problems are faced by middle and high school graduates, who face a whopping 21.1 percent unemployment rate, the highest out of the group BETAM analyzed.

"In general, the fact that a high school education does not equip women with skills for the labor market coupled with the reality that childrearing and gender roles increase the opportunity costs of working lead to a dismal labor market situation for women," the note stated. University education also did not help Turkey's situation, as university educated women face a 13.8 percent unemployment rate -- the highest out of all the countries studied.

Regarding whether Turkey could reach its goal of having a female labor force participation rate of 40 percent by 2023, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the republic, BETAM stated that Turkey would need to have an annual growth in the rate by a little over 1 percentage point on an annual basis.

A similar report by the İstanbul Chamber of Public Accountants and Financial Advisors (İSMMM) stated that the crisis year of 2009 was especially difficult for women, who saw their incomes evaporate, with 18.4 percent of women facing decreased incomes and 25.4 percent dipping into their savings.

Speaking to the Anatolia news agency, Saniye Dedeoğlu, an assistant professor in the department of labor economics and industrial relations at the University of Muğla, stated that women are overburdened in Turkey with household responsibilities and childrearing. She stated that according to a survey by TurkStat in 2006, women spend on average five hours and 17 minutes per day on household chores and looking after children, whereas this figure was only 51 minutes per day for men. Moreover, men spend on average six hours and eight minutes per day on economic activities whereas this number is a lower four hours and 19 minutes for women.

"The childcare services provided by the government are not enough," stated Dedeoğlu, adding that this meant that much of the childrearing activities weighed upon women. She noted that a

similar situation also existed with the elderly, whose care was socially assigned to females in the household.

Turkey's gold jewelry exports reaches 1.1 billion USD

08 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's gold jewelry exports reached 1.1 billion USD in 2009.

Arab and US consumers preferred the Turkish gold the most, as United Arab Emirates (UAE) imported gold jewelry amounting to 348.9 million USD, while USA purchased gold jewels worth 120 million USD from Turkey in 2009, a report from the Turkish Export Promotion Center (İGEME) said on Monday.

Germany, Iraq, Russia, Kazakhstan, Israel, Italy, Azerbaijan-Nahcevan and Libya were other countries that imported the highest amount of gold products from Turkey in 2009, İGEME's report said.

Turkey's jewelry exports amounted to 1.6 billion USD in 2008, putting the country at the 11th place in the world market list.

Turkey is currently one of the top 3 countries in the world gold jewelry market, together with Italy and India.

The country produces 250-300 tons of gold jewelry products annually.

The sector currently employs nearly 250,000 people, and it comprises of 6,000 producers and 35,000 jewelry shops.

Turkish businessmen eye world of opportunities in Indonesia

07 March 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON) has worked hard over the last four years to bring more than 8,500 foreign businessmen to Turkey from more than 135 different nations, resulting in more than \$14 billion in trade for the nation, but is still looking for opportunities in places like Indonesia.

TUSKON Chairman Rızanur Meral, speaking at the Turkey-Indonesia Trade and investment Forum in Jakarta on Wednesday, highlighted the importance of TUSKON for Turkey's economy. Regarding the volume of this support, Meral stated that TUSKON members had had more than 200,000 business meetings in four years, realizing more than \$14 billion in trade. He added that \$12 billion of this was solely from trade and that "this trade led the way to many investments being made, and therefore, growth should be even quicker in the future because of this."

Meral, speaking to members of the press, mentioned that Indonesia had become an increasingly important hub for world trade, adding that "our work as TUSKON is to watch this nation closely. Indonesia's ministers and business world are looking to Turkey as a way to enter the European market. They are asking for our support to help us enter these crucial markets, especially with regards to exports."

Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KADIN) Deputy Chairman for Tax and Fiscal Policy Haryadi B. Sukamdani stated that they aimed to increase Indonesia's trade with Turkey twofold in the next five years. "Indonesia has many opportunities for investors in the steel,

electronics, energy, agriculture, textile, telecommunication and pharmaceuticals industries. But our trade volume is only \$2 billion. We need to increase this.” Meral also stated that “after entering into the agenda of Indonesia thanks to TUSKON’s visit, we expect the trade volume to exceed \$5 billion in the next five years. Indonesia has been a neglected country up until today, but we are not late as Indonesia has started welcoming foreign investors.” Indonesia has free trade agreements with Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. Meral also remarked that a similar agreement needs to be signed with Turkey as soon as possible.

G20 will draw new economic lines

Indonesian Deputy Foreign Trade Minister Mahendra Siregar stated that “emerging markets, especially those in Asia, will be the engine behind economic growth. Indonesia was one of the fastest nations to exit the crisis because 45 percent of exports are to Asia. We hope that the door to Asia for Turkey’s investors is Indonesia.” Siregar stressed the importance of Turkey and Indonesia being a member of the G20, saying, “The world’s strategy is now being drawn by the G20 rather than the G8. Half of the G20 is made up of developing nations, and because of this, we need to form a strong economic relationship.”

Indonesia’s businessmen, who managed to support a growth rate of 4.5 percent during the period of economic crisis, converged on the forum to meet the 40 Turkish businessmen in attendance. The Turkish and Indonesian Businessmen’s Association, an organizer of the event, declared that they could only invite a certain number of businessmen to the opening meeting in an effort to prevent overcrowding. Others met with the Turkish party in one-on-one gatherings outside of the meeting.

Meral stated that they attended the forum with 28 companies from Turkey and met 400 Indonesian businessmen, adding that Indonesia has many investment opportunities in the mining and construction businesses. Ten investors from Turkey are now active in Indonesia, with six of them in the mining sector. However, a rapid increase in this number is expected as business talks continue and potential cooperation between the two countries is likely to continue.

The secretary-general of the Developing 8 (D8) also commented about the economic relationship between the two nations at the forum. “Indonesia’s population is three times that of Turkey, so we’re a big market. But there are very few Turkish firms doing business with us. We have lots of natural resources such as coal, gold, petroleum and wood that the strong Turkish industry can take advantage of. Our nations are very similar as we are both a majority Muslim country, with a secular and democratic government. Our [gross domestic product] GDP is \$500 billion, while Turkey’s is \$700 [billion], and we are the 16th biggest economy while Turkey is 15th. The relationship between these two nations needs to be strengthened, and we should start this with trade.”

Firms looking for opportunities

Various Turkish businessmen speaking to Sunday’s Zaman gave examples of the potential that Indonesia has for Turkish investors. Hatko Sports Technologies Chairman Erdem Ünlüçetinkaya said they spoke with many sports clubs in Indonesia that were paying more than twice as much for artificial turf as Hatko’s offerings. Ünlüçetinkaya stated that they have much potential to milk as their production costs were half those of Indonesian manufacturers. “Our product fits FIFA criteria, and we’re one of 24 firms in the world with a two-star rating. We export more than 900,000 square meters of artificial turf, and we also produce for golf, landscaping and baseball fields. Our biggest export market is South Korea, and we’ve signed agreements to export some 300,000 square meters of artificial turf to the country this year.”

Another example of a firm eyeing opportunities in Indonesia is Anadolu Nitro, an explosive materials manufacturing firm in the province of Malatya. Anadolu Nitro Chairman Nurettin Karabekmez, speaking to Sunday's Zaman, stated that they recently sold 25 percent of their explosives manufacturing facilities in Malatya to Spanish company Maxam. Karabekmez stated that "with our new partner we want to enter the Indonesian market, which consumes more than 600,000 tons of non-military explosives per year. Mining in this country is developing quickly, and it is also used in the building of roads. Indonesia currently imports 200,000 tons of non-military explosives, so they were very welcoming to our firm." He also added that the entirety of Turkey uses 200,000 tons of non-military explosives, or equal to the amount that Indonesia imports -- roughly TL 5 million.

The TUSKON chairman also announced to the press that the World Trade Bridge event held in İstanbul last June brought more than \$10 million to Turkey through plane tickets, hotel costs and shopping by the attendees. He stressed the importance of this event for investment in Turkey and, more specifically, the tourism industry. Some 2,250 people attended this fair. This year it will be held in Indonesia in June.

The Indonesian president will be visiting Turkey in June, while Indonesia's minister of trade investment will be coming earlier, in late April. Turkish Foreign Trade Minister Zafer Çağlayan will visit Indonesia with a delegation of businessmen in May to further business relations.

