

**BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD
TURKEY**

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

Period: 12th –18th March 2010.

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Presentation: 24th March, 2010

Report no.111

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POLITICAL ISSUES

AKP to seek opposition's support to push constitutional reform

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

ANKARA — Hürriyet Daily News

 Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will visit opposition parties next week to seek support for his constitutional amendment package.

The ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, will knock on the doors of Turkey's opposition parties next week to seek support for its constitutional amendment package.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has accelerated his efforts to partially amend the Constitution in order to submit a draft package to Parliament by April. Erdoğan met Wednesday with his top 10 aides, including Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin, Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Çiçek and Interior Minister Beşir Atalay.

The draft package has been finalized, AKP Parliamentary Group Vice Chairman Bekir Bozdağ told reporters at the end of the four-hour meeting in Erdoğan's office. "We will apply for appointments and kick-off a tour to opposition parties soon," Bozdağ said.

Erdoğan noted earlier that he would meet with all political parties that won a minimum of 1 percent of the vote in the latest elections. The existing election threshold of 10 percent makes it difficult to enter Parliament for many others in Turkey.

Though his opponents claim Erdoğan is trying to adopt the Iranian model, the prime minister asserts the government is trying to update the Constitution, drawn up in 1982 under military rule, to contribute to the European Union-candidate country's membership process.

"This Constitution does not fit a first-class democracy. Sooner or later it has to be amended," Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan told the broadcaster CNN Türk in an interview on Wednesday.

Babacan said the purpose was to make the AKP-made drafts widely discussed before being put to a parliamentary vote.

"It's doubtful that the other parties [represented in Parliament] will back the amendments," Babacan said, adding that the parties did not respond to requests for meetings. "With whom will you talk if you do not talk to us? We have kicked off a process, and we believe that it will have good results. We are aware that our people have this will [to amend the Constitution]," he said.

The package of changes to as many as 10 to 12 constitutional articles would expand to 21 the members the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors, or HSYK, the body that appoints court officials. The administration and Parliament would make a selection of one-third of the board's members with 15 elected from within the judiciary, Ergin announced earlier.

The constitutional steps will also revise the way political parties are outlawed or punished, making it more difficult for courts to act against them. Erdoğan's AKP survived a political ban two years ago by a single vote in the 11-member Constitutional Court. Prosecutors charged Erdoğan and his deputies with threatening Turkey's secular system of

government, citing efforts to ease a ban on the Islamic-style headscarf and making adultery a criminal offense.

The package of constitutional changes will probably be referred to a nationwide referendum because opposition parties in Parliament are unlikely to support them. The AKP has 337 seats in the 550-seat assembly, some 30 votes short of the two-thirds required to legislate the changes. A total of 330 are needed for a referendum.

Babacan, however, noted the risk of secret voting: “Of course, the constitutional amendment will not take place if we fail to gain the minimum 330 ‘yes’ votes. But we think there will be no major problem at that stage.”

Nevruz celebration begins with 40,000 people in southeastern Turkey

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

ISTANBUL - Daily News with wires

Hurriyat

The rising flame of a ceremonial torch signaled the start of celebrations for “Nevruz,” the marking of the arrival of spring, on Wednesday with 40,000 people gathering in a city stadium in Southeast Turkey to cheer on the opening events.

Selahattin Demirtaş, leader of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, and Gülten Kışanak, vice-president of BDP, lit the torch and released white pigeons at the city stadium in the Yüksekova district in Hakkari province to launch the celebrations, Doğan news agency reported.

Diyarbakır Mayor Osman Baydemir said they have been governing themselves for the past 10 years now with a system they developed.

“The alliance of Kurds in the Middle East will bring democracy, peace and freedom to all people,” he said.

Şerif Gençdal and Nizar Buldan were present at the Nevruz celebrations in Yüksekova. They were among 34 returnees who came from northern Iraq in October that included former members of the outlawed Kurdistan

Workers' Party, or PKK, from the PKK's main military base in the Kandil mountains and Kurdish refugees from the UN-controlled Kurdish refugee camp at Makhmour.

Aysel Tuğluk, former deputy of the banned Democratic Society Party, or DTP, said Turkish and Kurdish youths on duty on both sides of the border have their fingers on the trigger. "Let's make peace and let these young people embrace each other," said Tuğluk.

Mustafa Avcı, co-chairman of BDP's Istanbul Branch, said at a press conference in Istanbul on Wednesday that the celebrations started in Yüksekova for two reasons. "The government pushed on the Yüksekova residents in past few months even though they did not deserve it. We will start celebrations in Yüksekova to support the people there," said Avcı. The second reason is that Yüksekova and Istanbul are on the two edges of the country and we would be able to include all segments of society in joining our celebrations, said Avcı.

Avcı said they did not expect any problems in obtaining permission for their Nevruz posters due to the usage of "w." In past years, the party's posters have been disallowed because they used the Kurdish version of the word written as "Newroz."

Avcı said they applied to the governors' office on Wednesday for permission for the posters. "We heard about that there will not be any problem with the posters." The letter W is not included in the Turkish alphabet and is banned for public use.

Nevruz celebrations in Istanbul will take place in Kazlıçeşme Square in Zeytinburnu on Sunday starting at 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. and around 500,000 people are expected to gather there, according to Avcı.

Meanwhile, Istanbul Gov. Muammer Güler said 10,000 police officers would be on duty in Kazlıçeşme on Sunday, speaking at a press conference in Istanbul, Anatolia news agency reported Tuesday.

"What is important is not to have any illegal, separatist incidents. It is not possible for us to allow any incident that would overshadow the unity of the country under the name of 'festival celebrations,'" said Güler.

Avcı, however, blamed the statements of Güler saying that “they have the right to implement measures for security, but why do they announce it in that way [like they are expecting negative incidents to happen] at a press conference?” Avcı said the BDP is making efforts to celebrate Nevruz without negative incidents. “Although our party’s supporters wanted to celebrate Nevruz in Taksim, we agreed on Kazlıçeşme to avoid any conflicting situations,” said Avcı.

“Those who gather at a place other than Kazlıçeşme, including Taksim, are not part of our group. We decided on Kazlıçeşme and will be there on Sunday,” said Avcı, adding that the party will assign 400 people to take security measures and prevent provocative actions.

Taksim Square is equipped with high resolution security cameras that also can zoom in with no visual loss and thus make it possible to identify the face, before the upcoming Nevruz in case of street protests, NTV's news Web site reported on Wednesday. Also, 17 such cameras have been placed in Kazlıçeşme Square for Nevruz celebrations.

A total of 39 groups, including political parties, associations and movements will be gathering in Kazlıçeşme this year and Avcı said they call for all segments of society to join the Nevruz celebrations and voice their demands for democracy.

Turkey's top general in 'challenging mood' over coup allegations

Tuesday, March 16, 2010 SERKAN DEMİRTAŞ

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

With civil-military strife on the rise and his own retirement approaching, Gen İlker Başbuğ offers his perspective to the press on recent events, including the controversial police seizure of an army munitions truck. The top general challenges allegations against his fellow soldiers but says relations with the government will never be severed

Turkey’s top general is “in a challenging mood” over recent allegations that officers and soldiers in the 700,000-strong military under his command have been involved in plots to stage a coup.

“I can’t say I am in a fighting mood. If you are fighting, you should have an enemy. There is no enemy [in our case]. So I prefer to call it a ‘challenging mood,’” Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ told journalists late Monday during an Ankara reception.

With his retirement in sight at the end of August, Başbuğ has held interviews over the past few days with the country’s most influential newspapers, dailies Milliyet and Hürriyet, and responded to allegations that the military was plotting against the government.

Civil-military strife has worsened in recent months with reports about the alleged “Sledgehammer” and “Cage” operations, in which the military is accused of having worked out scenarios to provoke mass violence on the streets in order to create a suitable environment for the military to interfere in politics.

Tensions rose further March 10 when police in the capital, responding to an anonymous e-mail tip, stopped a civilian truck carrying hand grenades for the military. After the immediate action taken by police, the Ankara chief public prosecutor said Friday that there was no need to launch a formal investigation into the incident because the information provided by the military had explained the situation.

“Have you read the full text of the tip sent to the police via e-mail?”

Başbuğ asked reporters before telling them its contents himself.

“Please, my friends! It says that these bombs will be used in our southeastern Anatolian city, in Muş, actually, during the Nevruz [holiday] as a provocation,” the top general said. “You are pushing me for a reaction. If you reporters also believe in such a scenario, then we are all finished. Seriously, could something like that ever happen?”

In his interview with daily Milliyet published Monday, Başbuğ criticized the police for not informing the Turkish Armed Forces about the truck seizure and not allowing the arrested officers to call the military headquarters. “I hope everyone got the necessary message and it won’t happen again,” he said. “I think the message was received.”

During his long conversation with the media, the top general also responded to questions about the current status of relations between the military and the government. “We are statesmen. Our relations will

never be severed,” he said. “What is important is the fact that we have a dialogue. Everything is discussed within this framework.”

The dialogue Başbuğ referred to was the Feb. 25 meeting he had with President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the presidential palace right after the arrests of former top generals including Çetin Doğan and Ergin Saygun. The main opposition party has accused the three top leaders of using the meeting to cut a deal.

“No! No!” Başbuğ said in response to these allegations. “I do not see any problem regarding the civil-military ties.”

No resignations

When a journalist asked about speculations that top generals might consider resigning from their posts in reaction to the arrests of their colleagues, Başbuğ did not hide his anger. “Are you going to be happy if we resign? I said I am on the job until the last minute of my term,” he said. “I have been wearing this uniform for the last 50 years and I still feel like a lieutenant.”

Başbuğ continued by explaining the meaning of “teğmen,” the Turkish word for lieutenant: “‘Teğmen’ means the one who attacks. This word was created by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself. We’ll sometimes be generals, sometimes lieutenants.”

“I started to wear this uniform in 1957. I was promoted to officer in 1962. My actual service [as an officer] in the military has been 48 years,” he said. “There are some other generals who served 47 or 46 [years]. But 48 years – it’s a record. Why do I say this? I want to emphasize that I stand behind my years in the military. I stand behind what I have done thus far.”

The ‘young officer syndrome’

Another question posed to Başbuğ concerned how the lower-ranking officers see the current situation and whether the headquarters is concerned about their reactions. “If you have asked this question, let me say this very frankly: Of course I am talking about my own term ... Perhaps we, as the Armed Forces, are passing through a very dire moment; this is indisputable,” the top general said. “But as you did ask, I can proudly say this is when the Armed Forces are most disciplined.

This is the time in which the military enjoys full discipline and stands united.”

Emphasizing that he held meetings with officers serving in different parts of the country over the last few weeks, Başbuğ said he asked all military personnel to focus on their own jobs.

“We are, of course, speaking with young officers. We are also asking their opinions. But a lieutenant will do his or her job,” the general said. “A lieutenant cannot find himself engaged in issues that are the responsibility of the chief of General Staff. I will never allow this; that cannot happen.”

During his conversation with reporters, Başbuğ brought up Article 95 of the Military Penal Code, which punishes military personnel who harm the order of relations between high- and low-ranking officers. “For me, all military personnel are the same. We don’t differentiate between retired personnel and serving officers. And we do not discriminate between military personnel on the basis of their basic branches,” he said. “If someone implies such a thing, an investigation could be launched against this person.”

Retirement plans

With five and a half months left until he retires from the military, Başbuğ said he would work in his capacity until the very last minute, as if he were tasked to serve another 100 years. “[But] I will surely leave after completing my term,” he added.

The top general also emphasized that comparing terms of different chiefs of General Staff would be wrong, as each term has its own difficulties. He added that when he assumed his job Aug. 26, 2008, the first instruction he gave to his aides was not to compare his term with those of his predecessors.

Başbuğ replaced Chief of General Staff Gen. Yaşar Büyükanıt, who posted an e-memo on the military’s Web site that urged the government not to elect Abdullah Gül as president.

YÖK steps back on ruling on Turkish university exam

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

ANKARA — Hürriyet Daily News

Turkey's Higher Education Board, or YÖK, on Wednesday overruled its earlier decision to grant Turkish students who study abroad the right to transfer to Turkish universities without taking the university entrance exam.

YÖK recently make a highly criticized decision that enabled Turkish students who complete their high school education abroad to enter Turkish universities without taking the university entrance exam when they return to Turkey.

The university entrance exam is obligatory for all Turkish students who complete their high school education and want to continue their education in university. The YÖK decision exempting Turkish students who studied abroad from taking the exam, however, has long been criticized by experts and students as creating inequalities.

YÖK, which convened Wednesday under the chairmanship of the board's president, Yusuf Ziya Özcan, revoked the earlier decision. In Wednesday's ruling, YÖK said it annulled its decision after taking into consideration that the move is likely to discourage Turkish students who complete their high school education in Turkey without going abroad.

New universities coming soon

17 March 2010, Wednesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Seven new state universities are to be established in the cities of İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Bursa, Konya, Kayseri, and Erzurum once the relevant legislation is approved, Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Çiçek announced on Monday.

Çiçek announced plans for the new universities at a press conference following Monday's Cabinet meeting. Çiçek said the legislation commissioning the universities is awaiting ministers' signatures. "The situation in those provinces calls for more universities to be opened," Çiçek added.

The new universities are to include Medeniyet University in İstanbul, Yıldırım Beyazıt University in Ankara, Turgut Reis University in İzmir and Orhan Gazi University in Bursa as well as universities in Konya, Kayseri and Erzurum that will operate under the names of those provinces. In the last few years, Turkey has made a huge leap forward in the number of higher education institutions. There are currently 141 universities in the country, 60 of which were established in the last four years.

Sledgehammer and Cage plans on agenda of meeting with Jewish community

17 March 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) Deputy Chairman Hüseyin Çelik will meet with representatives of Turkey's Jewish community on Thursday at the Neve Shalom Synagogue within the framework of the democratization initiative.

It is expected that during the meeting Çelik will tell the members of the Turkish Jewish community more about the democratization initiative and its content regarding religious minorities.

The government launched the democratization initiative in order to solve Turkey's Kurdish problem, but it has also defined it as a "national unity project," and as the government frequently points out, the aim of the initiative is more freedom and democracy for everyone. Another subject of the meeting will be the concerns of Turkish Jews regarding the Balyoz (Sledgehammer) and Cage plans.

The Cage Operation Action Plan is a subversive plan allegedly devised by a group from the Naval Forces Command to intimidate the country's

non-Muslim population by assassinating some of their prominent figures, undermining the power of the ruling party. An indictment has been submitted to a high criminal court regarding the plan.

The Sledgehammer plan, another plot against the government, allegedly is the outline of a plan to create chaos by killing or injuring a number of bureaucrats and journalists and bombing mosques. According to the plan, the assets of minorities were to be seized and nationalized.

Çelik is expected to discuss these plans with the Jewish community and assure them that they are protected.

The Jewish community requested the meeting after Çelik's recent participation in a series of meetings called the "Beşiktaş meetings" in which he talked about the Sept. 6-7, 1955, events. He said these events were also planned to pave the way for the May 27, 1960, coup d'état.

The Sept. 6-7 events started after a newspaper headline said Atatürk's home in Greece had been bombed by Greek militants. In revenge, Turkish nationalists attacked the houses and business places of non-Muslims, destroying 5,300 businesses and houses owned by Greeks, Armenians and Jews.

After Çelik's remarks about the Sept. 6-7 events, the Jewish community asked the organizer of the Beşiktaş meetings, AK party deputy Nursuna Memecan, to organize a meeting between Çelik and the Jewish community as well.

Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç, also on Thursday, met with the spiritual leaders of religious minorities in Turkey and the heads of congregation foundations at a breakfast in İstanbul, where he sent a message of "unity" and "democratization."

3 admirals accused of gang membership in Cage indictment

17 March 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

An İstanbul court has started examining an indictment against suspects linked to a subversive plan called the Cage Operation Action Plan that

calls for jail sentences of up to 15 years for three admirals on charges of membership in a terrorist organization.

The document also seeks lengthy prison sentences for 30 other defendants on similar charges.

The Cage plan is an alleged Naval Forces Command plot to undermine the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) by assassinating prominent non-Muslim figures in Turkey and putting the blame for the killings on the party. The plan aimed to intimidate the country's non-Muslim groups, which was expected to increase internal and external pressure on the ruling party. Weakening public support for the party was intended to eventually lead to a military takeover.

According to the 65-page indictment, the plot team was being coordinated and led by retired Adm. Ahmet Feyyaz Ögütçü.

The Cage plan was detailed on a CD seized last year from the office of retired Maj. Levent Bektaş, who was arrested in April for suspected links to a large cache of munitions buried in İstanbul's Poyrazköy area. That discovery came as part of an investigation into Ergenekon, a clandestine gang whose suspected members are currently standing trial on charges of having plotted to overthrow the government.

The indictment points to Vice Adm. Kadir Sağdıç and rear Adm. Mehmet Fatih İlğar as "number two and three men" behind the plot. The two were interrogated last month by İzmir prosecutors as part of the Ergenekon probe.

The İstanbul 12th High Criminal Court is expected to decide on whether to accept or reject the indictment on March 19.

Among other defendants in the indictment are Col. Mücahit Erakyol, Col. Levent Gülman and Lt. Col. Halil Öz Saraç.

On March 15, a civilian prosecutor in İstanbul asked the court to merge the Cage indictment with an indictment into the Poyrazköy munitions. The Poyrazköy indictment demands life sentences for five naval officers -- Lt. Col. Ercan Kireçtepe, Lt. Col. Mustafa Turhan Ecevit, Maj. Eren Günay, Maj. Emre Onat and retired Maj. Bektaş -- on charges of "attempting to destroy Parliament and the government."

Adm. Ögütçü's name appears in Cage plan documents as "the president." Ögütçü was forced to retire at last August's Supreme Military Council (YAŞ) meeting, reportedly due to his suspected ties to Ergenekon.

Ögütçü was thought to be the most likely candidate to take the helm of the Naval Forces Command. Observers believe the reason behind his retirement was his links to Ergenekon. According to a National Intelligence Organization (MİT) document, Ögütçü was one of the founders of the Karargah houses, which the Ergenekon investigation has revealed were meeting spots for generals plotting a coup in addition to housing hit men and serving as storage places for munitions.

Ögütçü was implicated in the placement of blocks of TNT and other explosives at the bottom of a submarine exhibited at the Rahmi M. Koç Museum. The explosives were found by police in July based on a plan outlined in the Cage plot. The explosives were to be detonated while a group of students visited the museum.

Study estimates loss of half of İstanbul's at-risk building in major quake

17 March 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

In the İstanbul districts most threatened by an earthquake, nearly half of the buildings could collapse in the event of a major earthquake, according to the worst-case scenario of a five-year study.

The study, carried out by the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality and Middle East Technical University (ODTÜ), examined nearly 125,000 buildings in six İstanbul districts considered likely to be most affected by an earthquake, namely Zeytinburnu, Fatih, Küçükçekmece, Bahçelievler, Bayrampaşa and Güngören.