Nabucco pipeline project approved in Turkey's Parliament

06 March 2010, Saturday

TODAY'S ZAMAN ANKARA

The strategically crucial Nabucco pipeline got a thumbs up from the Turkish Parliament on Wednesday, breaking legal ground in Turkey for the pipeline connecting the country's eastern neighbors to Austria.

Parliament passed a bill approving the Nabucco project and the establishment of a national Nabucco company dealing with issues regarding the new pipeline. The bill, titled "The Acceptance Agreement Regarding the Nabucco Project between Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Turkey," was passed after debate on the floor of Parliament.

The bill will allow the pipeline to be constructed on Turkish soil to transport natural gas coming into the country from the south and east and into Europe. Energy and Natural Resources Minister Taner Yıldız thanked Parliament after the bill was passed and responded to criticism questioning whether such a pipeline would benefit Turkey financially. He stated that although an "entrance fee" for natural gas coming into Turkey would not be charged, a transportation fee would be levied.

He also added that the fact a major part of the pipeline would run through Turkey would be advantageous. "We will have the right to charge a different tax rate for natural gas going through Turkey. The agreement between the nations is for a tax rate of 16.6 percent that will be divided equally among them, but we also have a separate 61 percent tax rate that we'll charge.

BOTAŞ [the state-owned Turkish Pipeline Corporation] will also charge an operating fee. With six partners, we've acted to give Turkey as great an advantage as possible," said Yılmaz.

TÜSIAD: We support a resolution to Cyprus issue

06 March 2010, Saturday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Turkish Industrialists and Business-men's Association (TÜSİAD) Chairman Ümit Boyner has said that settling the Cyprus issue is one of the oldest unresolved issues of the present day while stressing the importance of continuing to work toward settling this sticky problem.

Speaking on Friday in Lefkoşa before a meeting with Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (KKTC) President Mehmet Ali Talat, Boyner stated that as a representative of the business world in Turkey she would give her full support to resolving the issues between the KKTC and Greek Cyprus.

Boyner, saying that as TÜSİAD they've supported the EU accession process for the last 15 years, stressed that "the Cyprus problem has never been something that we've overlooked. In much of our work we know that political gridlock brings about economic gridlock, and our reports show this clearly happening."

"As the global economic structure is transforming, Cyprus, along with northern Cyprus, has the power to become an economic power in the region. We fully support the continuing efforts to find a resolution to this issue," Boyner said. The determination and confidence of the KKTC to resolve the issue is something that TÜSİAD wants to see continue, Boyner stated. She added that the steps taken would help draw a roadmap regarding the political measures that can be taken, along with a plan for an economic model and structure for Cyprus.

Turkish Cypriot Turkish Businessmen's Association (İŞAD) President Metin Yalçın, also joining TÜSİAD's delegation, stated that the two sister organizations would continue to draw up economic and political solutions to the situation. The two organizations worked together between 2002 and 2004 to find points of resolution for the two sides to the Cyprus debate.

Yalçın emphasized the need for a political solution with a strong economic foundation that it can build on. He added that his organization would be speaking with TÜSİAD on designing this foundation.

Boyner, answering a question from the press regarding the presidential election in the KKTC, stated that "we came here to support the efforts to resolve this issue and to find avenues where we can support this process. We support a resolution; we don't hold an opinion on the election nor do we support a particular candidate."

Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association Chairwoman Ümit Boyner said they have faith Cyprus, along with northern Cyprus, has the potential to become an economic power in the region following an anticipated resolution to Cyprus issue

Turkey's Deputy PM says no IMF program talks until May

Wednesday, 10 March 2010 12:20

World bulletin

The Treasury said it invited an IMF team to Ankara after the fund and World Bank Spring meetings on April 24-25 for the regular Article IV consultations.

Turkish State Minister & Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan said on Wednesday that there would not be any negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) regarding the program till May.

Asked if stand-by talks with the IMF terminated, Babacan said Treasury Undersecretariat issued a statement and gave information about how the process would operate.

Babacan said every IMF member made review once a year within the framework of 4th Article, and noted that Turkey did this review lately in May 2007 and the report was made public in

November 2007.

"As long time has passed, we decided to carry out the study soon and following telephone conversations on Tuesday evening we agreed on beginning of May. No meeting will be in question on the program till May. Following the 4th Article review, we will decide on the framework with IMF under the conditions of that day."

The Treasury said it invited an IMF team to Ankara after the fund and World Bank Spring meetings on April 24-25 for the regular Article IV consultations. The discussions will allow a "comprehensive evaluation of how relations with the IMF will be carried out in the future," the statement said. Turkey last held article IV consultations in March 2007.

The IMF backs Turkey's medium term economic program and future cooperation will be based on that, the Treasury said in a statement on its Web site.

Turkish banks announce record profits in 2009

Sunday, 07 March 2010 14:57

WORLD BULLETIN

Turkish banks announced record profits in their balance sheets for 2009. Ziraat Bankası which announced a gross profit of 3.5 billion TL in 2009 was followed by Garanti Bankası which announced a net consolidated profit of 3.1 billion TL, with some of the banks nearly quadrupling their profitability ratios in the past five years. (1USD is traded at 1.5430TL).

Other banks which announced high profits were Is Bankası with 2.752 Billion TL and Akbank with 2.722 TL.

Total net profitability in the entire banking sector in Turkey was 5 billion TL in 2005, which doubled to 10 billion TL in 2006.

It reached 14 billion TL in 2007 and slightly declined to 12 billion TL in 2008.

The total profitability of the banks in 2009, which boosted their profitability thanks to the revenues from loans and bonds despite the global crisis, is estimated to have exceeded 20 billion TL.

The Turkish banking sector saw net annual profits over 3 billion TL for the first time in its history.

Following are the profitability of Banks (in TL) in the last five years based on balance sheets of Banks and data compiled from Turkey's Union of Banks.

BANKS 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009

01 - Ziraat Bankası	1,846,000	2,100,000	2,351,000	2,134,000	3,511,000
02 - Garanti Bankası	752,000	1,167,000	2,421,008	1,891,002	3,100,000
03 - Is Bankası	1,379,940	1,415,263	2,026,795	1,819,030	2,752,304
04 - Akbank	1,489,668	1,580,145	2,040,429	1,782,252	2,722,661
05 - Halk Bankası	525,325	864,259	1,132,620	1,016,297	1,665,369
06 - Yapi Kredi Bankası	697,000	1,019,000	1,265,000	1,553,000	

Turkey completely to end debt to IMF in 2013

Wednesday, 10 March 2010 11:14

WORLD BULLETIN

Turkey owes nearly eight billion USD of debt to IMF.

Turkey's debt to International Monetary Fund (IMF) will completely end in 2013.
Turkey owes nearly eight billion USD of debt to IMF.
IMF and Turkey have made stand-by deal for 19 times so far, and only the last two of them were completed successfully.
Turkey made its first stand-by deal with IMF on January 1, 1961 which lasted for one year.
With the stand-by deals, Turkey obtained a resource of over 50 billion USD from IMF.

Earlier today, Turkish Treasury Undersecretariat said that an IMF delegation was invited to Turkey on April 24-25 to have talks on Article IV following IMF-World Bank spring meetings.

Turkish Minister to join economic meeting in Algeria

Tuesday, 09 March 2010 12:01

WORLD BULLETIN

Yilmaz will co-chair the meeting of delegations together with Algerian Energy and Mining Chakib Khelil. Turkish State Minister Cevdet Yilmaz departed for Algeria on Tuesday.

Yilmaz will attend the Turkey-Algeria Joint Economic Committee meeting.

Yilmaz will co-chair the meeting of delegations together with Algerian Energy and Mining Chakib Khelil.

He will also meet with Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia, Commerce Minister El Hachemi Djaaboub, Water Resources Minister Abdelmalek Sellal, Transportation Minister Amar Tou, Minister of Relations with the Parliament Mahmoud Khedri, Public Works Minister Amar Ghoul, Minister of Industry and Promotion of Investments Abdelhamid Semmar, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Rachid Benaissa.

Trade volume between the two countries increased to \$5 billion in 2008 from \$1.6 billion in 2003. However, in 2009, it dropped to \$3.8 billion after a fall in Turkey's natural gas and iron products imports.

Turkey's exports to Algeria was up 10 percent in 2009 to reach \$1.7 billion.

Turkey holds talks to give back unused swine flu vaccines

Tuesday, 09 March 2010 14:34

WORLD BULLETIN

Turkish Health Minister Recep Akdag said, "swine flu pandemic has almost petered out in Turkey."

Turkey has held talks with pharmaceutical companies to give unused swine flu vaccines back after the pandemic was reported to be petering out in the country.

Turkish Health Minister Recep Akdag said on Tuesday that Turkey had ordered 43 million doses last year but bought some 17 million doses of it.

"We have held talks with manufacturers to give a significant part back," Akdag said. "However, we will keep 2-3 million doses in reserves for emergencies."

In January, Akdag had said the pandemic H1N1 infection killed over 600 people in Turkey this winter, adding, "swine flu pandemic has almost petered out in Turkey."

The number of deaths caused by swine flu was 415 in Turkey as of mid-December when health ministry officials last announced the number of deaths.

Akdag reiterated that the pandemic was almost over. He said a second pandemic wave could be

expected in autumn but it would not be a widespread one.

"We are about to close deals (with manufacturer companies) for buying back," Akdag said.

Turkey spends \$27.5 bln for cell phone handsets so far

Wednesday, 10 March 2010 13:19

WORLD BULLETIN

Turkish people have spent \$27.5 billion for 135 million mobile phone handsets sold in Turkey since 1994, either registered or unregistered, a study showed.

Turkish people have spent \$27.5 billion for 135 million mobile phone handsets sold in Turkey since 1994, either registered or unregistered, a study showed.

Three mobile phone operators --Turkcell, Vodafone and Avea-- has 63.6 million subscribers in Turkey as of December 2009.

The study, made by the Mobile Communication Systems Dealers Association, covers the period from 1994, when mobile phone services were first introduced in the country, and the beginning of 2010.

Turkey legally imported some 105 million mobile handsets in 16 years. Around 19 million illegal phones, which did not have a valid International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI) number, has been registered after a law introduced in 2005.

The study revealed that there are still 10.5 million illegal sets in use.

It also showed that 72 million handsets out of 135 million mobile phone sets are now considered trash. Total amount of trash handsets are worth around \$18 billion.

Dubai's Emaar plans \$1.5 bln-project in Turkey

Monday, 08 March 2010 16:49

WORLD BULLETIN

Dubai-based developer Emaar Properties plans to launch a \$1.5 billion real estate project in Istanbul, company's CEO in Turkey said on Monday.

Dubai-based developer Emaar Properties plans to launch a \$1.5 billion real estate project in Istanbul, company's CEO in Turkey said on Monday.

Ozan Balaban said Emaar bought a land in Camlica district, in the Asian side of Istanbul, last year.

"We plan to launch a \$1.5 billion mixed-use project, which includes a five-star hotel, residences, shopping mall and offices on that land," he said. "We will start an advertisement campaign after September."

Balaban also said that Emaar, the builder of world's tallest tower Burj Khalifa, believes in Turkey and especially Istanbul, adding that Istanbul would become one of the most important metropolises of the world in the next decade.

Minister says Turkey's economy sees "moderate recovery"

Monday, 08 March 2010 14:31

WORLD BULLETIN

Ergun's statement came after Turkstat, country's statistics authority, announced recent figures for industrial output.

Turkish Industry and Trade Minister Nihat Ergun said on Monday country's economy has seen moderate recovery since the second quarter of 2009 after a stagnation caused by the global economic downturn.

Ergun's statement came after Turkstat, country's statistics authority, announced recent figures for industrial output.

Turkey's industrial production was up 12.1 percent year-on-year in January 2010. However, industrial production was down 15.3 percent when compared to previous month.

Ergun attributed downward figures to seasonal effects.

"When considered net of seasonal effects, the industrial production index is in an upward trend since March 2009," he said.

Ergun said Turkey has started to weather impacts of the global economic crisis before several other economies thanks to measures taken by the government, adding that recent figures showed that recovery would continue.

SOCIAL NEWS

Earthquake flattens Turkish villages, kills 51

08 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

A strong, pre-dawn earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 6 struck eastern Turkey on Monday, killing 51 people as it knocked down stone and mud-brick houses and minarets in at least six villages, the government said.

The earthquake surprised many people as they slept, crumpling buildings into piles of rubble. Panicked survivors fled into the narrow village streets, some climbing out of windows, as more than 50 aftershocks measuring up to 5.5 and 5.3 magnitude rattled the region.

The Kandilli seismology center said the quake hit at 4:32 a.m. (0232 GMT, 9 p.m. EST Sunday) near the village of Basyurt in Elazığ province, about 340 miles (550 kilometers) east of Ankara, the capital.

The government initially put the death toll at 57 but later lowered it to 51. It gave no explanation for the discrepancy. In addition to the deaths, about 34 people were being treated for injuries from the quake, Turkey's crisis center said.

The worst-hit area was the village of Okçular, where 17 people were killed. As relatives rushed in for news of their loved ones, authorities blocked off the area so ambulances and rescue teams could maneuver on the village's narrow roads. Residents lit fires to keep warm in the winter cold. "The village is totally flattened," village administrator Hasan Demirdağ told private NTV television.

Ali Rıza Ferhat of Okçular said he was woken up by the jolt.

"I tried to get out of the door but it wouldn't open. I came out of the window and started helping my neighbors," he told NTV television. "We removed six bodies."

Television footage showed rescue workers and soldiers at Okçular lifting debris as villagers looked on. Rescuers dug into the dirt to find the body of an elderly man and quickly covered him with a sheet. Two women sat on mattresses wrapped in blankets. The temblor also knocked down barns, killing farm animals.

Another 13 people were killed in the village of Yukarı Demirci, Gov. Muammer Erol said, adding that by noon everyone had been removed from the rubble.

"Everything has been knocked down, there is not a stone in place," said Yadin Apaydın, administrator for the village of Yukari Kanatlı, where he said at least three people died. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Kandilli Observatory's director, Mustafa Erdik, urged residents not to enter any damaged homes, warning they could topple from aftershocks that Erdik said could last for days.

Erdoğan blamed the region's mud-brick buildings for the many deaths and said the government has instructed its housing agency to construct quake-proof homes in the area. He said ambulance helicopters, prefabricated homes and mobile kitchens were being sent, and Turkey's Red Crescent aid group rushed in tents and blankets.

The quake was also felt in the neighboring provinces of Tunceli, Bingöl and Diyarbakır, where residents fled to the streets in panic and stayed outdoors. Schools were closed for two days in the region. In Tunceli province, students were sent home after the quake caused a school's walls to crack, the state-run Anatolia news agency reported.

A museum in Elazığ displaying artifacts from the Iron-age Kingdom of Urartu was not affected by the quake.

Earthquakes are frequent in Turkey, much of which lies on top of two main fault lines. In 1999, two powerful earthquakes struck northwestern Turkey, killing about 18,000 people.

The Elazığ quake followed deadly temblors in Haiti and Chile, but Bernard Doft, the seismologist for the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute in Utrecht, said there was no direct connection between the three.

"These events are too far apart to be of direct influence to each other," he said.

Richard Luckett, a seismologist from the British Geological Survey, said there has not been a spike in global seismic activity.

"If there was a big increase in the number of magnitude 6.0s in the past decade we would know it because we would see it in the statistics," Luckett said. "We haven't seen an increase in 7.0s either."

He said scientists often see strong quakes but they don't get reported because the damage or death toll is minimal.

"The point is that earthquakes are common and always have been," he said.

In other Turkish earthquakes, a 5.7-magnitude one in 2007 damaged buildings in Elazığ and a 6.4-magnitude one in 2003 killed 83 children when a school dormitory collapsed in Bingöl. The collapse was blamed on poor construction.

Turkish prime minister on quake in eastern Turkey

08 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan warned people in the eastern province of Elazığ to stay away from the damaged buildings since aftershocks were continuing to shake the region. Prime Minister Erdoğan said, "51 people were killed and 71 others were injured when a 6-magnitude earthquake hit Başyurt hamlet in the town of Karakoçan. Ambulance helicopters were sent to the quake-hit region from Ankara, Kayseri and Van. Turkish relief agency, the Red Crescent, dispatched 230 tents, a thousand blankets, 20 prefabricated houses, 2 mobile kitchens and experienced personnel to Elazığ."

"A number of ambulances, health staff and search-and-rescue teams arrived in Elazığ from the neighboring provinces. State Minister & Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Çiçek, State Minister

Cevdet Yılmaz, Public Works & Housing Minister Mustafa Demir, Health Minister Recep Akdağ and deputies left for Elazığ earlier today," he said.

Prime Minister Erdoğan expressed profound sorrow over loss of lives in the quake.