The study aimed to find those buildings expected to collapse or sustain severe damage as a result of a major quake, study coordinator Haluk Sucuoğlu from ODTÜ told the Anatolia news agency. The potential side effects of earthquakes, including landslides and tsunamis, were not taken into account in measuring potential damage.

Two scenarios were constructed by the study. In the worst-case scenario, the districts would be hit by a magnitude 7.5 earthquake after a total rupture of the Northern Anatolian Fault Line, which has not ruptured since 1766. Nearly half of the concrete buildings examined, 43,270, are expected to collapse or be severely damaged, while about 1,500 out of about 24,000 unreinforced masonry buildings are expected to collapse or be severely damaged.

In the other scenario, which envisages a magnitude 7.2 earthquake, partially rupturing the Northern Anatolian Fault Line, a total of 24,190 concrete buildings are estimated to collapse or be severely damaged. “These figures are much higher than the figures which have been put forward as a result of studies that were carried out without fieldwork. If the range of building quality were normal, say, when you examine 100 buildings, 50 of them would be slightly damaged, 40 moderately damaged and 10 severely damaged. The figures of severely damaged buildings are the highest; moderately and slightly damaged ones are less than severely damaged ones,” Sucuoğlu said.

‘Surface discussion is an urban legend’

Asserting that the discussion of the earth surface’s being firm or weak amounts to only an urban legend, the professor said almost all earthquake-threatened buildings are on solid ground in earthquake terms. “The weak surfaces in terms of earthquake are in riverbeds and narrow strips of land near coasts, where we don’t have many buildings.”

He also stressed that the common feature of the at-risk buildings is their weak structure and called for those buildings to be either strengthened or reconstructed. A regulation must be implemented by the relevant institutions forcing residents of at-risk buildings take action and reinforce their property, he said.

Sucuoğlu also noted that the residents of the districts examined in the study can read the file on their own buildings at their municipalities.

Poll shows AK Party would win clear majority

13 March 2010, Saturday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's ruling Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party (AK Party) would win a clear majority if general elections due next year were held today, an opinion poll stated on Friday.

Strains between Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government and the secular establishment have fueled speculation that elections set for July 2011 could be brought forward, although Erdoğan has repeatedly denied any such plans. Investors would favor a strong AK Party government, fearing a coalition government would bring instability. The pro-business AK Party will seek a third term in power. The poll, conducted by the Konsensus polling firm, showed the AK Party with 39.6 percent of the vote. In the last election in 2007, the AK Party, which was first elected in 2002, won 46.6 percent of the vote. The main opposition secularist Republican People's Party (CHP) would garner 23.1 percent and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) 16.5 percent, the Konsensus poll stated. The survey was taken between Feb. 24 and March 4 after an unprecedented crackdown on the military in which nearly 70 people including former heads of the air force and navy were arrested in a probe into an alleged anti-government conspiracy. The AK Party has also clashed with conservative judges and has threatened to call a referendum to curb their powers.

Opinion polls are not always reliable in Turkey. Compared to a previous poll by Konsensus published last month, the AK Party was down 2.8 percent, the CHP down 1.2 percent while the MHP was up 1.4 percent. Erdoğan is hoping an economic recovery will boost the AK Party's popularity ahead of next year's scheduled vote. Before Turkey sank into a recession in 2009, the AK Party presided over years of strong economic growth and launched historic talks to join the European Union. But it is distrusted by Turkey's powerful secular elite, including top judges and army generals, because of its roots in political Islam. The party denies any Islamist agenda.

Turkish FM: Turkey must have a very active diplomacy for global peace
12 March 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said on Thursday, "We must have a very active diplomacy everywhere so Turkey can contribute to regional and global peace."

Before completing his two-day formal visit to Ireland, Davutoğlu spoke to "Irish Times" newspaper, and said, "Turkey's traditional strategic relations like the EU and NATO are the backbone of Turkish foreign policy; with that backbone we must have a very active diplomacy everywhere so Turkey can contribute to regional and global peace."

"Our integration into the EU is a strategic, historical choice of the Turkish nation, and it will continue. Our active involvement in other regions is an asset to our relations with the EU, rather than an alternative to the EU," he said.

Noting that no other candidate country had faced political problems Turkey had faced, Davutoğlu said, "Turkish people are really disappointed. There was huge enthusiasm for Turkish EU integration. In spite of all these difficulties, the government has full determination to continue."

Regarding the approval of the resolution on 1915 incidents at the US House of Representatives Committee of Foreign Affairs, Davutoğlu said, "We were expecting a much more influential intervention by the White House."

"Of course, the US is our strategic ally, but we cannot accept any insult to our nation through such a process, which is not serious but just addressing the local political context of certain members of congress," he stressed.

Regarding regional problems, Davutoğlu said that Ankara was working very hard to solve the problems.

Turkey can hold referendum on constitution by summer

Wednesday, 17 March 2010 20:31

World Bulletin

Turkish government could hold a referendum on proposed changes to the constitution to reform the judiciary before the summer, Interior Minister said.

The Turkish government could potentially hold a referendum on proposed changes to the constitution to reform the judiciary before the summer, Interior Minister Besir Atalay said on Wednesday.

Atalay's comments were the first indication of a timeframe for a vote.

"We would like to hear the opposition's opinions on reforms, but we are very determined, we will hold a referendum if necessary. I think this would better to be held before the summer," Atalay said.

Last Saturday, Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin said the government would present proposed constitutional amendments to parliament before the end of March, although the AK Party lacks the two-thirds majority needed to pass the measures.

Ergin said the government would take the issue to a national referendum if it does not get parliamentary approval.

Changes to Turkey's constitution, a charter ratified in 1982 following a military coup two years earlier, are a key requirement for Turkey's European Union membership bid.

The government wants to make it harder to outlaw political parties and reform the way judges and prosecutors are appointed. It also wishes to curb the role of the Constitutional Court.

Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Cicek said this week: "The current constitution is the cause of many important problems in Turkey, it's also a major obstacle that stands in the way of Turkey's EU membership."

Reform of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors, which appoints senior members of courts, is an extremely contentious issue.

The EU has urged its reform to ensure its independence and meet European norms.

In 2008 the AK narrowly avoided closure by Turkey's Constitutional Court after a case was brought against it by the chief prosecutor.

Opposition Party Asks Adana Mayor to Resign

Tuesday, 16 March 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

ANKARA (A.A) - Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the opposition Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), asked Aytac Durak, mayor of the southern province of Adana, to resign from the MHP.

"Adana Mayor Aytac Durak must resign from our party before a disciplinary investigation," Bahçeli told a party gathering on Tuesday. Bahçeli's call came after media reports accusing Durak of corruption. Durak denied charges made by one of his aides that he made a \$2 billion fortune, saying his wealth was around \$40 million and that the main source of his assets came from his wife's family.

"These charges can never be accepted or ignored by MHP," Bahçeli said, adding that his party would never give shelter to people who showed weakness in moral issues.

Bahçeli also urged prosecutors to launch a probe into charges of corruption.

Durak was elected mayor five times during his political career with different parties, first with the Motherland Party (former ANAP) in 1984, then with the Justice & Development (AK) Party in 2004 and finally he switched to the MHP in March 2009.

Women's Movement in Turkey Strong on Its Own Accord

Sunday, 14 March 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Whether living in Turkey's rural southeast or its urban west, all people, but especially women, have rights that need protecting, the director of a Turkish civil-society organization has said.

Turkish civil society is strong and dynamic, according to Gökçe Tüylüoğlu, the executive director of the Open Society Foundation, an organization that focuses on many human-rights issues, but especially those pertaining to women and gender.

Despite her young age, Tüylüoglu has been heading the foundation since August 2009. But she is no newcomer when it comes to civil society and management; she has been dedicating herself to nongovernmental causes in Turkey for a number of years since completing schooling abroad.

The 1999 Marmara earthquake was a turning point for her, as it was for Turkish civil society in general, Tüylüoglu told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review in an interview March 3.

She first joined one of the nongovernmental organizations, or NGOs, working in the earthquake region on a voluntary basis. Later, she jumped at the chance to become a full-time worker because of what she called the feeling of “empowerment and ability to make real changes in the world.”

Other activities at the Istanbul Policy Center and Bilgi University ultimately set her on the path to becoming the executive director of the Open Society Institute. The “determined and idealistic” Tüylüoglu would probably be doing her NGO work for free – but the fact that she now draws a wage for doing what she loves makes it all the better.

Tüylüoglu said the women’s movement in Turkey is strong on its own merits, not because of European Union support, because women are very successful at uniting around a common goal, such as reform to the Turkish Penal Code. “Thirty out of 38 amendments proposed by the women’s platform were approved – that’s quite a change,” she said. The NGO director said there is no substantial difference between a woman living in a remote part of southeast Anatolia who cannot leave the house unaccompanied by a male relative and an urban, educated, middle-class woman involved in a toxic relationship she cannot leave due to the negative opinions associated with divorced women. “I can’t really separate one from another,” she said.

For the past five years, the Open Society Foundation has been supporting projects presented to it by KAMER, a Diyarbakır-based women’s organization with branches in 23 eastern and southeastern Anatolian provinces.

KAMER has been very active in bringing about awareness about crimes committed in the name of honor, which Tüylüoglu called “one of the

most brutal human-rights violations.” Among the KAMER projects supported by the foundation are 14-week-long training seminars that seek to raise women’s awareness of legal rights, women’s sexuality, communication and counseling.

Apart from these trainings directed specifically at women, KAMER also operates in close contact with the gendarmerie, the police, imams and village leaders to foster greater sensitivity toward gender-based violence in the areas in which the organization is active. As a result of KAMER’s efforts, the gendarmerie now keeps the identity of female victims of domestic abuse secret instead of simply forcing the women to return home.

In addition to gender issues, the foundation also supports research and projects in a number of priority areas: EU accession, education, decreasing regional disparities, disadvantaged groups, media and civil society. Research is an important part of civil-society activism, according to Tüylüoğlu, because it helps both in understanding the problems of society and designing appropriate measures to solve such injustices.

Regardless of their repression in Turkish society in relative or absolute terms, Tüylüoğlu said, “[All groups,] be it Roma, people with HIV/AIDS, people with mental disabilities, refugees, women or [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, or] LGBT groups should have the same level of voice in society.”

The foundation’s philosophy is based on the assumption that there is “no ultimate truth, that there is no general, all-encompassing definition of anything,” precisely because the organization supports all kinds of rights-based groups, she said.

Historical peninsula locals petition against urban transformation

Thursday, March 18, 2010

ISTANBUL – Hürriyet Daily News

Local residents of Istanbul’s historical Fener, Balat and Ayvansaray neighborhoods submitted petitions to the Fatih Municipality on

Thursday after reading a press statement complaining about the municipality's recent urban transformation project.

“According to the third article of Law No.5366, real estate owners have the right to renovate their buildings staying loyal to the project of the municipality. [As owner of the building] I want to use my right to renovate my own house,” stated the petition.

Deniz Durmaz, owner of a four-story building, told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review that the municipality's project does not allow her to renovate her own building. “It was built back in 1940 and it is a strong building,” said Durmaz, adding that the municipality plans to destroy it and replace it with a hotel. “I learned that my building will be the entrance part of a hotel that is planned to be built in Balat,” said Durmaz.

Fener, Balat and Ayvansaray are on the borders of the Fatih Municipality and they are known for their historical buildings.

A small group of locals gathered in front of the Fatih Municipality holding a poster that said, “Don't touch our buildings, our history.”

The urban transformation project was awarded to the GAP Construction Company, which is owned by Çalık Holding, and it aims to demolish many historical buildings, according to Çiğdem Şahin, press speaker for the Association for the Rights of Owners and Renters in Fener-Balat-Ayvansaray, or Febayder.

“The goal [of this construction project] is not to protect the historical buildings or to build on the behalf of the public. We saw in the preliminary projects that our buildings are going to be destroyed altogether and will be replaced with luxurious apartments designed for rich people, said Şahin reading the statement on behalf of locals of Balat, Fener and Ayvansaray.

She also said the home owners are not compensated for the value of their buildings, adding that, “They want to expel us from our neighborhood without paying us any money.”

Fatih Mayor Mustafa Demir denied Febayder's claims at a previous press conference held on Feb.17. “There are 240 registered historical

buildings in the Fener and Balat neighborhoods, and these will not be demolished, unlike the [Febayder] association has claimed,” said Demir. “We told the GAP Construction firm to let as many real estate owners stay in the neighborhood as possible,” said Demir. The municipality will discuss with the Housing Development Administration, or TOKİ, a solution for the renters in the neighborhood, he said.

The municipality did not make a statement Thursday.

The Fatih Police Department took measures against the protest, but locals dispersed without a major incident.

Turkey asked to change religious minority rules

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Wednesday, March 17, 2010

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

The Council of Europe’s advisory body has recommended that Turkey introduce legislation making it possible for religious communities to acquire and maintain a legal personality. The advisory body has also said it sees no reason for Turkey to prevent the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate from using the title “ecumenical.”

The European Commission for Democracy through Law, known as the Venice Commission, said any interference with the right to use the title is a breach of religious rights.

Ultimately, however, there is no indication Turkey is preventing the Patriarchate from using the title, it said, but added that Turkish authorities are also not obliged to use the title.

The commission informed the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate on its outlook on religious communities after its meetings on March 12-13. The recommendation comes after the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, or PACE, asked the commission last April to assess the issue.

Although the Venice Commission said its conclusions made public last week might also apply to Muslim religious communities in Turkey, it emphasized that its focus was on non-Muslim communities.

According to Turkish law, religious communities cannot register and obtain a legal personality. Instead, they have to operate indirectly through foundations or associations.

Non-Muslim communities, however, face major problems due to the lack of such legal personality, the commission said, noting the continuing restrictions on the training of clergy.

The commission also said there was a lack of both legal provision for the private higher religious education for these communities and such opportunities in the public education system. Most importantly, the commission noted Halki seminary remains closed for the Greek Orthodox community.

Secular concerns

Turkish authorities have been concerned that if they permit non-Muslim communities to obtain a personality, a door will be opened to various Muslim groups to also organize themselves, thereby strengthening the possibility of fundamentalist activities.

The commission, however, said such secularist concerns are not enough to justify the current situation.

Although the lack of legal personality applies in principle to all religious communities in Turkey equally, there is a clear, de facto distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims, the Commission said.

“For Muslim activities, these are administered through the Directorate of Religious Affairs [Diyanet] ... For the Muslim communities, issues related to representation are therefore handled through the Diyanet,” the report said, adding that the Diyanet could not be considered representative for non-Muslims.

While the commission welcomed recent amendments to improve the rights of non-Muslim communities, it has said the current law is still in contrast to the predominant European model, in which religious communities are allowed to obtain a legal personality.

The report said the current situation indicates clear interference with the exercise of freedom of religion and recommended that Turkey introduce new legislation.

The commission also evaluated the fact that Turkish authorities do not recognize the Greek Orthodox patriarch as “ecumenical,” regarding him merely as the leader of the Greek Orthodox Church in Turkey.

In this, the commission refused to accept Turkey’s argument that the stance is based on the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, arguing that the treaty does not limit the right of the Patriarchate to use the title “ecumenical.”

The report also said the denial of the title constitutes interference with the religious freedom of the Orthodox community.

No consensus in EU

Despite this, decisions from the Venice Commission are not binding, said Mehmet Özcan, a European Union expert at the International Strategic Research Organization, or USAK, an Ankara-based think-tank.

“Let’s not forget that the EU does not have a common practice on minorities,” he told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review. “The EU does not even have a consensus on what a minority is. On the ecumenism issue, Turkey’s position is clear. It does not recognize ecumenism in the international sense.”

The Venice Commission said: “Freedom of religion includes certain autonomy on the side of the religious community to decide on its own organization, such as questions of internal structure, designating religious leaders, the election and education of the clergy and the official denomination of a religious group.”

The “ecumenical” title has been used by the patriarch seated in what is now Istanbul since the sixth century. The title was also in use during the Ottoman rule.

GEO-STRATEGIC ISSUES

Gül warns political debates on history hurdle to peace

12 March 2010, Friday

TODAY’S ZAMAN ANKARA

Reiterating Ankara’s stance that legislative bodies are not places to judge history, President Abdullah Gül warned on Thursday that such

attempts both by the US Congress and the Swedish parliament concerning the killings of Anatolian Armenians during World War I would eventually harm peace and stability in the Caucasus.

Turkey has expressed outrage over the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs' approval last Thursday of a non-binding resolution calling the killings "genocide," the vote on which was broadcast live on Turkish television, and recalled its envoy to the United States for consultations.

As of yesterday afternoon, the Swedish parliament was debating a motion to recognize the 1915 events as genocide.

"First of all, I would like to say that these resolutions have no currency as far as the Turkish people are concerned," Gül was quoted as saying by the Anatolia news agency during a visit to Central Anatolian province of Isparta when reminded of both the US committee vote and the debate in the Swedish parliament. The debate in the Swedish parliament had not been finalized by the time Today's Zaman went to print.

The Swedish parliament had voted on the issue before and approved a report in 2000 recognizing disappearance of Armenians, Chaldeans, Syrians, Assyrians and Pontian Greeks from April 1915 as genocide. But the recognition was later withdrawn "on a technicality."

"All of them are very wrong and constitute unfairness to the science of history. There can be nothing more wrong than politicians and individuals who have no knowledge of history making decisions about history," Gül went on to say.

The issue of the Armenian killings is a deeply sensitive one in Turkey. Turkey accepts that many Christian Armenians were killed by Ottoman Turks but vehemently denies that up to 1.5 million died and that it amounted to genocide -- a term employed by many Western historians and some foreign parliaments.

"What I consider important is peace, stability and cooperation," the president said.

Turkey has also said the resolution could jeopardize 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.

“Consequently, the issue of the resolution of problems for peace and stability in the Caucasus is also important for me. I hope that everybody will see over time that these kinds of political decisions are damaging and obstructive to maintaining peace and stability,” Gül concluded.

A Swedish English-language online daily, The Local, reported yesterday that the motion in the Swedish parliament had the backing of members of five of the seven Swedish parliamentary parties, including the Left Party. While several center-right politicians have supported the motion and, according to the Left Party’s foreign policy spokesman, Hans Linde, made their support public on Thursday, the vote’s outcome is uncertain as the parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs has recommended its rejection, The Local reported.

Some Swedish editorial writers, meanwhile, argued that parliamentarians are not the right people to define history and that this should be left to historians.

Turkish PM threatens to expel Armenian workers

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

LONDON - Daily News with wires

HURRIYAT

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has taken a harsh position against undocumented Armenian workers in Turkey, threatening to expel thousands amid tensions over allegations that Armenians were victims of “genocide” during the last days of the Ottoman Empire.

Resolutions passed recently in the United States and Sweden to brand the World War I killings as “genocide” undermine peace efforts with Armenia, Erdoğan said during his visit to London, according to excerpts from an interview with the BBC Turkish service published on the BBC Web site late Tuesday.

However, Suat Kınıklıoğlu, deputy chairman of the ruling Justice and Development Party, on Wednesday tried to clarify Erdoğan’s remarks in a written statement, saying: “What our prime minister referred to was

the tolerance affording to Armenian citizens who are working illegally in Turkey.”

Kınıkoğlu, who is also head of Turkey-U.S. Interparliamentary Friendship Caucus, noted that this has been part of Turkish policy since 2005 to warm relations with Armenians. Turkey will continue its efforts to stabilize the South Caucasus, he said, adding that at a recent NATO meeting in Yerevan he saw that Armenian elites were still not ready for normalization, but that the Armenian people were looking forward for normalizing ties and opening borders.

“Hope, they will catch this historic opportunity and do the right thing,” he said.

‘Negative impact’

Referring to about 100,000 undocumented Armenians working in Turkey that Ankara has so far tolerated, Erdoğan said: “So what will I do tomorrow? If necessary, I will tell them 'come on, back to your country' ... I'm not obliged to keep them in my country. Those actions [on genocide resolutions] unfortunately have a negative impact on our sincere attitudes,” Agence France-Presse quoted him as saying.

Forced to leave their impoverished country to earn a living, thousands of Armenians, mostly women, have settled in Istanbul, working mainly in manual jobs or as nannies and cleaning ladies.

Erdoğan also blamed the “genocide” resolutions on the influential Armenian diaspora in the United States and Western Europe. “We are extending our hand, but if our counterparts clench their hand into a fist, there will be nothing we can do,” he said.

During the interview with BBC, the prime minister also touched on the Iran’s controversial nuclear program and said there was no definite report showing that Iran would acquire nuclear weapons. “These are all rumors. Because, nothing like that has happened. So, it is meaningless to discuss it,” he said.

Noting he had personally warned Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad several times and told him that Turkey did not want any nuclear weapons in its region, Erdoğan said the Iranian leader said that his country had no intention to produce nuclear weapons.

In his reply to a question on whether Turkey's EU membership process has lost velocity, Erdoğan said the process did not slow down, according to a report by Anatolia news agency.

Expressing Turkey's determination for the opening of the remaining chapters in its EU process, he said, "Turkey will continue to walk toward the EU in a determined way as long as the union does not close its doors to Turkey."

British justice minister tells Erdoğan 'genocide' bill will not pass

Tuesday, March 16, 2010

ISTANBUL — Daily News with wires

HURRIYAT

British Justice Minister Jack Straw on Tuesday assured Turkey's prime minister that Parliament would not pass a resolution recognizing the Ottoman-era killings of Armenians as "genocide," CNN Türk reported. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was in London on an official visit Tuesday, during which he was scheduled to meet with British Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

"The chance of this becoming law is zero," Straw said, according to CNN Türk's Web site. "I can assure everyone on this issue."

After the Swedish parliament adopted an Armenian "genocide" resolution last week, many have turned their attention to the British Parliament, where a draft will be submitted to a House of Commons committee after a second reading on April 30.

If it is approved, an "Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day" will be established in the country.

"The English government and the opposition do not support this draft," Straw said.

The British committee is scheduled to hold its last evaluation in late March; the first reading of the draft was made Jan. 6. A similar draft will follow the same process in the British House of Lords.

Armenians claim 1.5 million of their kin were massacred in 1915 at the hands of the Ottoman Empire. Turkey rejects these claims and says many people on both sides were killed during a period of civil strife.

Public diplomacy with Yerevan picks up speed

Collaboration between Armenian and Turkish civil society organizations has helped to ease the recent tension in Turkish-Armenian relations as various civil society organizations from Turkey continue meeting with their counterparts in Yerevan.

The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV) is working on reconstructing a historic Silk Road bridge along the Turkish-Armenian border, while the Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council (TABDC) is calling on Turkish investors to start up businesses in Armenia through a series of conferences on the issue. The Caucasus Strategic Research Center (KAFKASSAM) and Fatih University are organizing cultural activities to bring the two nations closer together.

An improvement in relations with Armenia started when President Abdullah Gül visited the country to watch a soccer match between Turkey and Armenia in 2008. This was followed by two protocols signed by the two countries last year to improve relations between them. However, while the Armenian Constitutional Court upheld the legality of the two protocols in January, it underlined that they could not contradict Yerevan's official position that the alleged Armenian genocide must be internationally recognized. The US House Committee on Foreign Affairs also passed a resolution recognizing the 1915 mass killings of Armenians at the hands of the Ottomans as genocide, which further damaged the process. Experts believe these developments have been caused by Turkey's limited success in terms of public diplomacy and explaining its own position internationally. However, civil society organizations have continued to visit Armenia.

TEPAV's Burcu Gültekin, who is responsible for the Caucasus region, says the organization has been working on reconstructing the bridge over the Arpaçay River, which was part of the Silk Road. The Arpaçay River marks part of the border between Turkey and Armenia. She said TEPAV is very happy about President Gül's support for the project. The

ancient bridge, built under the auspices Armenia's Bagratid Dynasty, will, at least symbolically, cover the political distance between the two countries, TEPAV hopes.

Gültekin added that the foundation is also working on two new projects that are likely to contribute to the region economically as well as having symbolic value. "The Turkish-Armenian border might not have been opened yet, but the walls are already coming down," she said, noting that a tourism cluster project for Turkey's eastern Anatolian region and Armenia is also in the works and is supported by the Armenian diaspora. TABDC Co-Chairman Kaan Soyak says it is time for peace in the Caucasus. He says the TABDC tries to answer Turkish companies' questions about starting to do business in Armenia and has held various seminars on this topic. The TABDC has also started an international business forum called "The Bridge." Soyak said they have been talking to their Armenian counterparts about the business opportunities that may emerge when the Southern Caucasus railroad and another railroad connecting Turkey's border town of Kars and Armenia's Gyumri start functioning. Soyak also said they have been discussing possible investments in Armenia with World Bank representatives.

"The people of Armenia want to see good relations established with Turkey with no preconditions," according to KAFKASSAM President Hasan Oktay, whose organization is offering vocational training courses to young people in Armenia. Another of KAFKASSAM's projects involves Turkish and Armenian artists expressing their vision of İstanbul through art. Oktay said KAFKASSAM frequently conducts polls in Armenia to find out the Armenians' perception of Turkey as well as engaging in networking activities to bring the two nations together. Fatih University's Cafer Ulu says bilateral projects between the two countries should be increased in number. Ulu recently met with female Armenian deputies in Yerevan as part of a project titled "Contributions of Turkish and Armenian Women to Turkish-Armenian Relations." Ulu said he attached great importance to communication between individuals who are considered opinion leaders on both sides. Ulu said that however

insignificant they might seem, such projects can be very influential, especially at times when the two countries' relations are in crisis.

Gates labels 'genocide' vote at Congress a 'mistake'

15 March 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN ANKARA

US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has expressed regret over a US House committee's labeling killings of Anatolian Armenians as genocide, while voicing awareness of probable "damaging" impacts of the US House committee's resolution on Turkey-US relations.

During an interview with the Al Arabiya television channel broadcast on Friday, Gates was asked about whether he was worried, given that Turkey withdrew its ambassador to the US in reaction to the March 4 vote and that Turkey may have threatened to withhold military assistance to the United States.

"I am worried about it. I will say that it was just one committee of the House of Representatives that voted on this resolution," Gates responded, according to the transcript of the interview posted on the Defense Department's Web site.

"We very strongly feel that the resolution is a mistake. Turkey and Armenia are making progress toward a reconciliation. Protocols have been drafted along those lines. That's the process that we think ought to be used. A resolution of this kind could be very damaging to US-Turkish relations, and we certainly hope that the Congress and the House of Representatives take this measure no further," Gates added.

Armenia and Turkey signed two protocols 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 South Caucasus, must be ratified by the parliaments in Ankara and Yerevan.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton -- who had urged the House Foreign Affairs Committee not to hold the vote on March 4 -- said on

March 5: "We are against this decision. Now we believe that the US Congress will not take any decision on this subject."

Sweden, Turkey jointly denounce 'genocide' vote

14 March 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The foreign ministers of Turkey and Sweden condemned on Saturday a vote in the Swedish parliament that defined the World War One killings of Anatolian Armenians as genocide.

Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, who is holding informal talks with foreign ministers including Turkey's Ahmet Davutoğlu in northern Finland, said he was upset by the vote on Thursday and concerned it could affect Turkish-Armenian reconciliation.

"It's regrettable because I think the politicisation of history serves no useful purpose," he told reporters.

"We are interested in the business of reconciliation, and decisions like that tend to raise tensions rather than lower tensions," he said.

Sweden's parliament, by a vote of 131-130, backed a resolution that branded the killings of Armenians in the World War One as a "genocide," a term that Turkey resolutely rejects.

Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt phoned his Turkish counterpart, Tayyip Erdoğan, on Saturday and said he disagreed with the resolution, according to a statement on the Turkish prime minister's official website.

The vote followed a decision by a committee of the US House of Representatives the week before approving a nonbinding measure condemning the 1915 killings.

In both cases Turkey responded angrily, withdrawing its ambassadors to Washington and Stockholm.

The vote in the Swedish parliament was particularly galling for Turkey as Sweden is one of Ankara's strongest backers on issues such as Turkey's desire to join the European Union.

Reinfeldt told Erdoğan Sweden would continue to back Turkey's EU bid and that the vote was driven by domestic politics and would not affect bilateral relations, the statement said. Erdoğan cancelled a planned visit to Sweden this month, and the government recalled its ambassador from Stockholm.

Davutoğlu said Turkey would not stand by quietly if other nations took similar steps to describe the 1915 killings as a "genocide" and said it was pointless for countries to think they could put pressure on Turkey.

"We will not be silent and we will not just show the usual attitudes. For each case we will have a different (set of) measures," he said.

"What is the purpose of this? If the purpose is to make pressure, nobody can make pressure on Turkey. If the purpose is to get local domestic concerns raised, Turkish historical events should not be misused for these narrow issues."

Davutoğlu, the architect of Turkey's foreign policy of re-engaging with its neighbours, including Armenia, said it was wrong for parliaments to think they could define history purely via a vote.

He also said he was concerned about the impact the vote could have on efforts by Armenia and Turkey to reconcile their history and find a political common ground at a time when they are making progress towards normalising relations.

Italy not among countries recognizing Armenian allegations on 1915 incidents

12 March 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Italy said on Friday that it was not among countries recognizing Armenian allegations regarding 1915 incidents.

Italian Embassy in Ankara released a written statement and said a tv channel on Friday included Italy among countries which formally recognized Armenian allegations.

The embassy statement said the news report did not reflect the facts.

Swedish Parliament on Thursday approved a resolution on Armenian allegations regarding 1915 incidents with 131 votes against 130.

The US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs last Thursday approved the resolution on Armenian allegations.

Turkey strongly rejects the genocide allegations and regards the events as civil strife in wartime which claimed lives of many Turks and Armenians.

Turkey and Armenia signed two protocols on October 10, 2009 to normalize relations between the two countries. The protocols envisage the two countries to establish diplomatic ties and open the border that has been close since 1993.

Turkey and Armenia also agreed to take steps to operate a sub-commission on impartial scientific examination of the historical records and archive to define existing problems and formulate recommendations, in which Armenian, Turkish as well as Swiss and other international experts would take part.

However, on January 12, 2010, the Constitutional Court of Armenia declared a decision of constitutional conformity on the protocols. Turkey thought the fifth article of Armenian Constitutional Court's verdict regarding the protocols was against the target and basis of the protocols.

Erdoğan under fire at home for remarks on Armenian workers

18 March 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's remarks about the possible deportation of irregular Armenian workers in Turkey have angered civil society organizations despite the ruling Justice and Development Party

(AK Party) attempts to explain that Erdoğan did not intend to expel these workers but only wanted to underline Turkey's "magnanimity."

"Look, there are 170,000 Armenians in my country -- 70,000 of them are my citizens, but we are managing [tolerating] 100,000 of them in our country. So, what will we do tomorrow? If it is necessary, I will tell them, 'Come on, back to your country.' I will do it. Why? They are not

my citizens. I am not obliged to keep them in my country. I mean these are [defenders of the Armenian claims of genocide], their attitude is affecting our sincere attitude in a negative way, and they are not aware of it,” Erdoğan told the BBC Turkish service in an interview on Tuesday during a visit to London for talks with British Prime Minister Gordon Brown. He was responding to a question about a couple of resolutions passed at a US congressional panel and in the Swedish Parliament earlier this month recognizing Armenian claims of genocide by Ottoman Turks a century ago. He described the votes as a “show” and warned that they were harming Turkey's efforts to normalize its ties with Armenia. “We are committed to the zero-problem policy [with Turkey's neighbors], but there is nothing we can do if the other side clenches its fist while we extend a hand.”

Leaving aside foreign policy considerations, civil society organizations criticized Erdoğan's remarks on several grounds: first, he mentioned Armenian Turkish citizens together with the citizens of Armenia, and secondly, he was using foreign workers as a tool of foreign policy and neglecting the humanitarian side of the problem.

But Suat Kınıklıoğlu, deputy chairman of the AK Party Foreign Affairs Committee, underlined that Erdoğan was trying to explain that Turkey tolerates the irregular Armenian workers. “As has been known for many years, there are Armenians illegally living and working in Turkey, and as a reflection of our goodwill and efforts toward normalization which started in 2005, we do not really touch them.

We tolerate them and take their difficult circumstances into consideration. In particular, we are not questioning their status due to the acceleration of the normalization process in Turkish-Armenian relations. The prime minister needed to draw this fact to people’s attention, especially now, when resolutions have been accepted which damage normalization. I think Turkey’s magnanimity is being ignored,” he said, and added that the prime minister did not mean he would immediately send those workers back to their country.

Öztürk Türkdoğan, the chairman of the Human Rights Association (İHD), said Erdoğan’s remarks could easily be considered a “threat” and

as discrimination. “These remarks could lead some people to think that to expel people is a 2010 version of forced migration. This mentality is far from human rights-oriented thinking. People have the right to work, and this is universal. There are many Turkish workers all over the world; does it mean that Turkey will accept their expulsion when there is an international problem? Secondly, these remarks are discriminatory; there are many workers in Turkey of different nationalities,” he said.

Ceren Öztürk from the immigrant solidarity network said that free circulation of people is a universal right and Erdoğan’s remarks are not acceptable. “The right to free circulation cannot be used as a wild card in international relations. Immigrants have to have equal rights with Turkish citizens because they are producing and contributing to society,” she said.

Armenian issue as litmus test

Journalist Hayko Bağdat said Turkish foreign policy loves the principle of “reciprocity,” but uses its own citizens who are minorities. “If the prime minister is angry with the US or Sweden, he should expel the citizens of those countries who are living or working in Turkey. The poor Armenian workers here -- by the way, their number is not 100,000 at all -- have nothing to do with the genocide resolutions,” he said.

He added that Erdoğan had also made a distinction between “good Armenians” and “bad Armenians.” “The prime minister mentioned Armenian Turkish citizens and Armenian citizens together, but later talked about expelling the poor Armenian workers. This means that the official policy has been lying to us for years. He put everyone in the same category, but according to what -- according to their ethnic origin. But for years we have been told that there are no distinctions on the basis of ethnic origin. This means that “unity” is not internalized and the roots of discrimination are very strong,” Bağdat said.

He added that there are two camps in Turkey now: one is claiming that it is trying to change the system and the other one is resisting this change, but when it comes to the Armenians, they have a common understanding.

“The Armenian question is the litmus test for everyone to find out if they really want a change in the system,” he said. After the “genocide” resolutions in the US and Sweden, during a debate over the issue in Parliament’s Foreign Affairs Commission, Canan Aritman from the Republican People’s Party (CHP) suggested deporting Armenian workers in Turkey. In the past, she has also called for an investigation into the ancestry of President Abdullah Gül’s mother, implying that she was of Armenian origin. Gül took Aritman to court.

The İHD’s Türkdoğan was also critical of Erdoğan’s remarks regarding ethnically Armenian Turkish citizens: “We can see that the classic republican understanding based on ethnic Turkism is still valid.

Minorities cannot be the subject of bargaining in international relations. This is racist discourse and only proves how far we are from a human rights-oriented perspective,” Türkdoğan said.

Number of Armenian workers is controversial issue

There is controversy over the precise number of Armenians illegally working in Turkey, but a recent study by the Eurasia Partnership Foundation claimed that there are between 12,000 and 13,000 Armenian citizens working in Turkey. The study conducted by Alin Özinan states that according to official numbers, 6,000 Armenians did not return home after traveling to Turkey between 2000 and 2008. Özinan adds figures from the 1990s to this number and says the number of Armenians illegally living in Turkey is not 70,000 to 100,000 as has previously been asserted, but is actually between 12,000 and 13,000.

According to the study, 94 percent of the Armenians working in Turkey are women, with very few Armenian men accompanying their spouses or working here. Armenian women tend to work as childcare providers, servants, janitors and saleswomen. Most of the Armenian men who accompany their wives here choose not to work at all, while those who do tend to work in the jewelry business. In the past, Turkish foreign ministers and diplomats have also claimed that the Armenians living in Turkey number around 70,000. Turkey has deported very few Armenians working irregularly here in recent years, the report says, asserting that Armenians are only deported if they have committed a

crime outside of working illegally; the crime rate amongst immigrant Armenians is very low.

Main opposition party to call for parliamentary session on Armenia

Thursday, March 18, 2010

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

The main opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP, is planning to request a parliamentary session to review the normalization process with Armenia.

Party leader Deniz Baykal had earlier urged the government to withdraw the protocols signed in October following the approval of "genocide" recognition bills in the Swedish parliament and the U.S. House of Representatives' Foreign Affairs Committee.

Addressing his party members Wednesday, Baykal criticized recent comments by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who told the BBC in an interview that some 100,000 Armenians had been illegally working in Turkey. Turkish-Armenian weekly Agos, however, estimates the number at 14,000, citing Labor Ministry statistics. Erdoğan's remarks were interpreted as a threat to expel the workers in reaction to campaigning by members of the Armenian diaspora for bills such as those passed in Sweden and the United States.

"It is an unfortunate and serious statement," Baykal said, adding that he found the remark "unacceptable."

"It is against human rights to misuse those people working in Turkey in seeking a solution to a disagreement," the CHP leader said.

Baykal has opposed any normalizing of relations with Armenia due to the deadlock in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute between Yerevan and Baku. The CHP argues that the protocols between Turkey and Armenia, which envision opening the border and normalizing diplomatic ties, should not be ratified until Armenia amends its constitutional article related to "genocide" and withdraws from the territory it occupies in Azerbaijan.

Greek Cypriot president won't seek second term if talks fail

Thursday, March 18, 2010

NICOSIA - From wire dispatches

HURRIYAT

Greek Cyprus' president says he will not seek re-election in the 2013 elections if ongoing reunification talks with his Turkish Cypriot counterpart fail. While Greek Cyprus' Christofias heads to Athens for consultations, Turkish Cyprus President Talat holds similar talks in Ankara

Greek Cypriot President Dimitris Christofias said on Thursday that he would not seek re-election in 2013 if ongoing U.N.-brokered talks to reunify the divided island fail.