"Unfortunately, houses made of sun-dried brick constitute the architecture in the region. We have given necessary directives to the provincial authorities to change architectural structure in the region," he said.

"Fifty-five aftershocks followed the main quake. I warn residents in the region to stay away from the damaged buildings," he added.

1st International Theater Festival to be held in Antalya

Tuesday, March 9, 2010

ANTALYA - Anatolia News Agency

HURIYAT

The Mediterranean city of Antalya, the capital of Turkish tourism, has also become popular for theater events, including the 1st International Theater Festival, which will take place in the city from May 10 to 26.

Antalya State Theater Director Selim Gürata said the Haşim İşcan Cultural Center would be home to the festival under the leadership of the Antalya State Theater.

There are already cinema, opera, ballet and piano festivals in the city, but not a theater festival, Gürata said, adding that Culture Minister Ertuğrul Günay supports the festival and has asked for it to be organized in ancient cities.

"This festival will be a kind of rehearsal for us. It will turn into an international ancient-theaters festival in the coming years," Gürata said. "We will bring all of our plays to the stage at ancient theaters. The main concept of our festival is to revive theater in the geography where it was born."

Berliner Ensemble expected

According to Gürata, four or five foreign plays and five Turkish plays will be performed during the festival. He added that government-sponsored theaters from Ankara, Erzurum, Istanbul, Eskişehir and İzmit are expected to take part in the festival, as are troupes from Romania, Russia, Germany, Italy and Abkhazia.

"Probably the Berliner Ensemble, the largest theater group in Germany, will take part," he added, noting that businesspeople, tourism officials and nongovernmental organizations in the city have all financially supported the event.

The festival will start with a show by the Italian Street Theater and the lighting of a festival torch, Gürata said, adding that some 15,000 people are expected to attend the event. "There will be subtitles for foreign plays," he said. "We will do this for the first time in Antalya."

The festival program for 2011 will be clear in July, Gürata said, adding that next year's event will be included in a variety of international fairs and tourism-company tours. "We are also targeting tourist groups to come for the theater festival," he said. "We are working hard for this. Tourism needs the support of art."

According to Gürata, the Haşim İşcan Cultural Center has thus far not been promoted well. "This festival will raise awareness about this culture center. We want to show that there is still a transportation problem and that a solution should be found for it," he said. "We will organize the festival there in order to show that Antalya needs a new theater center."

COMMENTARY

Inside a 'hyphenated-American' war

ALÍ H. ASLAN

TODAYS ZAMAN

Like it or not, US Congressman Ron Paul can be unabashedly blunt, if not offensive, when it comes to speaking his mind. During last Thursday's roller coaster mark-up hearing at the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on the controversial "Armenian Genocide" resolution, he seemed sick and tired with special interests' impact on the US Congress. He called for the US to pursue its national interests, regardless of what "hyphenated-Americans" press for.

The hyphenated-Americans in this particular case were those of Turkic and Armenian descent who have long been engaged in a skirmish over how horrible events in Ottoman-ruled Asia Minor during World War I should be described. Armenians say it should be officially affirmed that Anatolian Armenians were victims of a premeditated genocide. Turks vehemently disagree with that legally binding term but tend to acknowledge that atrocities happened. Both sides expend a lot of resources on lobbying Congress. What is presented as a genuine vote of conscience (or technically speaking, sense of Congress) on the topic is often marred by selfish politics and hypocrisy by proponents for both sides. With all due respect to perhaps a few members who truly believe in human rights, who would care about the history of Armenians and Turks in the US Congress, absent the huge lobbying push?

Had Turks lent some of their lobbying budget to Armenians, perhaps that could have taken care of the reparations that they fear they'd have to pay in the event the genocide gets officially recognized by the US. Armenians, on the other hand, could have purchased lots of Aegean islands from cash-thirsty Greece with their lobbying money. Seriously speaking, I wish Armenians had invested their financial and human resources in things like enhancing civil society and critical thinking in Turkey. That would most probably yield the desired outcome in the process of Turkish self-criticism more effectively. Vice versa, Turks would be better off in many ways if they had invested more on cultural and social exchanges especially with diaspora Armenians.

I find a lot of parallels between the way lawyers and lawmakers operate. Lawyers profit from people's inability to resolve their disputes among themselves. So do lawmakers. In this case, some of them get paid by pro-Armenian enterprises, others by pro-Turks. And that gives me one other good reason to support all reconciliation efforts between Turks and Armenians: putting lawmakers out of business. The final tally might have worked in favor of the Armenian side in the latest congressional saga, with 23 members voting for and 22 against the resolution. No side can claim such a close call a victory. But the business was certainly lucrative for many congressmen.

I don't understand at all why Americans and Turks should take the US Congress as an institution this seriously. With all the corruption and lack of ethical reforms, its reputation as "the people's house" has become increasingly tarnished. After all, isn't this the institution that has so far been unable to come up with sensible plans to end widespread corporate abuse, such as those by health insurance companies? Bailouts for big guys are abundant in Congress, while they pay little heed to the ordinary man's real concerns. No wonder politicians rank low in most public trust surveys.

The genocide war is a business for many Armenian and Turkish groups. Aside from professional advocates, some prominent civil society organizations depend on this conflict as a source of public visibility, resources and connections. There are certainly many sincere people who operate and support these organizations to have their voices heard. But a lot of politics, self-promotion and profiteering can also come into play.

Given the ongoing post-traumatic effects of the events early in the last century in Ottoman territory, the politics of fear, suspicion and revenge have so far worked effectively on both sides. It's high time now for Armenians and Turks to question the wisdom of their respective strategies, which don't seem to be getting us anywhere. Since no decisive victory seems likely for both sides ahead, they need to put more thought into how to divert this from a lose-lose direction to a win-win situation. Instead of subsidizing legislative wars in places like the US Congress, they should give more of a chance to dialogue, understanding, mutual empathy and reconciliation. See, I may also be a "hyphenated-American," originally from Turkey. But I'm as determined to put politicians out of business as most unhyphenated-Americans are!

How can peace come to nations tired of historical conflicts?

GÖKNUR AKÇADAĞ

TODAYS ZAMAN

How peace can come to the region seems to depend on multi-sided developments these days, as Azerbaijan reiterates her war threats over the Nagorno-Karabakh problem.

The war between Azerbaijan and Armenia for Nagorno-Karabakh has left some 35,000 dead since the 1980s. Still some mention the war. The Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense has created tension by saying: "Diplomacy has solved nothing for 15 years. Azerbaijan cannot wait for another 15 years. It is time for recourse to military action." The threat of the war option has been constantly published in the Azerbaijani press in recent days, based on statements from Azerbaijani politicians.

Man has coped with his enemy in three ways from the past to the present: by fighting, by running away or by finding a way to like or compromise with the enemy. But the nations and states that have fought each other for centuries were unable to wipe out their enemies. The past art of ruling is out of date today. Past methods of coping with the enemy are useless. It is inevitable that conflicts and enmities must be reduced for the sake of regional and world peace.

It is more and more inevitable that methods which bring peace become favored in implementing solutions instead of exploiting crisis and conflict. We are all obliged to look to the future and end the enmity no matter what kinds of difficulties were suffered in the past. Bequeathing conflicting societies-nations-states to the new generation and our children along with passing on a legacy of revenge would not be useful.

Common aims and emotions and internal and external interests must be given a common sense approach when the top-level international policies of the states are designed. The questions of how peace can come if it will come and how the historical conflict between these two states or nations will end may be answered by clarifying the common aims, their own interests and the feelings and consciences of the parties to make peace. This common aim is regional peace for Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Nowadays, global and regional policies do not support the claim "I can survive without others." Therefore, a solution must be found for Turkey and Azerbaijan-Armenia.

The message of the heavy metal group Megadeth in its song “Peace Sells... But Who’s Buying?” referring to the Cold War is highly important now. Perhaps those who have hope for peace in their hearts cannot understand why others react when closed doors open. Therefore, hundreds of readers express their reaction to the question “Who, in fact, owns Karabakh?” in the readers’ comments part of the news. Different opinions are voiced instead of only one-sided and status quo supporting views. Emotional approaches are cast away while more realistic, objective and audacious comments are submitted to the question of “Where are we now and where must we be in this problem?” The psychologist Dr. Doğan Kökdemir says, “The conviction that ‘peace is wanted by everybody’ is such a strong conviction that bewilderment about those who oppose it is great.”