In a televised news conference to mark two years of his administration, Christofias said that if his key aim as president to solve the Cyprus problem is not achieved, he will not consider standing again.

Christofias, the first president from the Communist Party AKEL, was elected in 2008 on a campaign promise to resume stalled peace talks with his counterpart Turkish Cypriot President Mehmet Ali Talat. But there has been only limited progress after 19 months of slow-moving negotiations.

The current round of talks is due to be suspended at the end of this month to allow Talat to campaign for elections on April 18 in Turkish Cyprus. Talat is trailing in the polls to hard-liner Derviş Eroğlu.

"This will be my first and last term in office unless I succeed in solving the Cyprus problem," Christofias said. He said if he fails to broker a deal with Talat, he will not even "think about" running at the end of his five-year term.

"I underline clearly; if no Cyprus settlement is reached by the end of my first term, I will not seek a second term. My current term in office will be my first and last," Christofias said during a news conference in Nicosia.

Poor progress

Both Cypriot leaders say they are committed to reaching a settlement to end 36 years of division. But since peace negotiations were launched under much international optimism in September 2008 there have been few signs of tangible progress 70 meetings later.

The two sides remain far apart on the core issues of property, security and territorial adjustments. Christofias said talks have made progress on sharing power under an envisioned federation, but that it wasn't "sufficiently satisfactory."

He said both sides are still far apart in their positions on other key issues including arrangements on property lost during the war, and complained that the Turkish Cypriot side was being influenced by Ankara.

"The failure to achieve impressive progress is owed to the distance in positions between the two sides and not because more meetings haven't been made," he said.

"Wherever the Turkish Cypriot side showed a willingness equivalent to our own, there has been convergence. Unfortunately, in many of its proposals, the Turkish Cypriot side, with the backing of Ankara, remained static in older positions."

But Christofias reached out to Talat, who faces possible ousting in an April 18 election in Turkish Cyprus. In a show of support for Talat, Christofias warned that his rival Eroğlu's rise to power would make peace talks "very, very difficult."

Christofias and Talat have already agreed that any peace accord would be based on a federation composed of two constituent states. Eroğlu advocates a loose partnership of two separate states – something that Greek Cypriots reject as entrenching division.

Christofias in Athens, Talat in Ankara

Greek Cypriots rejected a U.N. reunification blueprint in a referendum, ensuring a still divided Cyprus joined the European Union in 2004 despite a Turkish Cypriot vote approving it. Following that, movement on a peace deal stagnated for four years until Christofias' election victory in early 2008.

U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon visited the island earlier this year to give the talks a boost.

"For decades the world has heard about a Cyprus problem. Now is the time for a Cyprus solution," he after meeting the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot presidents on Feb. 1.

Christofias was headed to Athens later on Thursday for consultations with the Greek government. His visit was due to continue through Sunday. Talat was, meanwhile, wrapping up a visit to Ankara where he held similar consultations with the Turkish government.

There is continuing debate about whether or not the two men will make a joint statement later this month on the progress made in their talks so far.

Nabucco partners to finalize production accord in April

Thursday, March 18, 2010

ANKARA - Anatolia News Agency

HURRIYAT

The partners in the planned Nabucco natural-gas pipeline to Europe will conclude a production-sharing agreement in April, Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yıldız said Thursday.

A Project Support Agreement, or PSA, will be clarified and then signed, he added.

Nabucco is a strategic and commercial effort supported politically by Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Austria, the minister told reporters after a meeting in Ankara that was attended by representatives of all the countries participating in the pipeline project.

"Turkey is lending its full political support to Nabucco," Yıldız added.

Reinhard Mitschek, a high-level executive with the project, said that an intergovernmental agreement had been signed for Nabucco in 2009 and that extremely crucial developments are expected this year. According to Mitschek, natural gas will start to flow through the pipeline in 2014.

The Turkish Parliament approved March 4 a bill on a deal signed with the other four countries to launch the Nabucco pipeline project, which will link Europe to the Caspian Sea region and is considered a key step toward reducing Europe's energy dependence on Russia. Under the law

approved by Parliament, the pipeline will carry Caspian natural gas to Austria through Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. Yıldız told lawmakers that the state-owned Turkish Pipeline Company, or BOTAŞ, and the Turkish Petroleum Corporation, or TPAO, could create partnerships with international firms. "Energy diplomacy is like chess. When you see a move, you have to make one as well," he said. Responding to a question about whether a new partner for the project was needed, Yıldız said Nabucco was an ever-developing project and would therefore always be open to new partnership deals. "However, the new partner needs be at a level where it can provide full support and contribute something valuable to the project," he added.

Erdoğan: 'Only rumors' that Iran making nuclear weapons

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

LONDON — Agence France-Presse

HURRIYAT

Turkey's prime minister said Tuesday it was "only rumors" that Iran was making nuclear weapons, stressing the Islamic republic's right to develop civilian atomic power.

Speaking before meeting with British Prime Minister Gordon Brown in London, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also questioned why countries like Israel did not face calls from the international community to disarm, while Iran did.

"It's only rumors that Iran is making nuclear weapons," Erdoğan told the BBC, speaking through an interpreter.

"I believe it is Iran's most natural right to employ nuclear energy for civilian purposes."

Turkey has good relations with its neighbor Iran and has offered to host an exchange of its low-enriched uranium, or LEU, with 20 percent enriched uranium to be supplied by world powers to Tehran as part of a U.N.-drafted deal.

The prime minister added that countries with nuclear weapons "are not in a position to turn to another country and to say: 'Oh, you are not supposed to produce nuclear weapons.'"

"Take Israel. Israel possess nuclear weapons. Why aren't other countries warning Israel to dispose of her nuclear weapons but they're doing the same to Iran?" he asked.

At a press conference with Brown at Downing Street later, Erdoğan said he would like to see "a world without nuclear weapons" and advocated diplomacy over sanctions.

"We always say to all of our friends we would not like to see any nuclear weapons in our region," he said. "We believe in the importance of a diplomatic solution."

He added: "Sanctions have been imposed twice before and if it's considered to carry on with the sanctions a third time, we will see but what I would say is that what we need to do ... is find diplomatic solution."

Brown added: "Prime Minister Erdoğan and I share a conviction that we must resolve this issue diplomatically and my belief is that the U.N. Security Council must take action to ensure sanctions against Iran."

Washington trip unlikely, PM signals

Tuesday, March 16, 2010

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

In an indication that diplomatic tensions continue between Ankara and Washington, Turkey's prime minister has signaled that he is unlikely to participate in the international energy summit U.S. President Barack Obama will host in April.

Following a U.S. House committee's passing of a resolution March 4 recognizing the deaths of Armenians in 1915 as "genocide," observers have been waiting to see if Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will attend the Nuclear Security Summit in the United States on April 12.

“We don’t have a scheduled visit to the U.S.,” Erdoğan told reporters late Monday before departing for London. “We have received only an invitation, which is routine. A colleague of ours may participate, but we have not yet assigned a specific person.”

Erdoğan’s hesitation did not come as a surprise to observers in Ankara, especially after the prime minister cancelled a visit to Stockholm following the approval of a similar resolution by the Swedish parliament.

“I think Erdoğan will not announce his final decision until the last moment. Unless President Obama assures Ankara that the U.S. Congress will not approve the genocide bill, he will not go to Washington,” a source close to the prime minister told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review on Tuesday.

In protest of the two resolutions, Ankara recalled its ambassadors to both Stockholm and Washington, D.C., last week.

During a recent visit to Riyadh, Erdoğan said: “I don’t believe the U.S. would sacrifice a strategic partner such as Turkey for such trivial political calculations. We have nothing to say if they take the risk.” At the time, Erdoğan appeared wary of returning his ambassador to Washington.

“We will assess the situation in the broadest meaning; we have to,” he said. “As long as we don’t see the results [Turkey desires], we will not be sending our ambassador back to the U.S.”

Energy minister waiting for green light from PM

Energy Minister Taner Yıldız also said Tuesday that Turkey has made no final decision about whether to join the upcoming nuclear summit in the U.S. capital.

“That’s why we will be following further developments. Later we will discuss the issue with Mr. Prime Minister,” Yıldız told reporters.

The energy minister said he still hoped for “a positive development in relation to the 1915 events” – meaning that the full U.S. Congress would not ultimately approve the Armenian “genocide” resolution.

Highlighting a U.S.-Turkish joint plan to drill for oil in the Black Sea, Yıldız said: “I don’t think any outside effect will damage these joint

projects. We will continue our collaboration, but we also believe that this wrongdoing [by the U.S. House committee] will be corrected.”

EU slammed for delay in announcing needed judicial reforms

The long-awaited results of a screening by the European Union on the state of the Turkish justice system seem to have fallen into the cracks within the cumbersome EU bureaucracy, thwarted by political myopia and eventually making EU-hopeful Turkey the latest victim of the slow-paced and often complicated structure of the EU decision-making apparatus.

The delay has irked many officials in Turkey, including top EU negotiator Egemen Bağış, who said the situation has raised concerns in the Turkish capital. It has drawn indignation from leading European Parliament officials as well. “It is not understandable why the EU would waste the chance to be a model,” said H el ene Flautre, a French politician and member of the European Parliament who co-chairs the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee.

Negotiations on Chapter 23 of the *acquis communautaire*, concerning the judiciary and fundamental rights, aim to maintain and further develop the negotiating country as an area of freedom, security and justice. In addition to the chapter on the judiciary, nine other chapters that Turkey needs to negotiate with the bloc are still awaiting the announcement of the screening results simply because the European Council has not yet acted and approved them. The undue delay in revealing the screening results is extremely problematic as Turkey is about to embark on a major legal overhaul to reform its notorious justice system for the smoother operation of government agencies.

The EU’s screening project on the Turkish judiciary started in September 2006 and was completed a month later. Although Chapter 23, “Judiciary and Fundamental Rights,” has not been officially opened due a Greek Cypriot veto, that veto would not have prevented the European Commission from announcing the results of the screening after they were approved by the council or from conveying them to Turkey once the procedure was completed. The European Commission says it sent the findings to the council, meaning the EU’s member states, for review. It

appears, however, that somebody dropped the ball, and the results were left in a drawer.

By contrast, the council has approved all of Croatia's screening results, a candidate country that went through the process at about the same time as Turkey. "We have not been officially notified about the screening results on 10 chapters as they have not yet been approved by the council," Bağış, state minister and Turkey's chief EU negotiator, told Today's Zaman. "Although the necessary work on these chapters is being carried out to meet domestic needs in Turkey, the approach of the council and some EU member states in relation to this matter nonetheless is curbing Turkey's enthusiasm," he lamented.

Bağış underlined that in negotiations with the EU, the official start of each chapter begins with the approval of the screening results by the council so that the candidate country is officially made aware of the criteria, if any, they need to meet in order to open the chapter and therefore reorganize its work accordingly. "Unfortunately, on chapters 23 and 24, dealing with 'judiciary and fundamental rights' and 'justice, freedom and security' respectively, the EU has not officially conveyed the results of the screening despite the screening being completed a long time ago," he noted.

Turkish Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin also complained on Saturday that Turkey has been awaiting the outcome of the EU's screening of Turkey's legislative process, required to open the chapter on the judiciary and fundamental rights, which began in 2006. "Although almost five years have passed, we have not received the results. We need to see those results urgently in order to do what is necessary to open the chapter," Ergin noted.

Top EU negotiator Bağış also said he is very concerned that the council's delay is further aggravated by the fact that one member state announced it will block the opening of these two chapters. Although he did not name the country, it was obvious that Bağış was referring to the Greek Cypriot government, which single-handedly has blocked the opening of half of the negotiating chapters with the EU. Nevertheless, Bağış vowed to keep up reforms in Turkey and underlined that Turkey

has made some reforms regarding Chapter 23 and that negotiations are under way for the re-admission agreement, which would authorize the repatriation of illegal migrants to their home country via Turkey within the framework of Chapter 24.

European Parliament criticized council

17 March 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

In an op-ed piece published on March 7 in Sunday's Zaman, Flautre raised this issue and criticized the way the EU handled the screening process regarding the judiciary. "It is not understandable why the EU would waste the chance to be a model, a reference and most importantly, an institutional player in Turkey's becoming a democratic country governed by the rule of law. I cannot keep myself from asking what the reasons might be for our failure to convey the screening results and our expectations regarding judicial reforms to Turkey, as well as about the 'disagreement' between the European Commission and the European Council on the screening results," she argued.

The screening, officially known as the analytical examination, is the first phase of the negotiations pursued by the commission with a candidate country. It takes around a year and allows candidate countries to familiarize themselves with the *acquis*, a body of rules and laws governing the EU. It helps the commission as well EU member states to evaluate the degree of preparedness of candidate country prior to negotiations.

Screening is conducted through meetings. There are two kinds of meetings for each chapter: first explanatory meetings with all candidate countries together, and then bilateral meetings with each of the countries separately. In the explanatory sessions, the commission explains the *acquis* to the candidate countries. Approximately one month after the explanatory meeting, a bilateral meeting (country session) is held with each country individually. During that session, it is the candidate

country that explains its degree of preparedness and its plans with regard to the chapter in question.

The commission held explanatory meetings with Turkey in September 2006 and bilateral meetings a month later. Although screening was completed, its results were never communicated to Turkey. By contrast, for example, on Chapter 1, “Free Movement of Goods,” the first explanatory meeting was held in January 2006 and the bilateral meeting a month later. In June 2007, the screening report on this chapter was released to the public, though opening of the chapter was frozen in December 2006 due to political reasons.

“The report is not lost,” Angela Filote, spokeswoman for European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighborhood Policy Stefan Füle, told Today’s Zaman when asked about the fate of the report. “The screening reports are published when the EU member states agree on opening benchmarks. We are working on this with our member states,” she said. Filote further noted that the EU’s viewpoint on the need for reforms in this area is well known. “We have included our evaluation in the yearly progress reports, and we are discussing this in our contacts with the Turkish authorities as this is an area of reform that is very important, in the first place, for Turkey and its citizens. We are also discussing these issues with the representatives of civil society in Turkey,” she added.

Fuele reaffirms support to Turkey's EU membership bid

15 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

EU Commissioner for enlargement Stefan Fuele on Monday reaffirmed his support to Turkey's accession talks and bid to join the European Union (EU).

Fuele also underlined his support to efforts to normalize relations between Turkey and Armenia while speaking at a joint news conference with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in Ankara.

Fuele said he welcomed Turkey's policy of zero problem with its neighbours, which was discussed at the meeting. He said he also welcomed historical steps made between Turkey and Armenia to normalise relations.

Fuele said they also discussed Cyprus question adding that implementation of the Additional Protocol was important for the EU and urged Turkey to normalize relations with the Greek Cypriot party.

The additional protocol to the Ankara Agreement foresees extension of Turkey's customs union deal to ten countries that joined the European Union (EU) in 2004, including the Greek Cypriot administration.

He said any comprehensive solution that would be found on Cyprus question would be a historical development both for Turkey and the EU.

Reaffirming his commitment to see Turkey as a member of the EU, Fuele said his meeting with Davutoğlu focused on EU's commitments and Turkey's requirements to make steps during the reform process.

"We have also reaffirmed that the EU should assume a role not only as an observer but a leader of the world," he noted.

Turkey became an EU candidate country in December 1999. The union launched accession talks with Turkey on October 3, 2005.

Asked to comment on visa liberalization to Turkey, Fuele said this was important both for Turkey and the EU.

Fuele said some studies were in question to help Turkey deal with illegal migration, and noted that some studies should be carried out regarding extradition of those who went to Europe via Turkey.

EU Enlargement Commissioner said studies to liberalize visa requirements could start in the following stages in case any progress could be recorded in dealing with illegal migration.

Asked to comment on approval of the Armenian resolution in the Swedish parliament, Fuele said the commission did not make comments on the internal decisions of the member countries.

Earlier in the day, Fuele also got together with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at a closed-doors meeting. Turkish State Minister & Chief EU Negotiator Egemen Bagis were also present at the meeting.

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FM Davutoğlu underlines strategical importance of EU for Turkey

15 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said on Monday that European Union (EU) was a strategical essential target for Turkey. Speaking at a joint news conference with EU Commissioner for enlargement Stefan Fuele, Davutoğlu said their meeting focused on three main topics, naming them as strategic vision of Turkey-EU relations, course of negotiation process as well as coordination of policies Turkey and EU carried out regarding neighboring regions.

Davutoğlu said he had a very fruitful meeting in the weekend in Finland on strategic vision of Turkey-EU relations, "EU is our common unity and Europe is our common continent," he said.

"Turkey's membership is an opportunity for the EU and EU membership is an extremely important strategical essential target for Turkey," Davutoğlu said.

Davutoğlu said they also discussed course of negotiation process, noting that he told Fuele that Turkey's EU process should not be affected by political problems like Cyprus which were not directly related to the matter.

Davutoğlu said they discussed Cyprus question comprehensively, views towards a comprehensive and lasting peace and shared the views that talks should be speeded up.

Davutoğlu said he gave information to Fuele about the ongoing political reforms in Turkey and once again relayed the EU Turkey's demand for visa exemption by taking into consideration previous legal commitments.

Davutoğlu said they also discussed developments in the Western Balkans, Caucasus, West Mediterranean, neighboring countries and energy security issues.

He said, "we reached to a consensus of opinion that EU should establish a new strategic dialogue mechanism with Turkey after Lisbon Agreement."

Davutoğlu calls for more active EU foreign policy

15 March 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN WITH WIRES ANKARA

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has urged the European Union to seek more influence in the South Caucasus and the Middle East, regions where Ankara already considers itself to be a major player.

Davutoğlu's remarks came on Saturday in Lapland, Finland, ahead of an informal meeting with seven of his EU counterparts, news portal EUobserver reported.

"We want the EU to be much more active in all international affairs and also much more visionary, because the EU itself is a good example of how countries who had serious difficulties, the worst tensions in the past, came together based on the principle of values as well as economic interests," Davutoğlu was quoted as saying, while he described the EU as a "good model" of unity and added that countries in the South Caucasus and the Middle East could learn from European integration.

"The EU can provide strong messages and very good examples for other countries and regions," he said.

As of Sunday, the global dispute surrounding Iran's controversial nuclear program was a top item on agenda of the ministers. The French and Finish ministers have said that a UN resolution on new sanctions against Iran may not be ready until June and that if a vote on it fails, European states could take unilateral measures instead.

Davutoğlu, who has visited Iran several times to try to broker a uranium exchange deal that might prevent the need for sanctions, said he had had an open exchange with his colleagues, including EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton, on the Iran nuclear issue and remained convinced sanctions were wrong. "We shared our views and we are trying to develop a common approach," he said when asked if he had managed to

convince his EU counterparts that sanctions on Iran were the wrong idea. "I believe there is room for diplomacy and that the EU can play a significant role. If there is good strategic cooperation between Turkey and the EU, that will help not only the Iran nuclear issue but all other regional issues in the Middle East and the Balkans," he said.

EU official reiterates condition for Turkey visa facility

Wednesday, 17 March 2010 11:39

WORLD BULLETIN

European Union's commissioner for enlargement said on Tuesday that the visa procedures between EU and Turkey might be lifted "some day". European Union's commissioner for enlargement said on Tuesday that the visa procedures between EU and Turkey might be lifted "some day", once the steps regarding the re-admission agreement were completed, Anadolu news agency reported.

EU wants Turkey to sign a readmission agreement to halt the entry of "illegal immigrants" to Europe.

A significant number of people fleeing their poverty-stricken or war-torn countries of origin seek an opportunity to live in Europe. Turkey is the main route for thousands of asylum seekers coming from Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Middle East.

Stefan Fule, the Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy, held talks with the Umit Boyner, the head of Turkish Industrialists' and Businesspeople's Association (TUSIAD) in Istanbul.

Speaking to reporters after the gathering, Fule said that Turkey was a part of Europe and it needed EU's full support.

He said Turkey would become an EU member once it fulfilled "all the requirements."

Commenting on his meeting with Boyner, Fule said "credibility" was on the agenda of the gathering, expressing the importance of EU's commitment to its promises and Turkey's carrying on with its reform process.

Fule also said that not only politically strong actors, but also non-governmental organizations should participate in the process.

Upon a question on the visa regime, Fule said talks on the re-admission agreement continued.

Fule said "a non-visa regime might be brought" once such agreement was concluded and the following period was overcome.

TUSIAD head Boyner said in her part that Turkey was an important project for EU.

"If Turkey is a rising country today, it is because it has assured to adopt EU's values, high democracy standards, human rights and pluralistic democracy," Boyner said.

"We believe the reform process in Turkey should continue. As TUSIAD, we will fulfill our responsibilities on such matter," she also said.

Cypriot leaders to meet under Cyprus negotiations

15 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

President Mehmet Ali Talat of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) will meet with Greek Cypriot leader Demetris Christofias on March 16 under ongoing Cyprus negotiations.

The meeting will take place at the residence of the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative to Cyprus Taye Brook Zerihoun.

Leaders will continue discussing the topic of "economy" during the meeting which is expected to last whole day.

They will come together again on March 30 ahead of the presidential election in the TRNC on April 18.

Turkish President Gül visits Congo

15 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's President Abdullah Gül arrived in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo on Sunday

Gül is accompanied by state ministers Selma Aliye Kavaf and Faruk Nafiz Özak, Industry & Trade Minister Nihat Ergün, businessmen and representatives of nongovernmental organizations.

President Gül had a meeting with Turkish businessmen working in Democratic Republic of Congo at Grand Hotel in Kinshasa.

Turkey attached a great importance to its relations with Africa, the Turkish president said. Gül recalled the Turkey-Africa Cooperation Council meeting that took place in İstanbul in 2008 within the scope of the government's Africa initiative.

President Gül said Turkey extended humanitarian aid to several African countries without expecting anything in return and Turkey's aid exceeded 1 billion US dollars.

Gül added they supported Turkish businessmen in African countries which had great potentials.

Gül seeks cooperation in DR Congo and Cameroon visits

15 March 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

President Abdullah Gül will meet with the presidents and top officials of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Cameroon to discuss political, regional and international affairs, Gül said during a news conference on Sunday before his trip to the two African republics.

President Gül pointed out that his trip this week to Congo and Cameroon, upon the invitations of DR Congo President Joseph Kabila and Cameroon President Paul Biya, is the first presidential-level visit between Turkey and the two countries.

Many ministers, deputies, representatives of professional and civil society organizations, university professors, media and business groups will accompany him during his visit. Exactly a year ago, President Gül visited Kenya and Tanzania. Noting that 60 percent of the agenda of the United Nations Security Council consists of issues related to Africa, Gül said they have started to work closely with African countries during Turkey's time on the Security Council.

Stating that Security Council decisions concern millions of people in Africa, Gül said that it is necessary to take their opinion into consideration. "That is the reason why this visit is important. We go there to listen to and understand them and learn their thoughts," Gül said. Noting that they received the votes of almost all African countries in the Security Council nonpermanent member elections, Gül said Africa has already become Turkey's strategic partner.

Turkey's trade volume with Africa was only \$5 billion in 2003, but rose to \$15 billion in 2009. "Our target is to increase trade between Turkey and African countries to \$30 billion in the shortest possible time," Gül said. Gül also added that Turkey could cooperate with the two countries he's visiting on construction, mining, energy, tourism and agriculture.

Turkey, Cameroon sign visa deal, protocol

Wednesday, 17 March 2010 09:04

World Bulletin

Turkish and Cameroonian parties signed an agreement on mutual visa exemption agreement as well as a protocol on technical, scientific and economic cooperation.

Turkish President Abdullah Gul said on Tuesday that Turkey would keep providing humanitarian aids to Africa.

President Gul, who is paying a formal visit to Cameroon, delivered a speech in Turkey-Cameroon Business Forum in Yaounde.

Turkey attached a special importance to Africa and relations between Turkey and African countries have improved in the last 10 years, he said.

Gul said Turkey would keep becoming the voice of Africa on the international platforms.

"We attach a special importance to close cooperation with Cameroon," he said.

Turkey had 18 embassies in Africa and it would also open embassies in other 10 countries, he said.

Turkish contractors could make business in Cameroon, he said. Turkish

businessmen could invest in the areas of mining, health and education in this country, Gul said.

"Visa deal"

Turkish President Abdullah Gul earlier had a meeting with Cameroon's President Paul Biya in Yaounde, Cameroon.

Biya decorated Gul with medal of merit of Cameroon before the meeting.

After their tete-a-tete meeting which lasted for nearly one and a half hours, Turkish and Cameroonian parties signed an agreement on mutual visa exemption agreement as well as a protocol on technical, scientific and economic cooperation.

Israeli top general to visit Turkey

15 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The chief of Israeli Defense Forces traveled to Turkey on Monday to take part in an international NATO conference along with military commanders from around the world.

Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi is also set to meet with Turkey's National Defense Minister Vecdi Gönül and Turkish General Staff Chief Gen. İlker Başbuğ.

He is expected to return to Israel after those meetings.

Observers probe where to next in Turkey-Israel relations

13 March 2010, Saturday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish and Israeli observers meeting in İstanbul have agreed that the happy days between Turkey and Israel are over as there have been changes in both countries, and public suspicions will remain even if some improvement in relations is achieved.

During a roundtable discussion of the Turkish Policy Quarterly on Thursday, one academic from Israel said the anger and disappointment

in Israel is “too deep.” The meeting’s participants agreed to abide by the Chatham House Rule, which stipulates the confidentiality of the source of information obtained at the meeting. The Israeli participants also complained about criticism of Jewish people in general, not Israel’s policies, by Turkish politicians and media.

A Turkish participant said it is not anti-Semitism but anti-Israeli sentiments which are increasing in Turkey and that these are “sound criticisms.” Another Turkish participant said Turkey has an environment “which allows Israel bashing” and that the lines have been blurred regarding what is anti-Semitism and what is not.

Having developed significantly during the second half of the 1990s, Turkish-Israeli relations began to weaken at the beginning of the 2000s. The relations have been badly strained since Turkey excluded Israel from the Anatolian Eagle NATO exercises. The last-minute snub was in reaction to Israel’s Gaza assault in late 2008 and early 2009 when about 1,400 Palestinians were killed, including many civilians.

In addition, the latest crisis between Turkey and Israel was also fueled by a televised insult to Turkey’s ambassador in Tel Aviv over a Turkish television show that depicted Israeli intelligence agents as baby killers. Following Ankara’s threats to recall its ambassador, a formal apology came from Israel.

Even though Turkish-Israeli bilateral relations have seen the exchange of harsh remarks between Israeli and Turkish officials since Israel’s Gaza offensive, the participants in the discussion agreed that the change in the tone of the relations had started earlier due to changes in the world, Turkey and Israel.

While Turkey has become more nationalist, independent of the ruling Justice and Development Party’s (AK Party) worldview, it has become more conservative and at the same time more self-confident, one Turkish observer pointed out. An Israeli participant said the Israeli elite have become more nationalistic and religious as well.

Israeli participants said Israel still might be willing to accept Turkey’s role as a “facilitator” in talks between Syria and Israel but that this

would not guarantee that there will not be new lows in Turkish-Israeli relations.

‘Azerbaijani dialogue with Jewish lobby helped Turkey’

Asim Mollazade, a member of the Azerbaijani parliament from the opposition Democratic Reforms Party, said Azerbaijan recently helped Turkey’s cause in Washington to fend off the Armenian genocide resolution in the US Congress by developing close relations with some Jewish organizations which used to help Ankara in that regard.

“Twenty-two members of Congress voted against the document.

Azerbaijani, Turkish and Jewish organizations worked together [to achieve this],” he said speaking to Today’s Zaman. “Together, we can build a strong partnership with the United States, which will defend our interests and resist Armenian attempts to pass a genocide document.”

The US House Committee on Foreign Affairs voted 23-22 last week to approve the non-binding resolution, clearing it for consideration by the full House.

Barzani hosts Turkey’s first consul general in Arbil

15 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Massoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdistan regional administration in northern Iraq, has met with Aydın Selcen, Turkey’s first consul general in Arbil, the de facto capital of the semi-autonomous region.

During the meeting, which took place at Barzani’s residence in Arbil on Saturday, Barzani congratulated Selcen on his new posting and pledged to support his activities in the region.

Turks and Kurds have been living together for centuries, Barzani told Selcen, according to a statement released after the meeting.

“What is not natural is the emergence of abnormal things between us. That’s why the more we integrate with each other, the more we will move away from bad thoughts,” Barzani was quoted as telling Selcen.

For his part, Consul General Selcen, who was appointed to his current post earlier this month, stated that Ankara has the political will to

improve its relations with the Kurdish region in every field. Earlier on Saturday, Selcen met with Kemal Kerkuki, speaker of the regional parliament, and on Friday, he had talks with Falah Mustafa Bakir, who is in charge of the Kurdish regional government's foreign relations. In late October Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu paid a landmark visit to Arbil, the first by a Turkish foreign minister. Davutoğlu, who visited Basra earlier that day for the opening of a Turkish consulate, stated in Arbil that Turkey would soon open a consulate there. The Iraqi Cabinet approved the opening of a Turkish consulate general in Arbil on Jan. 26.

Gül: Non-colonialist past an asset for Turkey in Africa

17 March 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

There are Turkish traces all over Africa, whether in the east such as Tanzania, or in the west such as Mali, President Abdullah Gül has stated, emphasizing, however, that there is no sign of colonialism within those traces.

Gül was speaking with Turkish journalists accompanying him during an official visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Today, Turkey has relationships with various countries in different geographical areas, Gül noted late on Monday. Yet, among these areas, Turkey attaches special importance to its relations with African countries, he added. Turkey's initiative for improving its relations with African countries has both humanitarian and economic aspects, Gül said.

The reason behind African countries' interest and confidence in Turkey is the fact that Turkey has never been a colonial country and that it has approached the continent with humanitarian responsibility.

The president cited Turkey's recent donation of 35 tons of medical supplies to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, adding that he had also brought some humanitarian aid to the country on his visit.

While northern countries have been living in wealth, African people have been suffering from poverty, Gül said. "If you are a large state, you

have to think about this. If you are a large state, you have to deal with climate, hunger and other issues in the world, not only with [issues of] your own country.”

Gül was reminded of the fact that African students in the Şafak Turkish School based in Kinshasa, which he visited earlier in the day, sang the Turkish national anthem, and was invited to comment on this.

“This is not something done in the spirit of colonialism or with that mentality. It would be best to ask the students [at the school] about the integration there. In colonialism, you don’t have a spirit of brotherhood, but you do have interests,” Gül replied.

On Monday evening the president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Joseph Kabila, hosted a dinner in Gül’s honor at the presidential palace.

“As it did yesterday, Turkey will continue being there tomorrow for the African people and sharing its experience and technology,” Gül said in a speech delivered at the dinner.

“Turkey, at the same time, will continue fulfilling its responsibility in the international arena to not allow the recurrence of diseases such as racism, intolerance and xenophobia which in the past have led to immense grief in Africa. We know that we have been elected to the [non-permanent] membership of the UN Security Council thanks to strong support from our African friends. We will continue with our duty [at the Security Council] with this awareness until the end of our term,” Gül added, referring to Turkey’s ongoing non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council for 2009-2010.

On Tuesday, Gül departed for Yaoundé, Cameroon, on the second leg of his Africa tour, after he had gathered with a group of Turkish citizens living in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as well as with members of the Turkish security forces who are in the country under the UN Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC).

Turkish president sees Africa as Turkey's strategic partner

14 March 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The Turkish president saw on Sunday Africa as Turkey's strategic partner.

Turkey's President Abdullah Gül said he considered Africa Turkey's strategic partner, and he would meet high-level executives and his counterparts in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon. Gül's remarks came before he flew to the Democratic Republic of Congo, the first stop of his tour covering this republic and Cameroon. "I will have the opportunity to discuss political relations as well as regional and international matters," Gül said before he left for the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Gül will visit the Democratic Republic of Congo on March 14-15 as the guest of President Joseph Kabila. He will proceed to Cameroon on March 16 as the guest of President Paul Biya and return to Turkey on March 17.

President Gül is the first Turkish president visiting these two countries. In February 2009, he visited Kenya and Tanzania.

"We will discuss ways to boost our cooperation," Gül told reporters.

Turkey's trade volume with Africa was only 5 billion USD in 2003, but rose to 15 billion USD in 2009.

"Our target is to raise it to 30 billion USD in the possible shortest time," Gül said.

Gül also said Turkey could cooperate with the two countries on contracting, mining, energy, tourism and agriculture.

Turkish relief foundations in renewed drive to help Haiti

16 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Some 1,000 quake victims have taken refuge in a tent city established by the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay) in the Tabarre neighborhood of Haiti's devastated capital city of Port-au-Prince

“You are not alone” is written in Haitian Creole, English and Turkish on a wall near the tent city, made up of 156 tents. Kızılay has also provided the necessary equipment and food to ensure nutrition, shelter and sanitation for some 1,000 Haitians, the Anatolia news agency reported. Several weeks ago, Turkish Ministry of Health doctors conducted health screenings for quake victims residing in the tent camp. Medicine was given to everyone who needed it, and some people were hospitalized. Kızılay also provides counseling services to reduce the psychological trauma earthquake victims are experiencing. As part of this program, doctors help children by having them draw and speak with them about what they’ve experienced as a result of the quake. Aid agencies have also established areas where children can play sports, which doctors see as another way to return normalcy to the lives of all those affected. A number of people from the tent city have even taken up dance. Visitors from among aid organizations and businessmen work to help families living here by distributing food. Upon hearing of an earthquake that struck eastern Turkey recently, a group of people residing in the tent city paid a visit to the Kimse Yok Mu (Is Anybody There) charitable association to express their solidarity with Turkey. Work is reportedly under way to ensure people’s safety during likely heavy flooding in the capital as a result of torrential rain expected to arrive in April and May. Approximately 160,000 Haitians whose houses were destroyed by the magnitude 7.0 earthquake in January live in tents. The quake has claimed the lives of more than 200,000 people so far. Gerald-Emile Brun, the owner of a private company specializing in reconstruction, met with Kimse Yok Mu representatives to discuss a “Turkish town” to be established in Haiti for earthquake victims they are going to build soon. The particular concern was how to make newly built shelters immune to heavy floods.

Haitian, Ethiopian medical students laud Turkish doctors

16 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Haitian and Ethiopian students of medicine studying in Turkey expressed gratitude to Turkish doctors extending a helping hand for the poor and needy in their homelands without expecting anything in return. Following the Success and Moral Responsibility for the Year Awards in the Healthcare Sector ceremony organized by the Marmara Platform of Healthcare Associations on Sunday, Haitian and Ethiopian medical students took the floor and commended the courageous service Turkish doctors have provided for their peoples. Joseph Johnobentz from Haiti stated that Turkish doctors were among the first people to help his quake-stricken country after the disaster. Haiti was hit by a catastrophic magnitude 7.0 earthquake on Jan. 12 that left almost 230,000 dead and 300,000 injured, according to the government.

Nasreddin Hocari from Ethiopia said they found Turkish doctors always there whenever they needed medical help. “There are at most 3,000 doctors in my country, where various health problems are rampant. We are grateful to those who left their warm homes here and went to my country to serve my people. We would like to see more Turkish hospitals and schools opening in Ethiopia. Today, we need you to look after us. Who knows, perhaps one day, we will look after you, too,” he said, calling on Turkish educational volunteers as well as medics.

The year’s NGO Award was given to the Physicians for Hope Foundation (ÜHDER) for organizing volunteer Turkish doctors to help those in need both in Turkey and abroad. Through ÜHDER-organized projects, the doctors provided medical care for people in several countries including Afghanistan, Haiti and Ethiopia. The Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TİKA) was also given an award at the ceremony for its contributions to the healthcare sector as a public institution.

Fethullah Gülen donates \$8,000 to Elazığ after earthquake

13 March 2010, Saturday

TODAY’S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Muslim preacher Fethullah Gülen has donated \$8,000 to support post-disaster relief efforts in the quake-stricken eastern province of Elazığ. In the aftermath of the massive earthquake that struck rural areas in Elazığ, Gülen donated \$8,000 earned from sales of his books and audio recordings to leading Turkish charity association Kimse Yok Mu (Is Anybody There) to support earthquake victims.

Among the first groups to respond to the Elazığ disaster, Kimse Yok Mu is continuing its efforts in the six villages affected. So far, 3,000 servings of water and juice, 100 boxes of food, 300 blankets, 50 rugs and 100 family-size packs of cleaning supplies and 110 boxes of winter clothing have been distributed in response to requests coming to the crisis center.

Turkey sends humanitarian aid to Chilean quake victims

12 March 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish aid organization Türk Kızılayı (Red Crescent) sent medicine and humanitarian aid to quake-hit Chile.

20 tons of relief including tents, blankets, medicine, food and water was sent from Turkey with two military cargo planes on Friday.

A magnitude-8.8 earthquake struck central Chile on February 27, ripping apart buildings, highways and bridges before sending waves rumbling across the Pacific Basin. Hundreds of people died and more than 2 million people were displaced. On Thursday, an aftershock measuring 7.2 hit Chile again.

Turkish tanker crew face drug charges in Venezuel

12 March 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Venezuelan authorities have arrested 23 Turkish oil tanker crew members on drug trafficking charges stemming from a recent bust aboard the vessel.

National Guard troops discovered 100 packages of cocaine aboard the Aqua Valetta on Feb. 20 as it was docked in Maracaibo Lake.

Prosecutors suspect the crew planned to smuggle the cocaine out of Venezuela. The South American nation is a major hub for traffickers who ship Colombian cocaine to Caribbean islands, Europe and the United States.

The Attorney General's Office said on Wednesday in a statement that the Turks were indicted on trafficking charges. They have remained aboard the ship under police guard since last month's raid.