He talks about peace briefly:

“Peace needs more effort than war. Peace is difficult because human behavior is influenced by several things at the same time and in a complicated way. Peace, unlike war, needs more sacrifice. It wants you to think about not your interests but everyone’s... Peace needs not to be betrayed.”

How much is a realistic prerequisite to finding a solution to the international relations problem that Karabakh has created, a crucial point for two former Soviet Republics, tied to diplomacy in the course of the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations?

More effort from mediators

Those who understand history, international relations and the attitudes and aims of the parties involved suggest that the mediator countries should exert more effort to solve the conflict and add that this is the way to apply pressure because the place where a solution can be found to the Karabakh question between Armenia and Azerbaijan is Russia. Azerbaijan unfairly pressuring Turkey, warning, “Do not take steps to be friends with my enemy,” as though Turkey were the country where the solution may be found, ruined the steps taken toward regional peace. There are Turks who have a special bond with Azerbaijan and know well the importance of dual relations in friendship and cooperation with Azerbaijanis that, on the other hand, are afraid of revealing their ideas and receiving adverse reactions even though they think the attitude of Azerbaijan toward Turkey is unfair; there are Turks who suggest that we must support Azerbaijan supposing that the conflict can be solved through local solutions without even knowing what the Nagorno-Karabakh problem is; and there are Turks between these two. Will our historic friendship and required cooperation be dependent on the everlasting normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations? The only way to relieve Azerbaijan must be through diplomacy, not an emotional “we are on your side” approach. Azerbaijan must be reassured that what is trying to be done is a part of finding a solution for the region. Interruptions that minimized the multi-optional regional and global policies stressed by Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu will bring the hopes and expectations for peace that may ease Turkey in troubled areas in her foreign policy to a halt. But phasing and explaining these policies may accelerate the solutions. The deadlock in Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia results from the fact that all the parties involved want a solution only they like. But on the other hand, the problem is that Russia has not yet given the nod to the two countries for a solution, even though she is able to give real signals for a solution, as she wants to control the situation for the sake of her interests. The option of war brought to the agenda by Azerbaijan is not an option to be supported by any country, particularly Russia.

At the very same time, bringing forward the resolution in the United States has been an action to stop the initiative as well as the possibility of peace and consensus by the Armenian diaspora --

even if it was approved by 23 votes to 22 by the committee. This means nothing other than trying to have Turkey pressured by America. The countries, for the sake of peace, mustn't surrender the future of their nations to the problems of the past. The US shouldn't be a country that succumbs to a trivial agenda item of an ethnic diaspora based on prejudice.

The former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroder said in his speech during an award ceremony held by the Turkish-German Academic Platform: "Turkey is a symbol of stability in a region where it is not quiet. The peace initiative between Turkey and Armenia started an initiative to make the region free of conflicts in spite of some difficulties." This statement puts forward an important external point of view.

In this regard, one must see that the "resolution agendas" devised by the pressure of the Armenian diaspora may impede the progress of normalization with Armenia, which has already been opposed in Turkey. Furthermore, aims for peace will result in a huge disappointment in the South Caucasus, expected to catch the spirit of world peace, as well as externally damaging Turkish-American relations.

Reform package and government dilemma

LALE KEMAL

TODAYS ZAMAN

The Turkish government has slowed down its democratic reform process over the last few years, playing into the hands of those who have been seeking to preserve the status quo in a country that has witnessed five different types of coups interrupting the democratic process.

In a major policy shift, meanwhile, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) has pursued a proactive foreign policy, achieving positive results, such as the normalization of ties with most of its neighbors once regarded as enemies. But for this policy to continue to be successful, internal problems, such as the decades-long Kurdish question, the military's destabilizing role in politics as well as the judiciary's pro-state stance at the expense of the citizenry, should have been addressed.

Thus, the government has made a move to bring the Turkish judiciary up to democratic standards and has been working on the details of a constitutional reform package, with judicial reforms comprising the greater part.

Although details of the package have been leaked to the media, it has not yet been officially disclosed by the AK Party. The government is expected to announce the details of the draft reform package later this week and to share them with the uncompromising opposition parties, in particular with the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP).

CHP leader Deniz Baykal declared last week, however, that his party will take the reform package to the Constitutional Court if it is adopted by Parliament. The CHP has long been paralyzing the functions of Parliament by taking several critical laws adopted by the AK Party majority to the Constitutional Court, itself a product of the 1982 Constitution, dictated by the 1980 military junta.

In most cases, the court cancels laws in line with the CHP's requests, but this raises fundamental questions over the fairness of its verdicts. One of the latest examples is the court's cancellation of an amendment made in a law that paved the way for the prosecution of military personnel in civilian courts for crimes such as acts violating the constitutional order. This law was important in meeting the European Union's democratic criteria.

Nevertheless, the government is determined to pursue a mini constitutional reform package as a last resort before the next general elections, which are scheduled to take place in July of next year or even earlier. Early elections held later this year are also a possibility.

Though officially not yet made public, the reform package includes a major change in structure for the controversial Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK), also a product of the 1982 Constitution. Radical reforms such as the affiliation of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) to the Ministry of Defense are not included in the reform package, but opening the decisions of the Supreme Military Council (YAŞ) to judicial oversight is envisaged. This will be an important step on the way toward democratization, narrowing the room for maneuver for the TSK to arbitrarily discharge officers in particular over charges of extreme fundamentalism.

The package foresees making the closure of political parties more difficult, while also envisaging a change in Article 145 of the Constitution so that the previously mentioned amended law cancelled by the Constitutional Court can be reintroduced.

If the mini constitutional reform package is not adopted by the three opposition parties in Parliament, as the ruling party's 337 deputies are not enough for those changes to be approved, the government will take the changes to a referendum. The CHP says the timing of taking the changes to a referendum is also against the Constitution while AK Party officials accuse the main opposition party of interpreting the related article of the Constitution wrongly. The wide disparity in the interpretation of Turkish laws and the Constitution shows how vital it is for the country to have a new civilian constitution that fits today's Turkey.

The AK Party wasted time in introducing a new constitution several years ago. Its mini constitutional package, meanwhile, has faced many hurdles so far, mainly from within Parliament itself. But a consensus has already emerged within Turkish society in favor of a new liberal constitution.

Citizenship by marriage: application and documentation (2)

BERK ÇEKTİR

TODAYS ZAMAN

In the first part of this article I provided information about applying for the acquisition of Turkish citizenship. One sentence from the first article is really worth repeating: The application is made to the governor's office in the city where you reside.

For those who are interested in do-it-yourself-type applications, you can check the previous article, published in Today's Zaman on March 3, at <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/columnists-203121-citizenship-by-marriage-application-and-documentation-i.html>.

Furthermore, the following documents are required from the applicants: The applicant must provide a document demonstrating the exact date of birth. Surprisingly, there are some cases of people not having any record of this -- neither the day nor the month, only the year. In such a case, the applicant will be asked to provide some documents to prove the exact date of birth, of course, notarized and officially translated. If there is no document to prove the exact date of birth, the Turkish law is here to serve. There is a law titled the Law Concerning Birth Registry Services No. 5490, and Article 39 states that in the case of an applicant not being able to prove the exact date of birth, he is supposed to accept the birth registry office entering the exact date of birth as July 1.

The applicant is required to submit a copy of his/her spouse's Turkish ID card. Please make sure that the photocopy is clear and easy to read. I am underlining this point because the officers (Hi

guys!) in the registry office have requested me to do so. If you fail to provide a clear copy of the ID, you will most probably receive a letter in two to three weeks' time stating that there is a document missing in the application file and that the file will be kept pending until this is completed. So, please don't waste your time, provide legible copies.

Of course, there is a service charge for the application file. You need to submit a payment receipt given upon payment to whichever bank.

Here is the crux of the matter. If the spouse applying for Turkish citizenship has children from another marriage or if the couple's children were born outside marriage, then the applicant must provide some documents attached to the application file as listed in a communiqué. I will write about this in another article in the coming weeks if someone needs the information.

I have a final paragraph for the reader who sent the question: You mention that you have worked for a foreign government institution. I am not suggesting anything here, but your application may also be monitored by the Interior Ministry if the application is somehow endangering the national security of the Turkish state. In previous applications, we have witnessed that some applications for Turkish citizenship have been dismissed or rejected because the applicant's present or past activities conflict with the national security of Turkey. Please do not take this last paragraph as a discouraging indication, I just needed to inform you about this possibility (which is an exception) which should be unlikely to happen.