Turkey Condemns Deadly Attacks in Pakistan

Saturday, 13 March 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

ANKARA (A.A) - Turkey has strongly condemned twin suicide bombings that killed at least 45 people in Pakistan.

In a statement, the Turkish Foreign Ministry expressed Friday solidarity with Pakistan's government and the Pakistani people.

"Turkey that considers terrorism as a crime against humanity cordially believes that Pakistan would overcome difficulties with unity and common will of all segments of the Pakistani people," the statement said.

Underscoring fraternal relations between Turkey and Pakistan, the ministry said that Turkey shared Pakistan's pain.

Two suicide bombers launched an attack in Lahore on Friday, killing at least 45 people and injuring nearly 100.

Birth Tourism in US on the Rise for Turkish Parents

Saturday, 13 March 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

With more Turkish parents wanting their child to be born in the US, tourism companies are starting to offer 'birth tourism' packages to US cities. Many women say giving birth in the US has benefits including

cheaper education and fewer visa worries. Some Americans, however, want to restrict the practice, citing fears of illegal migration.

If Bruce Springsteen's 1982 hit "Born in the USA" were to become popular again, the title might now refer to thousands of Turkish children whose parents are increasingly traveling to the United States to give birth.

According to tourism expert Gürkan Boztepe and media sources, 12,000 Turkish children have been born in the U.S. since 2003. The numbers are significant enough to draw the attention of tourism companies and inspire them to pursue "birth tourism."

"We found a company on the Internet and decided to go to Austin for our child's birth," said Selin Burcuoğlu who gave birth to a daughter last year. "It was incredibly professional. They organized everything for me. I had no problem adjusting and I had an excellent birth," she told the *Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review*.

Burcuoğlu said she and her partner chose to have the birth in the U.S. to make their child's life more comfortable. "I don't want her to deal with visa issues – American citizenship has so many advantages."

Birth tourism

Burcuoğlu is not the only Turkish parent who wants her child to have U.S. citizenship. Many Turkish parents-to-be are now seeking tourism companies to "guarantee" their child's life.

"We have been involved in medical tourism since 2002," said Levent Baş, general manager of Gurib Tourism. "But we were also receiving so many demands about this issue that we decided to sell birth packages," he told the *Daily News*.

"We first started our research in New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago and Orlando and we only contacted Turkish doctors," Baş said. "But we are preparing a package that covers everything from the flight and city tours to accommodation for several months and hospital expenses."

In terms of cost, Baş said the minimum expense is \$25,000, which rises to \$40,000 if the destination is New York.

Birth tourism organizations are located throughout Turkey, including one run by Gürkan Boztepe in the Aegean province of İzmir. "Before,

only celebrities gave birth in the U.S. We are now aiming, however, to make this service accessible to everyone. And surprisingly, our customers are not just from İzmir and Istanbul, there are also many people from smaller provinces, such as [southeastern] Gaziantep.” Many families, however, do not want to talk openly about the process, according to the birth tourism operators. “Many people say they are doing it because they want their kids to get a cheaper education and not deal with visa issues when they grow up,” said Baş.

“But they don’t want to make it public. Even celebrities who have done this are trying to ignore the issue by saying they had to give birth in the U.S. because their doctors were there,” he said.

Arzu Geiger is an entrepreneur who lives in Gilbert, Arizona, and offers customers the option to stay in her home.

“We got the idea when a friend of ours wished to give birth in the U.S.,” she told the Daily News. “We realized that many women abroad may also wish to give birth in the U.S., but may have many concerns regarding arrangements or safety. Some women may choose to stay alone with us for the first few months, then move to separate living arrangements when family members arrive for the birth.”

While the small-scale companies have started investing in the birth market, bigger firms are also entering the market with alternative packages. The Turkish-owned Marmara Hotel group recently announced a birth tourism package that includes accommodation at their Manhattan branch.

“We hosted 15 families last year,” said Nur Ercan Mağden, head manager of The Marmara Manhattan, adding that the cost was \$45,000 each

Law Amendment

According to the U.S.’s 14th Amendment, the country grants citizenship to anyone born on its soil. At the same time, however, many have demanded the elimination of the “ius soli” law.

"They come to this country and have babies. The children are citizens. The children are eligible to go to school. They receive food stamps and social programs. The American taxpayers are paying for it," said

Republican Congressman Gary Miller last month, who is co-sponsoring a bill that seeks to abolish birthright citizenship for children born in the country to illegal immigrant parents.

According to Emre Özgü, a partner at law firm Barst Mukamal & Kleiner LLP in New York, people in favor of tightening immigration laws have been attempting to end “ius soli” citizenship for years.

“Those trying to restrict immigration argue these babies, who are occasionally called ‘anchor babies,’ serve as a key link in the ‘chain immigration’ process that they would like to see eliminated. However, there is no current pending legislation before Congress that would limit the claim to U.S. citizenship of a child born in the U.S.,” Özgü told the Daily News.

When asked whether birthright citizenship could be considered a loophole in the law, Özgü said he would not classify the “ius soli” citizenship as such because it is explicitly included within the U.S. Constitution.

“While it can be controversial, birth tourism is legal in the U.S.,” said Geiger. “Some of the major concerns expressed with birth tourism are that the mother and baby can access free health and social benefits at the expense of U.S. taxpayers. We do not accept customers in this manner – they are responsible for the payment of their own medical expenses.”

Baş, however, thinks U.S. authorities are ultimately unconcerned by the practice. “I think the United States is aware of such a law, otherwise they would prevent it. I think it is part of an integration policy. They want people to become American citizens.”

Other examples

Birth tourism to the U.S. is not just popular in Turkey but also in Asian countries such as South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan. According to a Los Angeles Times report, many South Korean parents-to-be have chosen to give birth in the U.S. for many reasons, ranging from a desire to enroll their children in American schools to enabling them to avoid South Korean military service.

The birthright citizenship formerly applied to other countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia but both countries modified their law in

the mid-1980s.

India maintained such birthright law until 2004, but ended the right to prevent continued illegal immigration from neighbors Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Saturday, 13 March 2010

Turkish public reacts to Israeli policies, seizure of Palestinian land

18 March 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Israel's announcement last week that it would build more homes for Israeli settlers on Palestinian land in East Jerusalem and its restrictions on Palestinian access to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, Islam's third-holiest shrine, have enraged the Turkish public.

Ahmet Faruk Ünsal, head of the Association of Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed Peoples (MAZLUM-DER), said Israel's behavior, which runs contrary to international law, is also putting the United States on the spot. During US Vice President Joe Biden's visit to Israel, the Jewish state announced its plans to build 1,600 more homes for Israeli settlers in the West Bank.

Israel is now facing a diplomatic storm in Washington, whose minor success in nudging the Palestinians toward indirect peace talks may have gone up in smoke.

The US, which has been working hard for more than a year to get both sides negotiating again, strongly criticized the latest Israeli plan and berated Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on various occasions. US envoy George Mitchell, who had hoped to wrap up preparations to re-launch Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, called off a visit to the region on Tuesday amid the diplomatic tension.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas recently indicated that there would be no “proximity talks” unless Israel freezes all settlement building.

Netanyahu voiced regret over what US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called “insulting” behavior, but did not scrap the plan. Instead, he rejected any curbs on Israeli settlements in and around Jerusalem in a defiant speech he delivered in the Knesset on Monday.

Ünsal said problems in the area are nothing new. “Israel divided the Palestinian land with a wall. And that wall includes East Jerusalem. By building the wall, Israel made East Jerusalem a land within its own possession. Even though The Hague tribunal has declared the construction of the wall against international law, Israel did not take it seriously. So today’s problems are not new as they stem from troubles of the past,” he said.

Ünsal also said that US envoy Mitchell’s cancellation of his trip would not change the Israeli government’s mind and blamed the United States for allowing Israel to carry on with its “careless policies.”

He said the United States should take an initiative to protect world peace. “The United States should give up its policy of protecting Israel no matter what. It should not back Israel at the United Nations. Since the United States vetoes all decisions against Israel at the UN, the international community cannot do much,” he said. “It is not possible to understand why the United States is angry at Israel now.”

Ünsal claimed that the American politicians have become toys at the hands of pro-Israeli groups living in the United States. He was also critical of the recent visit of Israeli Chief of General Staff Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi to Turkey.

He is somebody who undermined international law, used illegal weapons, destroyed civilian centers and killed 1,400 people, mostly women and children. He was accused of having carried out genocide. If Turkey had a firm stance, he would not be able to come to Turkey comfortably. Turkey should be more sincere in its reactions,” he said.

According to former Ambassador Ercan Özer, international organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Arab League should play a role if decisions against Israel are binding.

“Turkey’s attitude is right regarding the status of the holy places. Rules regarding these places were also defined by international law and UNESCO. Israel’s policy of declaring the holy places their own does not serve peace,” he said.

Yasin Aktay, head of the Institute of Strategic Thinking, said the Turkish public has been following the Palestinian issue for a long time. He said Israel will not be able to build new settlements because it is about to lose its most important ally, the United States.

“The United States sees the limits of its unconditional support for Israel,” he said. “The Turkish public’s disapproval of Israel is getting even stronger. Israel will lose in the long term if it continues to pursue its current policies.”

Arab TV channel to air series condemned by Israel

18 March 2010, Thursday

TODAY’S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

The Turkish TV series “Ayrılık” (Farewell), which caused a diplomatic row between Israel and Turkey last October, will be aired on the Arab MBC1 station starting on Saturday, the Dubai-based Al-Arabia news channel reported on Tuesday.

The TV series sparked harsh reactions from Israel, and Turkish-Israeli relations significantly deteriorated after the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) broadcast “Ayrılık.” The series shows soldiers from the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) killing Palestinian children and torturing Arabs.

Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman called the broadcast of the series on TRT1 a “serious case of state-sponsored incitement.” The series dramatizes the brutality of the IDF soldiers during Israel’s Gaza offensive in 2008-2009 through a romantic story between the main actors. The scenes openly display Israeli soldiers opening fire on unarmed people, women and even children, including one girl who is shot in the head as she is smiling. Another scene depicting an infant

deliberately killed by an Israeli soldier caused the greatest anger among Israeli officials.

ECONOMIC NEWS

IPI signalling slow recovery in Turkey's macroeconomic outlook, report says

12 MARCH 2010

TODAYS ZAMAN

Recent figures on industrial production index (IPI) in Turkey indicates to a slow recovery in the country's macroeconomic outlook, said a report released by an İstanbul-based risks research institute.

TurkStat, Turkey's statistics authority, has said year-on-year IPI for January 2010 rose %12.1 as the month-on-month figure was down %15.3 (2005=100).

"Together with jobless rates and the inflation figures, the recent IPI data signal to a very slow pace of recovery in Turkey's macroeconomic outlook," said the report by Okan University Financial Risks Research Center.

Turkey's mining industry was down 0.6 percent; whereas its electricity, gas and water industry was up 3.1 percent and manufacturing industry was up 14.4 percent year-on-year in January 2010.

Turkey's industrial index recorded a 25.2 percent year-on-year rise in December 2009. The production was 8.7 percent up in December 2009 over November 2009.

Below are the overall industrial production of Turkey in January 2008, 2009 and 2010:

- MONTHS 2010 2009 2008
- -----
- Jan 12,1 -21,4 11,6
- Feb -23,8 8,4
- March -20,9 2,6
- April -18,7 7,0
- May -17,6 3,2

- June -10,1 2,4
- July -9,0 3,8
- Aug -6,3 -3,6
- Sept -8,9 -4,3
- Oct 6,5 -6,8
- Nov -2,2 -13,3
- Dec 25,2 -17,8
- Annual Average -9,6 -0,9

Below are the rise in industrial production of Turkey in December 2008 and 2009:

- 2010 2009
- . JAN JAN
- . -----
- Overall industry 12,1 -21,4
- . -----
- Mining -0,6 -4,1
- Manufacturing 14,4 -24,4
- Electricity,gas,water 3,1 -5,7

Turkish national airline's passengers on rise in Jan-Feb period

12 March 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's national air carrier Turkish Airlines (THY) carried 3.9 million passengers in January-February period of 2010, with a 25 percent rise in the figures of the same term of 2009.

A total of 3.1 million passengers had preferred to travel with THY in January-February 2009, a statement from the company said on Friday. THY's occupancy rate also rose up to 69.1 percent during the same period, the statement added.

THY is one of the fastest growing air carriers in Europe. The İstanbul-based airline is using İstanbul's Atatürk Airport as a hub for flights to

Europe, Asia and Africa in partnership with the Star Alliance group of airlines.

The number of THY's passengers in last month was up by 26 percent over the same period of last year.

THY's occupancy rate increased by 3.2 percent on a year-on-year basis and reached 68.6 percent last month.

Medvedev to visit in May for talks on energy, ties

12 March 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev will visit Turkey on May 11-13 for talks with Turkish officials focusing on energy cooperation and expanding bilateral ties, Russian officials have said.

Turkish and Russian officials have been working hard to finish preparations for the Russian president's visit. In addition to the vast energy cooperation between the two countries, Medvedev and Turkish officials are expected to discuss ways to increase the volume of trade to \$100 billion and plans to lift visa requirements. The Nagorno-Karabakh dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia is also likely to be on the agenda.

Turkey is in a bid to normalize its relations with Armenia but wants to see progress in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute to be able to push for more progress. Azerbaijan, a regional and ethnic ally for Turkey and a key energy supplier for the West, is opposed to the Turkish-Armenian reconciliation unless the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute is resolved.

Turkey, IMF disagree on distribution of possible extra income, Babacan says

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

ANKARA — Anatolia News Agency

HURRIYAT

Turkey and the IMF failed to reach an agreement on a loan stand-by deal because of projected distribution of extra income in case Turkey grows more than 3.5 percent in 2010, Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan said Wednesday.

In an interview with broadcaster CNNTürk, Babacan said the International Monetary Fund, or IMF, offered the government to restructure Turkey's revenue administration and reorganize municipal revenues. Babacan said Turkey accepted the Washington-based lender's proposal about municipal revenues but turned down the offer on revenue administration.

Following long-standing talks between Turkey and the IMF, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced last week that Turkey would not sign a loan stand-by deal because it did not need emergency funds.

Babacan also said that a possible deal with the IMF would no longer have a significant effect on Turkey's credibility. He said nothing after Dec. 31, 2009, could have brought about a result in negotiations with the IMF.

The IMF had long been willing to sign a stand-by arrangement with Turkey, Babacan said. But, he added, conditions changed over time as the country began to recover from the global economic downturn.

Babacan said a possible deal would not aim at helping Turkey rebound from the crisis, but it would be a deal supportive of growth.

"Turkey will continue to implement its own program within the framework of the Medium-Term Program," Babacan said.

Speaking to private CNN channel, Babacan said he expected Turkey's growth rate to be above 3.5 percent. Turkey will revise official growth projections within a few months, said Babacan, adding that the country was heading towards a better growth rate.

"Even if there is not any deal with the IMF, every one says that the growth rate will be much more higher than 3.5 percent," Babacan said, adding that the IMF had projected Turkey's growth around 3.7 percent. Also, Babacan said unemployment rate in Turkey, which used to be around 10-11 percent, rose to 14 percent in 2009. Babacan said the

number of jobless people was up 30 percent due to this unemployment rate.

The minister said Turkey launched vocational training programs and short labor appropriation practice. "If we had not implemented them, unemployment in Turkey would be much more higher than 14 percent," Babacan also said.

On March 8, the Central Bank of Turkey revised the year-end growth in Gross Domestic Product, or GDP, up to 4.4 percent from 4.3 percent as growth rate for end-2010 is estimated as 3.9 percent.

The Turkish Statistical Agency, TurkStat, said Turkey shrank 3.3 percent in the third quarter of 2009, over the same period of 2008.

Turkey will benefit from not signing an IMF stand-by deal'

15 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Amid current discussions on the repercussions of the suspension of negotiations on a stand-by deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the Turkish business world, Eczacıbaşı Holding CEO Bülent Eczacıbaşı has said the decision was "right to the point" and will be for Turkey's benefit.

Eczacıbaşı paid a visit to the paper's headquarters last week and shared his views on current developments with Ekrem Dumanlı, the editor-in-chief of Today's Zaman's sister paper, the Zaman daily, and Zaman's business editor, Turhan Bozkurt.

Eczacıbaşı said Turkey has once again proven that it can stand on its own two feet by not signing an IMF deal. According to the holding CEO, a self-reliant Turkish economy will overcome the aftereffects of the crisis relatively quickly. "We cannot say that the markets have completely left problems behind, but things are going well in the Turkish economy."

Mentioning ongoing democratization efforts, he said that alongside civil society organizations and political parties, the business world should also take on responsibility in this regard. Arguing that the problems

created by the 2009 crisis would prevail longer in Europe than in the US, he asserted that the Turkish economy has shown great strength in the face of trouble. Referring to the noticeable recovery in exports in the first two months of this year, Eczacıbaşı noted that the government should continue its reforms in the economy. However, Eczacıbaşı stressed that a sustainable recuperation in the domestic economy depends on developments in global markets.

While some parties blamed the government for having missed the opportunity to provide them fresh cash, Eczacıbaşı thinks Turkey did not need the IMF's support. "We could have signed a deal when the crisis first began to haunt the markets. But, in time, we all came to see that there was actually no need for such a measure," he said. According to Eczacıbaşı, the medium term economic plan announced last year along with fiscal discipline will help increase Turkey's credibility in the global arena.

Asked whether he agreed with criticism that banks in Turkey ignored the problems of the non-financial sector while enjoying record high profits during the 2009 crisis, Eczacıbaşı said he expected banks to be 'more flexible' this year. "But we should keep in mind that banks have the right to make sure deposits are in place."

As regards current political tension, particularly fueled by countrywide arrests amid an investigation into an alleged terrorist organization named Ergenekon, which is accused of preparing a coup plan to topple the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government, Eczacıbaşı said the public should get used to discussing such issues. "There is no need to be afraid. Turkey needs to face up to and bring the shadowy facts in its past into the light. Every single step in this regard strengthens the democratic system."

In relation to calls for a more transparent military structure in Turkey, Eczacıbaşı argued that military spending should be controlled by a civil supervisory mechanism, the Turkish Court of Accounts. "No public institution is exempt from supervision in developed democracies. We need to implement EU standards to minimize the deficit in public coffers."

Criticizing Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal for his stance against democratization efforts, Eczacıbaşı said he had expected Baykal to be more productive in this process. Baykal has been criticized for ignoring a document allegedly devised by the military to frame innocent people linked to the Gülen movement and the AK Party by planting arms and ammunition in their homes. Several laboratories, including those of the Council of Forensic Medicine (ATK) and the General Staff, acknowledged that the document bore the signature of a colonel, Dursun Çiçek. Despite proof, Baykal insisted that the fingerprints on the document and the age of the ink in the authenticated signature should be examined.

Çağlayan calls IMF issue a sign of Turkey's economic strength

15 March 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN ANKARA

Foreign Trade Minister Zafer Çağlayan said on Sunday that Turkey had been passing through a political, social and economic stress test over the past couple of years and that its resilience against the recent global economic crisis without having to commit to an International Monetary Fund (IMF) anchor was a clear sign of its strength.