What if Congress adopts the 'genocide' resolution? (2)

ŞAHİN ALPAY

08 March 2010, Monda

TODAYS ZAMAN

The Foreign Affairs Committee of the US House of Representatives last week adopted, as it did previously in 2000 and in 2007, a resolution to call on the president to declare the deportation and massacre of Ottoman Armenians in 1915 genocide.

Commenting on the resolution three years ago, I had written a column asking "What if Congress adopts the 'genocide' resolution?" (Feb. 12, 2007). It may be appropriate to comment on what has and has not changed during the past three years.

Like the Clinton and Bush administrations before it, the Obama administration declared that it did not approve of the resolution. The adoption of the resolution by Congress seems even less likely today than three years ago because Washington values good relations with Ankara as usual, primarily today due to its need of the latter's cooperation concerning Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, but also because it supports the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia. The resolution thus may not even reach the House floor.

If the resolution were to be adopted by the House and the Senate, would that lead the US government to recognize the "Armenian genocide"? No, because it is a non-binding resolution. If it was binding and the US government did recognize the "Armenian genocide," would that provide legal support to Armenian nationalist demands for reparations and territory? No, it would not. The United Nations Genocide Convention of 1948 is not retroactive.

If the US administration were to recognize the "Armenian genocide," would that prove and establish once and for all that the great tragedy that befell Ottoman Armenians in 1915 was genocide? No, it would not. Many, including distinguished non-Turkish Ottoman historians, would still continue to contest the use of that label.

With Chile joining in 2007, the number of countries (including France, Germany, Italy, Poland and Russia) whose parliaments have adopted “Armenian genocide” resolutions has increased to 19 during the last three years. Have these resolutions had a negative effect on Turkey’s bilateral relations with the countries concerned? No, not a bit. Have such resolutions helped Turkish society discover a dark side of late Ottoman history, which a great majority of them have been kept in the dark about by their state? They have often provoked a nationalist backlash that helps suppress the domestic debate on the question.

Why, then, is Ankara continuing to expend so much effort and energy to stop the US Congress from joining the 19 other parliaments that have adopted similar resolutions? Some in Turkey have in fact started asking whether this effort is helping Turkey’s position or the anti-Turkish lobbies in the US promote their causes.

Coming finally to what really has changed during the last three years, during which there were no “Armenian genocide” resolutions debated in Congress, one may point to the following. The domestic debate in Turkey on the tragedy that befell Ottoman Armenians has broadened. The Turkish and Armenian presidents paid visits to each other. The two governments last October signed protocols to establish diplomatic relations and open borders. If the House committee resolution was to eventually be adopted by Congress, it would undoubtedly provoke a nationalist backlash in Turkey, adding to other obstacles to the ratification of the protocols by the Turkish Parliament, and thus undermine the process of normalization between the two countries.

Normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia is surely the best way of helping Turkish society face its history and of achieving Turkish-Armenian reconciliation.

The most noteworthy comment made in the US on the House committee resolution was Henri Barkey’s piece titled “The Armenian genocide resolution is a farce all around” (Washington Post, March 2, 2010). This is his argument: “While some U.S. lawmakers feel strongly about the Armenian genocide resolution, most realize that no moral good can come from a label applied almost a century later. They support the resolution only to score points with the highly organized Armenian-American lobby. ... For Armenians, the genocide issue is of paramount concern. ... Yet in 2007, Yerevan State University awarded an honorary degree to the No. 1 Holocaust denier in the world: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. ...

“And what of the Turks? ... In a country where a Turkish citizen can be jailed for arguing that the Ottoman massacres were genocide, Turks will hurl that accusation at almost anyone else. The speaker of the Turkish parliament recently declared that the killing of 400 Azeris by the Armenians during the 1992 Nagorno-Karabakh war was genocide. Turkish politicians have on numerous occasions accused Israel of genocide in the occupied territories. And last year, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused the Chinese of committing genocide in Xinjiang, where interethnic riots killed 200 people. (He did, however, deny that the Sudanese government’s actions in Darfur were genocidal, on the grounds that ‘Muslims do not commit genocide.’)”

Is Russia deceiving Turkey?

GÜRKAN ZENGİN

07 March 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Date: Oct. 10, 2009. At Zurich University, the Turkish and Armenian foreign ministers were about to sign the two protocols that envisage the normalization of bilateral ties.

Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian caused a last-minute problem: I want to deliver a speech and state that these protocols have nothing to do with the Karabakh issue, he said.

When the crisis could not be solved for several hours, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stepped in: Don't be a nuisance, sign it. Then the Armenian minister immediately signed the protocols. The Russian minister was there since Russia was member of the Minsk group, but the Russian support for the protocols was not merely symbolic.

The Russian minister's presence as a witness to the signatures in Zurich and even his forcing the Armenian minister to sign the protocols had been interpreted then as an indication of Russian approval for Ankara's vision and boosted hopes. Everyone knows that Russia is the owner of the Armenian pawn in the Caucasus chess game. Whoever is at the helm of Yerevan cannot dispense with the Kremlin's influence.

Moreover, Turkish-Russian relations were improving rapidly. During the last 10 years, there has been a tremendous leap in bilateral relations between Russia and Turkey, increasing the trade volume to \$40 billion.

On March 1, 2003, the Turkish Parliament refused to grant permission for the occupation of Iraq via Turkey, and the Kremlin started to monitor Ankara's policies more seriously. During his visit to Ankara in 2004, Vladimir Putin had conveyed this to Turkish officials, and he praised Turkey for its "independent, brave and principled" policies when he came to Turkey again in 2009.

There was nothing more surprising than Russia's support for a Turkish-Armenian rapprochement at a time when the mention of a "strategic partnership" was being made regarding Ankara-Kremlin relations. The Kremlin, it seemed, would open up a breathing tube to its ally Armenia via Turkey. Russia was talking about peace and stability in the Caucasus.

However, Ankara's hopes and expectations about the Russian position are increasingly being converted to disappointment in the process. It appears that Russia is using the Turkey-initiated process of normalization with Armenia in order to disrupt Turkish-Azerbaijani relations.

How do we know this? We know this based on two basic indications. First, although six months have passed since the signing of the protocols, there is not the slightest indication that Armenian occupation forces intend to withdraw from the occupied Azerbaijani territories. Moreover, Russia has not made even the smallest suggestion to Armenia regarding this matter. However, all the parties know well that the protocol cannot be implemented without the clear indication of the end of the occupation.

Turkey launched these normalization efforts by taking the risk of upsetting its relations with Azerbaijan. Now, it appears that the Russians are playing with this possibility. And they have made good progress in this respect. The Russians tell the Armenians to normalize their ties with the Turks, and at the same time, they say to the Azerbaijanis, "See how your brothers are selling you out."

This is how things are seen from Ankara. If this scene is true in reality, then peace in the Caucasus is a big lie. Peace is a matter of vision, and it seems that Russians are intent on continuing with their "backyard" politics. They want to have complete control of any integration in the Caucasus.

Azerbaijan is not a country that is expendable to improve relations with Turkey's neighbors. At the time of writing, Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Ambassador Feridun Sinirlioğlu and Ambassador Ünal Çeviköz, the deputy undersecretary for the Caucasus and Central Asia, had flown to Moscow. What is the reason for such a sudden trip? Can it be that they will tell the Russians: "Do not play with us. Tell us if there will be peace in the Caucasus. Let us know if there will not be any peace"?

Dmitry Medvedev will come to Ankara in May. Will Russia tell Armenia to “stop being a jackass and withdraw your troops” before his visit? If not, there will be no Caucasian peace he can talk about in Ankara.

US and Turkey: Time for the trading to begin

AMANDA PAUL

07 March 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Once again storm clouds have formed over US-Turkey relations. The approval of the Armenian “genocide” resolution by the US House Foreign Relations Committee has left Ankara furious and on the warpath.

Turkey immediately launched an aggressive campaign, pointing the finger at US President Barack Obama and making all sorts of threats. Within the first 24 hours, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu warned of a realignment of Turkish policy, accused Washington of a lack of strategic vision and of not wanting the Turkey-Armenia rapprochement to succeed and pulled Turkey’s ambassador out of Washington for “consultations.” While to many it may seem that Turkey is punching above its weight, at the same time, one cannot underestimate the importance of Turkey for the US in its foreign policy given that four problems out of five on the US government’s agenda are related to Turkey: the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq, Iran’s nuclear program, the AfPak issue, energy security and the turbulent Caucasus region. Therefore Turkey feels quite unconcerned about its “bully boy” approach toward the world’s only superpower. Obama now finds himself in a rather uncomfortable position. Prior to his election, he promised Armenians that he would recognize the genocide, but once in office realities had to be faced. His need for a strong relationship with Turkey outweighed this promise, and it seemed he wanted it to disappear. So it is hardly surprising that during his visit to Turkey in 2009, while he made it clear he had not changed his mind on the 1915 events, he also threw his weight behind Turkey’s normalization process with Armenia in the belief that success would offer a way out from this genocidal cul-de-sac. As we know, the best laid plans frequently go awry, and this one has certainly gone off course. Unfortunately, now that the normalization process seems to be on the rocks, “the g-word” has come back to haunt Obama. Turkey has deviated from the original framework of the agreement. Within a couple of days of signing the protocols in October 2009, Turkey’s leadership began openly linking ratification to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. There is no doubt that the US supports the peace process between Turkey and Armenia, but the big powers, the US and Russia, have been clear from the beginning: The two processes are separate, and they are not going to start pressuring Armenia to withdraw its forces from Azerbaijani provinces. In fact, Turkey’s approach is not only holding back the rapprochement, but it is also having a negative effect on the Karabakh peace talks, as Armenia does not want to be seen as doing anything that could be viewed as making concessions on Karabakh in order to have its border opened with Turkey.

In addition, Turkey has shot itself in the foot by shouting so loudly over the decision of the Armenian Constitutional Court. The US did not support Turkey in its complaints, but instead, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Philip Gordon stated that the US did not see it as an obstacle to progress. Turkey has overreacted to the court decision, making it even more difficult to move ahead and making it look like Turkey is scratching around for any old excuse not to ratify. This is all very bad for Turkey’s credibility.

The weeks leading up to April 24 will be full of tension and drama. However, even though the committee has adopted the resolution, it is very unlikely that it will be brought to the House floor, as was the case in the past. Because the US badly needs Turkey on a whole host of issues, the US cannot afford to alienate such a strong ally. Therefore Obama, Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden will pull out all the stops -- but they will not do it for free, no matter what threats pour in from Ankara. Turkey will need to deliver something in return -- as has been the case in other years. There is always some sort of trade off. The US may ask Turkey to support it in the UN Security Council on Iran and continue to insist that Turkey move ahead on the ratification of the protocols in the Turkish Parliament -- one way or another. If Turkey does not move, Yerevan may decide to move first and ratify first, which would leave Turkey in an even more difficult position.

And what about Azerbaijan in all of this? While I have sympathy for Azerbaijan, I also strongly believe that Ankara should move ahead and ratify. Further damaging the relationship between Turkey and Armenia is in no way useful to Baku, contrary to what they may say. While Turkey and Armenia are talking and engaged, it gives Turkey a voice and a foot in the door. The alternative means the slamming of the door, and Azerbaijan will be left alone on Karabakh again. Building trust between Turks and Armenians should in the long term help Armenians feel safer and less isolated, which could have a positive impact on their relations with Azerbaijan and the peace talks. It's time to be brave and do the right thing and move to a future beyond the past.

The Nigel Farage case and the EU

BERİL DEDEOĞLU

06 March 2010, Saturday

TODAYS ZAMAN

What happened in the European Parliament on Feb. 24 hasn't received too much attention from the Turkish press, unfortunately. Nevertheless, what Member of European Parliament (MEP) Nigel Farage said to the "President of Europe" and former Belgian Prime Minister Herman Van Rompuy was quite interesting.

Mr. Farage is also the leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party and co-chairman of the European Parliament's Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group.

Farage was fined because of this speech, in which he claimed Mr. Rompuy has "all the charisma of a damp rag." He also accused him of trying to kill European democracy and nation-states, probably because he's from Belgium, "pretty much a non-country." This is not the first time Mr. Farage, known as a euroskeptic, has drawn attention. After having been elected as an MEP, he has spent much of his time tracking financial irregularities within European institutions. He tries to expose the wastage of MEPs and EU commissioners, he talks about their holidays, he points out special funds. Nobody escapes his attacks, from EU commissioners to French farmers' leaders; that's why it's not surprising that he has also attacked Mr. Van Rompuy.

His comments have two dimensions: first, he denounces the fact that the person designated as the EU's "president" is someone almost nobody has heard of before his election to this prestigious post. Maybe he regrets that a Briton was not chosen for the permanent presidency of the Council of the EU, but his criticism reveals a legitimate interrogation. The Lisbon Treaty was aimed at transforming the EU into a global power center; that's why the EU had to have a powerful cohesion represented by a powerful presidency. There was also the hope of providing the US

president with a telephone number allowing him to talk with the EU directly, if necessary. However, if today Barack Obama does want to call “Europe,” he has four numbers at his disposal, and nobody’s sure who he should call. The question is why somebody such as Van Rompuy has been chosen for an office designed to become a credible representation of the EU. It mustn’t be too hard to find in the European continent somebody more charismatic who is known globally. However, one mustn’t forget that charismatic leaders are each others’ rivals, which would make it hard for them to be elected. The only person all 27 member states would accept could only be someone like Mr. Van Rompuy, and this is what has happened. Nonetheless, even though this was the only possible choice, the situation is far from what the Lisbon Treaty was aiming at. This very post was designed as a political position and not as a simple bureaucratic duty. However, as of today, the EU “presidency” is far from symbolizing the EU’s global ambitions; instead the risk of having an invisible EU at the end has grown stronger. This “invisibility” assures member states wide room to maneuver, reinforcing centrifugal effects. The second part of Farage’s criticism is about Mr. Van Rompuy’s designation method. The problem is that the president of the Council of the EU, also called the president of Europe, was nominated by the Council of the EU, bypassing European citizens. One could say that those who nominated Mr. Van Rompuy were elected by their citizens, so there is no problem of legitimacy. Still, the impression is that the Lisbon Treaty, which had the purpose of bringing EU mechanisms closer to the European people, didn’t fulfill its mission. The problem is that most ordinary EU citizens say, “Even if he was nominated by the leaders whom I have elected, I wouldn’t have chosen him as my president.”

Erdoğan’s test for Obama

Wednesday, March 10, 2010

MURAT YETKİN

TODAYS ZAMAN

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made critical statements on foreign policy while in Saudi Arabia to receive the King Faisal Award, which is granted to those who serve Islam.

Some of his words were directly and some indirectly pointed at Turkey-United States relations. Erdoğan keeps criticizing the U.S. for the approval of a genocide resolution in the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee. The draft resolution asks April 24 to be a day of observation for the so-called Armenian “genocide.”

Since Ankara wanted the U.S. administration to stop the draft before heading to the full House but failed by only one vote (through last-minute maneuvering backstage), Erdoğan holds the Barack Obama administration responsible.

Although Obama was involved in the process on the last day, this happened only after Turkish President Abdullah Gül warned him so. In the end, Turkey gained the highest number of votes in the history of such similar processes in the House committee. But that was enough.

Obama could not pressure adequately. However, not only foreign policy choices, but also U.S. national policy played a role in this.

The Armenian Question and Iran

Turkey Program Director at the Center for International and Strategic Studies, or CSIS, in Washington, Bülent Ali Rıza, has written a commentary on March 8. Rıza in his article pays attention to the important Congressional elections in November. He says Obama will shift emphasis from foreign affairs to the domestic agenda in the upcoming term.

In other words, the Armenian and Greek lobbies, and even the Jewish lobby, which Erdoğan said does not side with Turkey either, will be important for voters' choices and valuable for Obama. A foreign policy exception may be Iran.

Before concentrating on the domestic agenda, Obama will host a Nuclear Security Summit on April 12 and 13 in Washington and then face a possible sanction resolution, which he wants the United Nations Security Council to adopt.

The most serious obstacle is Iran itself, as far as the U.S. is considered. But Turkey is one of the key players in this game.

First of all, Turkey is being seriously tested as a temporary member of the U.N. Security Council after years. No one should expect Turkey to vote against its neighbor Iran in this test. As Gül implied during a trip to Iran, a vote of abstention or not attending the voting session is likely.

While in Washington, Erdoğan, just like any other world leader, wants to have one-on-one talks with Obama about other issues of interest to both Iran and Turkey.

As the April 24 threshold approaches, Obama is evaluating such a meeting in terms of American national policy and Turkish national policy if Erdoğan fails to have what he expects during the talk.