Speaking to the Anatolia news agency, the minister underlined that the dead end in the negotiations with the IMF over a new stand-by deal had not had an impact on the economy's stable recovery, which he believed was a consequence of reforms and recent achievements. "As such, we do not need the IMF now or in the future," Çağlayan claimed. Regrettably, the IMF held Turkey to a double standard, he added.

"In other words, the measures our government took in the economy over the last seven-and-a-half years were tested and approved by the markets," he asserted.

When asked if failing to sign a deal would adversely affect Turkey's domestic fiscal discipline, he asserted that it would not.

He recalled that in the past, Turkish officials went to the US to knock on the IMF's doors to beg for loans and that international lenders opened their loan channels only after Turkey signed a deal with the IMF.

Thanks to fiscal and budgetary discipline and structural economic reforms, Turkey eased past the fiercest global crisis and managed to secure credit rating upgrades from four international rating agencies without the IMF's assistance.

The minister also accused the IMF of hypocrisy in its relations with Turkey as it recommends that all nations increase domestic consumption, spend money and distribute financial aid to citizens while suggesting that Turkey do the contrary. "It turned to us and said, 'Except you.' My friend, you advise everyone to do this, so why don't you let me do the same thing, too? How are my budget and debt balance doing? I don't even have a single bank that went under due to the global crisis," he said.

Çağlayan also spoke about the government's democratic initiative. Moves to consolidate democracy and expand ethnic and minority rights in Turkey will seriously contribute to domestic peace and increase the sense of solidarity among the people, he argued.

He said he, as a former idealist of Turkish nationalism, had full faith in the democratic initiative. "We have brought up topics that no one even dared discuss or debate openly. We revealed all dirty affairs hidden under the carpet," Çağlayan stressed.

Touching on tense relations between Turkey and the United States after a committee from the US House of Representatives adopted a resolution on the incidents of 1915 earlier this month, the minister said he had postponed a trip to the US in reaction to the decision. "We will closely monitor the developments in Washington, D.C. We will formulate a decision after April 24," Çağlayan said. On April 24, as is usual for US presidents, Barack Obama will deliver a speech to mark the 1915 incidents.

Pressure to mount on banks as IMF no longer an option

18 March 2010, Thursday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

The Treasury is likely to increase pressure on financial markets, seeking extra liquidity now that the option of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan has been eliminated, Ahmet Çimenoğlu, economic research coordinator at Koç Holding, said on Wednesday in Ankara.

The Turkish government and the IMF recently announced that they have called off prolonged talks over an anticipated stand-by deal. Observers argue Turkey is no longer considering a stand-by deal with the fund.

Speaking at the 4th Annual Turkey Trade and Export Finance Conference, Çimenoğlu said the Treasury will opt to meet a fresh need for cash by borrowing money from banks in the domestic market since an infusion of money by the IMF will most likely not happen.

Emphasizing that the adverse impact of 2009's global financial turmoil still haunts markets, Çimenoğlu said Turkey will find it harder to attract liquidity from international sources than during the pre-crisis period.

"We could notice a nascent recovery in the markets; however, the crisis is not completely over. It will take some two years before we will be able to leave problems in economy brought about by the 2009 crisis behind." As regards this year's projections for the Turkish economy, he said there is a slight increase in domestic demand but that the picture is still bleak when it comes to new investments and employment.

World Bank Turkey Chief Economist Mark Roland Thomas said they expect the Turkish economy to grow by an average of 4.3 percent during the next five years. "We believe this will be a realistic estimation for sustainable growth in the Turkish economy," he told the conference.

Recalling that the country's economy enjoyed higher than average growth rates prior to the 2009 crisis, he said the Turkish market was badly hit by the credit crunch last year.

Iraq agrees to renew Kirkuk-Ceyhan oil link accord with Turkey

18 March 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Iraq has agreed with Turkey to renew an accord to operate an oil pipeline from its northern oilfields near Kirkuk to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan, a senior Iraqi oil official said on Wednesday

Iraq has approved to renew the Kirkuk-Ceyhan agreement after agreeing on some changes and amendments,” Iraq’s deputy oil minister, Ahmed al-Shamma, told Reuters. Shamma said the two sides had agreed on new transit fees and upgrades to the pipeline. “There is an Iraqi delegation in Turkey now, headed by a deputy oil minister, to finalize the deal.”

The agreement is expected to be signed during a trip by Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz to Baghdad, scheduled for March 22, said a Turkish Energy Ministry official who declined to be named. An agreement between Baghdad and Ankara that governs the operation of the 970-km (600-mile) pipeline, which transports about a quarter of all Iraqi oil exports, expires this month. Turkish officials said talks with Baghdad on extending the accord began last year.

The deal will include a guarantee from Baghdad on the flow of oil in the pipeline, the Turkish Energy Ministry official said. Flows are sometimes halted due to maintenance problems or sabotage by Iraqi insurgents and poor security left the link mostly idle between 2003 and 2007 after the US-led invasion of Iraq. The double-pipe link has a capacity of 1.6 million barrels per day (bpd) but normally carries about 500,000 bpd. The Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline first opened in 1977.

Turkish firms becoming more active in Iraqi market

18 March 2010, Thursday

TODAY’S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

The activity of Turkish companies working in Iraq has been increasing over recent years thanks to developing economic and commercial relations between the two countries.

While Iraq used to be a leading market for Turkish exports just before the first Gulf War, trade between the two countries was curbed with a 12-year UN embargo, which was lifted on May 22, 2003. Commercial

relations between Turkey and Iraq then began to increase again significantly.

According to a report released by the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK), Turkey's exports to Iraq increased from \$829 million in 2003 to \$5.1 billion last year. Furthermore, trade volume, which was \$941 million in 2003, exceeded \$6 billion in 2009. In the course of a year Turkey's exports to Iraq rose by 30 percent from 2008 to 2009, while Turkey's imports from Iraq, however, declined by 28 percent, to \$952.3 million, during the same period. Iraq is currently among the top five countries to which Turkey exports.

With its geographic proximity and logistical advantages, the Iraqi market also offers great opportunities for Turkish construction firms. The operations of Turkish contractors in Iraq rose thanks to infrastructure and superstructure investments during the period of reconstruction that followed the 2003 US invasion of the country. Last year, Turkish construction firms assumed a total of 44 projects in Iraq, valued at \$1.23 billion, up from \$242 million in 2003. Operating in a wide range of areas from housing projects to highways, bridges and hospitals, Turkish contractors worked on 495 projects with a total value of \$7.5 billion between 1972 and 2009.

Turkey, Britain can raise trade volume over 20 billion USD, minister
17 March 2010, Wednesday
TODAYS ZAMAN

The Turkish state minister for foreign trade said on Wednesday that Turkey and Britain could raise their trade volume over 20 billion USD. Turkey's State Minister Zafer Çağlayan said Turkey and Britain had the capacity to raise their trade volume over 20 billion USD within two or three years.

"We will discuss how we can boost our cooperation, and seek possible cooperation opportunities in other countries," Çağlayan said during the Turkish-British Business Forum in London, Britain.

Turkish-British trade volume was 14.5 billion USD in 2007, and dropped to 13.5 billion USD in 2008. The figure dropped to 9.4 billion USD in 2009.

Turkey's exports to Britain was up by four-folds between 2001 and 2008, and climbed from 2.1 to 8.4 billion USD. Also, Turkey's imports from Britain rose from 1.9 to 5.3 billion USD in the mentioned period.

Turkish companies' share rises in Iraqi market

17 March 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The share of Turkish companies in Iraqi market is increasing thanks to boosting commercial and investment relations.

According to a report of Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEİK), the total exports by Turkish companies to Iraq was 829 million USD in 2003, and it rose to 5.1 billion USD in 2009.

After 12-year UN embargo was lifted on May 22, 2003, commercial relations between Turkey and Iraq increased significantly. Accordingly, trade volume --which was 941 million USD in 2003-- exceeded six billion USD in 2009, and also Turkey's export to Iraq climbed 30 percent in 2009 when compared to 2008, reaching 5.1 billion USD. On the other hand, Turkey's import from Iraq decreased 28 percent to 952.3 million USD in 2009.

Iraq, now, takes place among top five countries Turkey made the highest export.

Operations of Turkish contractor companies in Iraq also increased thanks to infrastructure and superstructure investments in post-war period (as of 2003).

Total business amount of Turkish contractor companies in Iraq was 242 million USD in 2003, and it increased to 1.2 billion USD in 2009.

TPAO: Black Sea could fuel Turkey for upcoming 40 years

17 March 2010, Wednesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

The Black Sea, long seen as an important source of Turkey's fossil fuels, may have enough petroleum to cover Turkey's energy needs for the next 40 years.

Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) General Director Mehmet Uysal, speaking at the Ninth Turkish International Oil and Gas Conference (TUROGE 2010) on Tuesday, announced that according to their research, the amount of fossil fuel on Turkish soil is not enough to attract international attention but the potential under the Black Sea is different story.

According to Uysal, the Black Sea could have enough petroleum to meet Turkey's needs for the next 40 years. "As soon as we explore and research this potential, there will be a new page opened for Turkey's petroleum exploration and production," said Uysal. Noting that similar exploration is being conducted in the Mediterranean Sea, Uysal stated that it too has much potential and that they will be forming partnerships to work with the international sphere.

State-owned Turkish Pipeline Corporation (BOTAŞ) General Manager Fazıl Şenel, speaking at the same conference about natural gas consumption, a topic of much debate as the take-or-pay conditions imposed by natural gas exporters have left Turkey with a hefty energy bill, stated that meeting consumers' pre-crisis natural gas demand would take at least another three to five years -- putting natural gas producers in a difficult position.

"We can possibly meet the pre-crisis natural demand in three to five years. ... Take-or-pay contracts can lead to losses for importing countries, but because we have excess supply, we may be able to redraft old contracts," said Şenel.

First two months see 47.9 percent decline in budget deficit

17 March 2010, Wednesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN ANKARA

Tu rkey's budget deficit in the first two months of 2010 totaled \$5.39 billion, a 47.9 percent decrease over the same months of 2009, Finance Ministry data have shown.

The budget deficit in January and February of 2009 totaled \$10.35 billion.

According to Finance Ministry figures released on Tuesday, the state spent \$2.27 billion more than it earned in January, while the budget deficit in the month of February reached \$3.12 billion. Expenditures amounted to \$44.93 billion while \$39.54 billion entered the state coffers in the same period.

Budget spending rose by 0.07 percent in the January-February period when compared with the same months of 2009, while budget revenue increased by 15.5 percent in the same period. The primary surplus in the January-February period was \$5.27 billion, a 60.7 percent increase over the same period a year before. Tax income rose by 21 percent in the first two months of 2010 over the same months of 2009. A wave of new tax hikes at the beginning of the year was the major factor behind the increase in tax revenue.

The amount of money allocated to social security premium payments increased by 53.6 percent in the first two months over the same period of the past year.

Turkey's energy minister says pipeline agreement will be renewed with Iraq

16 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Tur key's energy and natural resources minister said that the crude oil pipeline agreement would be renewed with Iraq.

Speaking at the 9th International Oil and Gas Conference at Ankara's Sheraton Hotel, Taner Yıldız said, "there are big and significant natural gas and oil reserves in east of Turkey. Turkey shapes its energy policies and diplomacy by taking into consideration them. Projects for transportation of resources from the eastern countries to the western

countries such as Nabucco and Turkey-Greece-Italy Natural Gas Pipeline have an important impact on our energy policies."

"The agreement about Kirkuk-Yumurtalik raw oil pipeline expired in March. We will sign a 15-20 year agreement with Iraq soon to renew the deal," he said.

Yıldız said that USA's Exxon Mobil Corp. and Brazil's Petrobras had joined a consortium with Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) to find oil in the Black Sea. "We attach great importance to this project," he said.

450 companies from 23 countries to attend agriculture fair in Konya

16 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

450 companies from 23 countries will attend the 8th Agriculture, Animal Breeding and Milk Industry Fair which will open in central Anatolian province of Konya on Wednesday.

Tüyap Konya Fair Industry Director General İlhan Ersözlü said Tuesday Konya was the manufacturing center of flour, sugar and salt in Turkey.

"We target to host 140 thousand visitors," Ersözlü said, noting that delegations from Georgia, Syria and Iran would attend the fair which would stay open till March 21.

Turkish and African businesspeople get together

16 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Chief Coordinator of the Turkish-African Business Councils, Tamer Taşkın, said Tuesday the issue of "visa was the greatest obstacle to Turkey's African initiative".

Turkey's Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK) organized meetings for Turkish and African businesspeople in İstanbul on Tuesday.

In an exclusive interview with the Anatolia news agency, Taşkın said that 54 African countries have abundant amounts of agricultural and mine products.

"However, as there are not sufficient numbers of cold air depots and canned food factories, agricultural products can not be preserved and utilized properly," Taşkın said.

In the whole continent of Africa, there are not any automobile factories or auto manufacturing of any type, except in South Africa. Africa presents a "crucial" opportunity for Turkey. Africans love Turkey and they prefer Turkish products in every corner of the continent, Taşkın stressed.

Certain African businesspeople can not come to Turkey due to visa regulations of the Republic of Turkey. Turkey must facilitate easier procedures so that African businesspeople can come to Turkey and stay for long periods of time and possess multiple-entry visas. The issue of visa was the greatest obstacle before Turkey's African initiative, Taskin added.

Turkish and African trade volume was approximately 20 billion USD in 2009.

Turkey is planning to open at least 15 new embassies in different corners of the African continent in 2010.

Looking for a lasting remedy to Turkey's unemployment problem

16 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's biggest social, economic and political problem -- unemployment -- is still on the public's agenda as the most pressing issue for a healthy and stable country. What is needed to solve this problem, a problem only made worse by the global economic crisis? Unemployment reached a yearly rate of 14 percent in 2009, up by 3 percentage points compared to 2008, as investors pulled their money out of Turkey amid global uncertainty. This 14 percent amounted to 860,000 individuals, many of whom are below the age of 25 due to the incredibly

large share of youth in Turkey's population. Although Turkey is showing signs of economic recovery, like many countries, the ranks of the unemployed will continue to haunt policy-makers long after the recovery of other macroeconomic indicators.

A clear solution to the unemployment problem is not on the horizon, with many structural issues needing to be overcome before serious steps can be taken toward shrinking the number of people out of work and looking for work.

The public and private sector along with civil society and business organizations all have their own ideas about the most important barriers that need to be overcome. Speaking to Today's Zaman, many of the most prominent individuals in Turkey's economy shared their thoughts with us about what they wanted to see done to solve this unemployment problem.

'Unemployment is not just a number'

Labor and Social Security Minister Ömer Dinçer stated that although 2009's 14 percent unemployment rate was slightly better than the expected 14.8 percent, the problem is difficult, stating that it was no longer the case that increased production automatically meant increased employment. "As modern agricultural techniques were introduced, unemployment increased. On the other hand, technology and automation is becoming more advanced; therefore, the understanding that increases in production will lead to an improved employment situation is no longer the case," Dinçer said. He noted, however, that he was against giving families monthly unemployment income support as is done in Europe, though he highlighted that through the Prime Ministry's Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation, TL 200 per month has been provided to families without an income source and that approximately 7 million people are currently benefiting from this.

The president of the biggest business organization in Turkey, Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) head Rifat Hisarcıklıoğlu, said one of the biggest problems with unemployment is due to a lack of trained professionals in the population. He stated that without supporting vocational schools, the unemployment problem

could not be solved. Regarding economic growth, Hisarcıkliođlu said a 4 percent growth rate would not decrease unemployment and a bigger goal of 7 percent is needed. “Between 2003 and 2008, the number of employed individuals increased by 3.2 million. This means that if we can protect the stability of this country and focus on structural reforms, we can increase employment,” said Hisarcıkliođlu.

Turkish Exporters Assembly (TİM) President Mehmet Büyükekşisi also echoed these views, stating that a lack of qualified workers led to a greater increase in unemployed individuals. He also added that many businesspeople looking for workers were having difficulty finding qualified laborers. He added that labor-intensive sectors such as textiles, apparel and leather goods must have the barriers in front of them lifted to have the potential to employ a large segment of the unemployed.

Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON) President Rızanur Meral offered a different perspective on the issue, stating that Turkey needs to reorient itself toward the services sector. “Investments in this sector are growing globally, and we can’t ignore this field. ... We need to support sectors such as health and tourism.” He added that the Council of State’s decision regarding a penalty applied to the university entrance exam scores of graduates of vocational schools has created a large barrier for both employment and the business world in Turkey.

Independent Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association (MÜSİAD) President Ömer Cihad Vardan also shared the sentiment on vocational education, stating that policies need to be re-evaluated. He also stressed that a national employment strategy should be revamped, highlighting that short, medium and long-term goals for unemployment can help relieve this problem.

Social security premiums create burden

İstanbul Ready-to-Wear and Apparel Exporters Association (İHKİB) President Hikmet Tanrıverdi called for the reduction of social security premiums, income tax and unemployment insurance in order to create new employment. He added that this was especially needed in the textile

sector, calling for a 50 percent decrease in income tax and social security premiums.

Association of Turkish Furniture Manufacturers (MOSDER) Chairman Nazif Türkoğlu stressed the need for investments in lowering unemployment and especially highlighted the role of regional stimulus plans in achieving this. He added that as companies invested in cost-reducing technologies, employment decreased. To solve this, he said, further investments are necessary to employ those laid off. Mustafa Boydak, president of the Kayseri Chamber of Industry, stated that if taxes on minimum-wage workers were decreased by as little as 5 percent, this would greatly help the employment situation. He also recommended that the funds used by the government for İŞKUR's training programs could be used to support firms with the condition that they promise to employ more workers.

Contractors Union of Turkey President Erdal Eren said that his union is looking forward to 2010 and is expecting the government to continue to invest in building public infrastructure. "This will help increase employment in the sector," Eren said, adding, "For us to take more workers abroad, the government needs to give us some form of support." He also stated that Turkey has yet to sign social security agreements with many of the countries contractors are involved in, therefore making it a necessity to pay social security premiums to both Turkey and the country they are located in.

Turkey's unemployment rate rises to 13.5 percent

15 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's unemployment rate increased 0.4 percent to 13.5 percent in December 2009, Turkish Board of Statistics, TurkStat, said on Monday. Unemployment rate was 13.1 percent in November 2009.

According to the TurkStat's Household Labor Force Survey for December 2009, number of unemployed people increased 29 thousand to 3.3 million.

Labor force participation rate was calculated as 47.6 percent. Unemployment rate was 15.6 percent in urban areas and 9.2 percent in rural areas in December 2009.