The ambassador and shuttle diplomacy

Perhaps, just for this reason only Erdoğan and his team have prepared as though they would attend the summit in April. The team is waiting for his final decision.

In order to ease the decision process, Ankara keeps having meetings. For instance, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu invited the Turkish Ambassador to Washington, Namık Tan, to Ankara for a "consultation." He gathered high-ranking diplomats of the ministry together with the delegation of Parliamentarians, including representatives from the Nationalist Movement Party, or MHP. Davutoğlu is trying to give a picture of "unity."

A possibility to stop shuttle diplomacy between Turkey and the U.S. until Apr. 24 is also being considered in these meetings. Details of the story by Parliamentary Bureau Chief Yurdagül Şimşek can be found in the Radikal daily.

State Minister for Foreign Trade Zafer Çağlayan has already postponed a trip to the U.S. upon being requested by the Foreign Ministry.

It is also worth paying attention to Erdoğan's remark saying a decision "depends on a clear-cut stance," which he made the other day in response to a question about when Mr. Tan will go back to the U.S.

Erdoğan expects a "clear approach" from Obama, and the "approach" is not to pass the genocide resolution in the House plenary session.

It is also up to Obama's attitude whether or not Erdoğan will see this April summit as a one-on-talk meeting or an international affairs meeting.

Erdoğan, in a way, wants to say to Obama, "Show me now how much you love Turkey, me and my government."

Could there be another "one minute" move against Obama? Hardly, but I can say this is Erdoğan's test for Obama.

Armenian protocol is strongest card in hand

Wednesday, March 10, 2010

MEHMET ALİ BİRAND

TODAYS ZAMAN

April 24 is approaching and as every year we are watching the same movie again. But we need to be careful because each day the situation is tenser. Relations between Turkey and the United States are incredibly bruising. Afterward we spend an enormous effort trying to fix these wounds. Of course, in the end we are the ones to experience a loss.

To tell the truth, President Obama was the one to notice how dangerous this course was. And that's why he asked for a negotiation process between Armenia and Turkey.

Obama intended to start a negotiation period and thus get rid of pressures exercised by the Armenian lobby. For, during elections he had tied himself down regarding the genocide issue. Thus, the historical protocol signed between Armenia and Turkey has in fact made it easier for Ankara not Yerevan.

How?

The most obvious example is the poll in the Committee for Foreign Affairs in the U.S. Congress. The genocide resolution has been voted 7 times in various committees of the US Congress up until now and each time it turned against us. And the discrepancy was huge. Whereas Turkey received 22 votes in the most recent poll. The majority of congressmen who voted against Turkey believed in the genocide but based on the protocol they said the magic would be spoiled by the resolution once negotiations started between the two sides.

So if the protocol was to be signed, the votes from the committee meeting would have been for the Armenians by far.

These days the opposition badly wants this protocol destroyed. One issue where the CHP and MHP agree is the cancellation of this protocol. But there is election politics behind this appeal. Their purpose is to force the administration into a corner.

On the contrary keeping this protocol alive is in Turkey's best interest.

As long as this protocol is kept alive the Obama administration has to make an approach.

Otherwise it will kill the offspring they created.

Let's be realistic. Under present conditions this protocol cannot be revived.

As long as the Obama administration and the Armenian army keep 20 percent of Azerbaijani territory under occupation and no progress is realized, it is impossible for Turkey to take a step.

Whatever may be, this protocol can be revived in one way or another and the Armenian initiative put back on track in the future.

Let's not forget that the only way to ease the tension between Armenia and Turkey and to get rid of the genocide pressures is the Armenian Initiative. There is no other way.

Why did the word "pardon" create such ado?

I couldn't comprehend.

Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu said there could be a "general pardon" and all hell broke lose. In his speech he did not say anything new. He only repeated what CHP leader Baykal previously vaguely said, "If the PKK puts down its weapons we will support a general pardon as a contribution to peace."

Oh dear, hell broke lose.

From the president to the MHP leader, from the media to the CHP leader everybody started to get worried.

Especially Baykal responded to the party's ascending valuable member Kılıçdaroğlu with a bad connotation saying, "We don't want to hear such speeches." And poor Kılıçdaroğlu did not know how to react on that. As if criticizing himself and trying to make his way out of it he said, "Where did these words come from?"

It is difficult to understand why they panicked this much.

Let's be honest on genocide

Tuesday, March 9, 2010

Mustafa AKYOL

HURRIYAT

In all this perpetual controversy about the tragic fate of the Ottoman Armenians, there is something that I, as a Turk, don't like: its unethical politics.

Most non-Turks, and especially Westerners, honestly believe that what happened was genocide. In return, our lobbyists in Washington, or elsewhere, argue about how angry we Turks will be to hear that opinion, and how important a "strategic ally" we are to be pissed off.

In other words, we try to counter a historical narrative by political pressure.

Maybe that is inevitable, for the issue is highly politicized on the Armenian side as well. But, personally speaking, I am more interested in the truth of the matter than anything else. And, believe me, if I am convinced one day that what really happened to the Armenians in 1915 amounted to genocide, I will say it out loud.

When Empires fall apart:

Yet I am not convinced. I rather take the view that Norman Stone, professor emeritus of modern history at the University of Oxford, put in his piece in The Times the other day: "You cannot really describe this as genocide... if by that you mean the sort of thing [Adolf] Hitler did."

Professor Stone also added: "Horrors, of course, happened but these same horrors were visited upon millions of Muslims [and Jews] as the Ottoman Empire receded in the Caucasus and the Balkans. Half of its urban population came from those regions and, in many cases, the disasters of their families occurred at Armenian hands."

This background of 1915, of which most Westerners are clueless, is key to getting the story right.

The drama started a century ago, when the winds of nationalism entered into the multi-national Ottoman Empire. Its peoples, first in the Balkans and later elsewhere (as now in the Kurdish areas), started to aspire for national homelands, and, one by one, launched rebellions to achieve national independence. The latter were joyful moments of liberation for the new nations. But for others, they were nightmares. "Serbia for the Serbs, Bulgaria for the Bulgarians, Greece for the Greeks," a popular slogan of the early 20th century read, "Turks and Jews out!"

The latter, and especially the much more numerous Turks, a term which then often referred to all Ottoman Muslims, faced several tides of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Crimea. According to some estimates, more than five million Ottoman Muslims lost their lives in these regions between 1821 and 1922. (See: Justin McCarthy's book, "Death and Exile".) Some were killed in wars, others perished as refugees from starvation and disease. The ones who could make it to Turkey proper, including my own great-great-grandfather from the northern Caucasus, brought with them the stories of the cruelty of the enemy.

The reason why no congress considers resolutions about these perished Ottoman Muslims today is simply that there are very few people who remember them – and the ones who do really have no means to lobby in Washington or Paris.

But the Young Turks who ruled the Ottoman Empire in 1915 was of a generation that went through all that drama. Hence they had gradually lost faith in the centuries-old Ottoman creed: People of different faiths and ethnicities can live well together. When they unwisely entered the Great War on the side of Germany, they faced Russian invasion in the east, and found out that the some Armenian nationalists had formed paramilitary units to support the enemy. They feared

that an independent Armenia would be founded in the east and the Balkan nightmares would be repeated.

That led to the catastrophic decision that the Young Turk government took in April 1915 to expel all Armenians in Eastern Turkey to Syria. Hundreds of thousands perished on the road, due to massacres and other atrocities by locals, along with famine and disease.

There is no way that this ethnic cleansing can be seen as justified or excusable. But we should see that it is nothing like the Holocaust, by which the Nazis systematically exterminated the Jews simply out of their hateful ideology. There was no anti-Armenian ideology in 1915. There was rather a fear: "If we don't do something against them, they will do something against us."

The way to go:

Today, Westerners will do a much better job if they try to see this other side of the story, and encourage dialogue between Armenians and Turks, rather than pushing the latter into accepting a definition which they honestly find wrong.

And we Turks will do a much better job if we try to understand, respect and even share the pain of the Armenians. We might not accept the G-word, for reasons I noted, but we should accept that 1915 was a horrible episode which caused enormous suffering to a people who used to be our good neighbors.

Meanwhile, The Armenians, especially the more nationalist ones, should see that we Turks really are not a nation of monsters who take pride in the killing of innocents. We were just raised with a totally different national narrative. Yet now many of us are now ready to show more empathy. We will even be happy to offer our extended hands to Armenian nationalists, if they are willing to unclench their fists.