Kuwaiti emir to invest \$3 bln in Turkey

15 March 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Uğur Akkuş, the group president of Şems Foreign Trade Industry Ltd., the official consultants of Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Sabah IV al-Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah in Turkey, has said preparations to launch three or four giant projects in Turkey worth \$3 billion will be completed shortly. We have invested \$1.5 billion in Turkey in the last three years,” Akkuş told the Anatolia news agency in an interview on Sunday. The emir’s previous investments mainly included the purchase of buildings and land, portfolio investments in the İstanbul Stock Exchange (İMKB) and tourism. The new investments will primarily focus on the real estate sector, especially in İstanbul, he said. Akkuş said the company was also interested in hydroelectric power plants and defined Turkey as a country that might become the breadbasket of the Gulf region in coming years. “We also have an interest in the Southeastern Anatolia Project [GAP] in agriculture,” he said.

Akkuş said his company was established in 1982 by his father, Mahmut Akkuş, and has been conducting apparel exports to the region since then. As the business flourished, the Akkuş family constructed textile production facilities and started selling goods to Saudi Arabia. His father established lasting relations with the royal family in Kuwait and was able to earn their trust. “Kuwait has 110 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, which will suffice as the main source of income for the country for the next 100 years. The al-Sabah family has established an investment fund called the Kuwait Investment Authority to continue its wealth after the depletion of its oil resources and is transferring 10 percent of oil revenues to this fund every year. With the money

accumulating in this fund, Kuwait is investing around the world,” he said.

“The primary destinations for investments had previously been Europe and the US. However, as the global picture has changed, Turkey has become a popular country. Especially with the new emir’s accession to power, the course was completely altered toward Turkey and other neighboring countries in the region,” Akkuş underlined.

Turkish share in Iraqi market up, DEIK says

Wednesday, 17 March 2010 11:10

WORLD BULLETIN

Iraq, now, takes place among top five countries Turkey made the highest export. The share of Turkish companies in Iraqi market is increasing thanks to boosting commercial and investment relations.

According to a report of Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEIK), the total exports by Turkish companies to Iraq was 829 million USD in 2003, and it rose to 5.1 billion USD in 2009.

After 12-year UN embargo was lifted on May 22, 2003, commercial relations between Turkey and Iraq increased significantly. Accordingly, trade volume --which was 941 million USD in 2003-- exceeded six billion USD in 2009, and also Turkey's export to Iraq climbed 30 percent in 2009 when compared to 2008, reaching 5.1 billion USD. On the other hand, Turkey's import from Iraq decreased 28 percent to 952.3 million USD in 2009.

Iraq, now, takes place among top five countries Turkey made the highest export.

Operations of Turkish contractor companies in Iraq also increased thanks to infrastructure and superstructure investments in post-war period (as of 2003).

Total business amount of Turkish contractor companies in Iraq was 242 million USD in 2003, and it increased to 1.2 billion USD in 2009.

Turkey's PM says British commercial relations revived again

Wednesday, 17 March 2010 08:54

WORLD BULLETIN

Erdogan said that the global financial crisis had almost no impact on the financial system in Turkey.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that the global financial crisis had almost no impact on the financial system in Turkey, adding, "Turkish banks did not experience any difficulties while a number of banks and companies in the United States and Europe had rough time during the crisis."

Speaking at the Turkey-Britain Business Forum as part of his state visit to London, Prime Minister Erdogan said, "economic and commercial relations constitute an important part of our bilateral relations with Britain. British economy ranked 6th in the world and 3rd in Europe. And Turkish economy ranked 17th in the world and 6th in Europe as a result of rapid development in the last eight years."

"Britain was the third country to which Turkey made the highest amount of exports. Our trade volume fell to 9.5 billion USD in 2009 from 14.5 billion USD in 2008 because of global financial crisis. Now, our commercial relations have revived again. In the first month of 2010, our exports to Britain rose by 45 percent and our imports from Britain climbed by 54 percent," he said.

"As for direct investments, Britain is one of the most important investors in our country. Currently, there are 2,168 British investors operating in Turkey. British investments in Turkey amounted to 4 billion USD," he said.

Erdogan told Turkish and British businesspeople that they were working hard to improve investment atmosphere in Turkey.

He said that the Business Forum to be held on Wednesday and the Economic and Commercial Partnership Committee meeting on March 18 would help efforts to further improve economic and commercial relations between the two countries.

"Turkish economy recorded an average growth rate of 6 percent between

2003 and 2008. Now, our economy has begun recovering from impacts of global financial crisis. We estimate our growth rate to be 3.5 percent for the years of 2010 and 2011. In the last 2.5 months, four international rating organizations upgraded Turkey's ratings. Monthly increases in our industrial production exceeded those in the EU-member states," Erdogan added.

Minister expects over 3.5 pc-growth rate for Turkey

Wednesday, 17 March 2010 13:48

WORLD BULLETIN

Babacan said Turkey would revise official growth projections within a few months. The Turkish state minister forecast on Wednesday Turkey's growth rate over 3.5 percent.

Turkey's State Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan said Turkey would revise official growth projections within a few months, and said Turkey was heading towards a better growth rate.

"Even if there is not any deal with the IMF, every one says that the growth rate will be much more higher than 3.5 percent," Babacan told the private CNN channel.

Babacan said the IMF had projected Turkey's growth around 3.7 percent. Also, Babacan said unemployment rate in Turkey, which used to be around 10-11 percent, rose to 14 percent in 2009.

Babacan said the number of jobless people was up 30 percent due to this unemployment rate.

The minister said Turkey had launched vocational training programs and short labor appropriation practice.

"If we had not implemented them, unemployment in Turkey would be much more higher than 14 percent," Babacan also said.

On March 8, the Central Bank of Turkey revised the year-end growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) up to 4.4 percent from 4.3 percent as growth rate for end-2010 is estimated as 3.9 percent.

The Turkish statistical board, TurkStat, said Turkey shrank 3.3 percent

in the third quarter of 2009, over the same period of 2008.

Turkish minister says Turkey aims to host 30 million tourists

18 March 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The Turkish tourism minister said on Thursday that Turkey aimed to host 30 million tourists in 2010.

Turkey's Culture and Tourism Minister Ertuğrul Günay said Turkey would carry out a promotion campaign worth 50 million USD, and aimed to host 30 million tourists in 2010 with a 10 percent rise over 2009.

"My ministry has allocated 8 million USD for promotion campaign in Russia this year, but we will carry out over 50-million-USD campaign in Russia as the public and private sector," Günay told a press conference in Moscow.

Günay is actually visiting the Russian capital to participate in the International Exhibition Travel & Tourism.

The minister said Turkey was expecting 3 million tourists from Russia in 2010. Over 27 million tourists visited Turkey in 2009.

South Korean minister hints free trade agreement with Turkey

18 March 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

South Korea's foreign trade minister has sounded upbeat over a possible free trade agreement with Turkey this year

A free trade agreement would boost business between the two countries and I guess that we could sign it this year," Jong-Hoon Kim told reporters after visiting South Korean car maker Hyundai's plant in the northwestern province of Kocaeli.

South Korea signed a free trade agreement with the European Union last year, Jong-Hoon said, adding that a similar deal with Turkey would also bring more South Korean investments into Turkey.

The South Korean minister is set to meet on Friday with his Turkish counterpart Zafer Çağlayan.

Trade volume between the two countries in 2009 was \$3,350 million as trade balance was against Turkey with \$2,281 million.

Turkey's exports to South Korea last year totaled some \$234.8 million.

Turkey remains fifth biggest market in EU in 2009

18 March 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey remained in the fifth place in 2009 on a list of the largest markets in the European Union and the country was the seventh biggest trade partner for the Union, Eurostat, EU Commission's statistics body, said on Thursday.

Eurostat said Turkey's imports from the EU countries were down 19 percent in 2009 to 43.9 billion euros as the country's exports to the Union dropped by 22 percent to 36.1 billion euros.

Trade volume between the candidate country and Union fell to 80 billion euros from 100 billion in 2008.

The United States was the biggest trade partner for the EU with 204.5 billion euros. Turkey followed Japan which came sixth on the EU's list of trade partners with business worth of 55.8 billion euros.

SOCIAL NEWS

170 Mongolian students compete for place in Turkish Olympiads

17 March 2010, Wednesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Students from Mongolia have put their Turkish skills to the test in the Mongolian capital of Ulan Bator for a chance to participate in the 8th Turkish Olympiads.

Competing in various categories in the Turkish Olympiads Mongolia Qualifications on Monday, the students' moving recitation of poetry made the audience weep, while their joyous songs cheered them up. Turkish Ambassador to Mongolia Ahmet Asım Arar, Turkish Language Association (TDK) head Şükrü Akalın, Education Ministry financial and administrative affairs department head Yusuf Esener, the families of the students and many others attended the event.

Students competed in eight categories: singing, poetry, speaking, writing, grammar, special ability, presentation and reading. Speaking during the ceremony, Ambassador Arar said friendship is the most valuable thing people can have. Noting that the basis for friendship is speaking and understanding, Arar said that as a result, language is the fundamental basis of friendship. Speaking a common language and understanding each other through that language, Arar said, is a precondition for accepting our differences and living together in friendship and peace. "We are once more assured as we witness Mongolian students here speaking Turkish that the human bridge between Mongolia and Turkey is continuing to grow in very healthy and positive ways," he said.

Addressing the audience, Akalın said he was honored to be at such a tremendous event. "Along with being the territories where the Mongolian language and culture flourished, these places are where the Orkhon monuments, the earliest examples of Turkic writings, are situated."

Zekeriya Özyürek, the head of Yadigar Educational Institutions, which has established many Turkish schools and other educational institutions in Mongolia, said they have been serving Mongolia since 1994 and they are very happy to be there.

"One-hundred-and-seventy students from Mongolia are competing in the qualifications, and only eight of them will go to Turkey for the finals. The interest of Mongolians in the Olympiads is growing day by day," Özyürek said.

Women make up 56 percent of Turkey's elderly population

15 MARCH 2010

TODAYS ZAMAN

Up to 7 percent of Turkey's population is older than 65, Professor Hilal Özcebe, the chairman of the Population Association of Turkey, has said, adding that 56 percent of this elderly population is female.

Turkey finds its place among the most rapidly aging countries when its demographic data is compared with other countries. Turkey is expected to see a 736 percent increase in the number of citizens older than 80 between 2005 and 2050. This figure is expected to be 140 percent for France and 153 percent for Germany," Özcebe told the Anatolia news agency.

According to Özcebe, an increase in the elderly population leads to a change in social structure.

"A study on population and health carried out in 2003 indicated that the education levels of elderly women are lower than elderly men. Eighty-three percent of women older than 65 have no educational background. This figure is around 53 percent for males. While only 18.9 percent of men above the age of 65 are illiterate, this figure rises to 53 percent for women," she remarked. Şebnem Beşe Canpolat, who is responsible for the association's studies on aging populations, maintained that the number of older women who have no income is four times greater than men.

"This is an open indication that women have little participation in business life. Most old women who have an income get it from the pensions of their late husbands," she added.

Canpolat also underlined that Turkey's elderly women have little social interaction. "Elderly women are mostly uneducated and do not have economic power. As a result, they have deteriorating standards of living and little social interaction," she remarked.

She also said social policies followed thus far need to be discussed in order to slow down the the country's population growth and called on

the government to urgently focus on projects that aim to improve the economic situation and prosperity of Turkish people.

Bangladeshi scholar publishes book on Gülen

18 March 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

A ceremony celebrating the publication of a book called “Introducing Fethullah Gülen to the Bengal and Beyond” by Professor Maimul Ahsan Khan was held at the Turkish Cultural Center in Dhaka on Saturday. Focused on the life, ideas and work of Gülen, who was selected as the world’s top intellectual by the Foreign Policy journal in 2008, Khan’s new book was published both in English and Bengali. Leading academicians, reporters and respected invitees from all walks of life attended the ceremony.

Stating that they are greatly impressed by Gülen’s ideas, participants discussed Gülen and the newly published book. Issues such as dialogue, tolerance, contribution to world peace and efforts to advance education were mentioned during the speeches.

Explaining how he wrote the book, Khan said writing about Gülen’s ideas is not an easy task. “I have written numerous books. However, it was the first time that I have had difficulty writing a book. I came to understand that it is beyond my strength to explain Gülen. My friends in Europe said Turks have attempted to conquer Europe many times in history and they will again try to do the same. They said this time they will conquer the hearts of people, and this will be through the valuable ideas of Gülen,” Khan said. Cihan

Probe finds suspected criminals working at schools

18 March 2010, Thursday

TODAY’S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

A police investigation launched in response to a request from the Education Ministry has revealed that some employees at İstanbul

schools are accused of crimes such as pedophilia, sex crimes and drug dealing.

After inspecting the criminal records of 12,898 school workers including cafeteria operators and contract employees, the İstanbul Police Department found that 233 of them are suspects in crimes ranging from murder and robbery to drug dealing and sex crimes. Robbery topped the list, with 65 people under investigation on robbery charges. Nineteen school employees are suspected of involvement in illegal trade, 17 in forging official documents, 12 in murder, 11 in fraud, 10 in terrorism, 13 in drug dealing and six in pedophilia. The probe into the workers' criminal records started on Jan. 21, according to the Hürriyet daily. Education Minister Nimet Çubukçu said that those 233 people will no longer work in schools, but also pointed out that none of them have been convicted of any crime. "None of those people have been convicted of any crime. But considering the crimes that they are accused of and thinking about the high level of protection that our children need, we have to be more careful," she said yesterday, answering questions from journalists regarding the investigation.

She also pointed out that the inspection was done at the request of the Education Ministry.

"We are very careful about who works in our schools and cafeterias," she said. "We see schools as places where children need even more protection than in their homes." Asked if there will be anything done against the "old offenders" found in the investigation, Çubukçu said: "They are neither old offenders nor criminals. Their cases have not been solved yet."

When asked if those 233 people will continue to work in the school system, Çubukçu answered, "No."

School cafeterias are leased in accordance with the Education Ministry's 2005 Parent Teacher Association guidelines, which ban people convicted of crimes against the state, serious crimes and forgery from operating cafeterias, even if they have been pardoned.

Muammer Yıldız, head of the İstanbul Provincial Education Directorate, said that from now on, they will require more extensive investigations

into the backgrounds of people who apply to work in school cafeterias and on buses because a mere criminal report would not show most crimes in which a person is suspected of involvement in. He also said school employees will be subject to additional training.

He noted that of about 12,000 people working in schools in those capacities, 17 were currently wanted in criminal investigations. "There have been administrative and legal procedures started with those people. Among them are people who were involved in sexual abuse, robbery and drug dealing. We will fire those people this week," he said, and called on families to remain calm because they will address the situation quickly.

The investigation, which shocked the nation and the education system, was conducted as part of a 2007 protocol called "A Secure Environment in School" signed between the interior and education ministries.

Meanwhile, Vahap Osmanoglu, head of the Istanbul Canteen Operators, said that they were uncomfortable with the news because they feared they may be viewed as suspects or criminals. "I don't believe that cafeteria workers are involved in such crimes. We are facing loaded claims. There are standards for cafeteria operators or workers, and we are inspected by the schools," he said, adding that he wrote letters to all districts asking for criminal reports on all cafeteria operators. He also said that they will review the results and then decide what action to take on the matter.

Turkish doctors to fight against thalassemia in Mosul

18 March 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Prof. Dr. Duran Canatan with the Mediterranean Foundation on Hematology has received an invitation from the city of Mosul to fight against thalassemia.

A delegation from the City of Mosul's Health Department led by Dr. Selahattin Huseyin paid a visit of courtesy to Dr. Duran Canatan on Thursday.

Dr. Hüseyin and Dr. Canatan exchanged viewpoints on methods to fight against thalassemia in Mosul.

The two doctors signed a preliminary protocol, one that will be coordinated by the Governorship of Mosul, to fight against thalassemia. Dr. Canatan said that Turkey began its struggle against thalassemia in 2003.

"Since then, the number of Turkish patients with thalassemia has decreased by 90 percent," Dr. Canatan stressed.

Thalassemia is an inherited autosomal recessive blood disease. In thalassemia, the genetic defect results in reduced rate of synthesis of one of the globin chains that make up hemoglobin. Reduced synthesis of one of the globin chains can cause the formation of abnormal hemoglobin molecules, thus causing anemia, the characteristic presenting symptom of the thalassemias.

Thalassemia is a quantitative problem of too few globins synthesized, whereas sickle-cell anemia (a hemoglobinopathy) is a qualitative problem of synthesis of an incorrectly functioning globin. Thalassemias usually result in underproduction of normal globin proteins, often through mutations in regulatory genes. Hemoglobinopathies imply structural abnormalities in the globin proteins themselves. The two conditions may overlap, however, since some conditions which cause abnormalities in globin proteins (hemoglobinopathy) also affect their production (thalassemia). Thus, some thalassemias are hemoglobinopathies, but most are not. Either or both of these conditions may cause anemia.

The disease is particularly prevalent among Mediterranean people, and this geographical association was responsible for its naming: Thalassa, meaning sea and blood in Greek language.

COMMENTARY

The protocols of the learned elders of Fethullah Gülen

Tuesday, March 16, 2010

Mustafa AKYOL

HURRIYAT

If you have the chance to talk to a staunchly secular Turk these days and want to hear something mind-boggling, just ask him a simple question: “What the hell is this Gülen movement?”

It is very likely that you will then listen to a chilling conspiracy theory about how this evil cadre of “Islamists” is taking over Turkey step by step. You will learn how they have “infiltrated” every state institution, from the police to the judiciary, and now are defusing the power of the military, the last bastion of secularism. You might even hear that the 69-year-old Mr. Fethullah Gülen, who has lived in the United States since 1999, is similar to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in the sense that he will soon come back to bless an “Islamic revolution” prepared by his disciples.

The Imam in America

But if you want to get your facts right, don’t stop there. Ask the same Turkish ultra-secularist about the role of the U.S. in this evil scheme. It is very likely that he will tell you that Gülen is “supported by the CIA.” He will explain you how America wants to create “moderate Islamic regimes” in the Middle East, along with an independent Kurdistan – and, of course, a Greater Israel – and how Gülen perfectly fits into all these plots. Your friend will even quote a recent bestseller titled “Amerika’daki İmam” (The Imam in America) by Ergün Poyraz, a staunch Kemalist, to “prove” all this.

To me, however, all this rather sounds a bit like The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion, the notorious anti-Semitic forgery. In both The Protocols and the conspiracy theories about Gülen, the theme is similar: There is a cunning enemy that is secretly, yet steadily achieving its plan for total domination. The enemy never sleeps, always schemes and works “everywhere... behind every institution.”

I, as you can imagine, have a different explanation for the Gülen movement.

First, I believe that its extent and influence is exaggerated. I actually know this from personal experience: Despite the fact that I have stated many times that I am not a follower of Gülen, or anybody else, I

routinely get aggressive comments, and even hate mail, from Kemalists who take it for granted that I am yet another “Gülen lackey.”

In fact, Turkey’s ultra-secularists have lately come to believe that anybody who is conservative, pro-Islamic or even just critical of the military must be a “Gülenist.” Recently, even a more refined Kemalist commentator defined the anti-militarist daily Taraf as a “pro-Gülen newspaper.” One could rather define it as the Turkish paper with the highest number of atheists and agnostics among its editors and writers. The truth is that with a few million followers, and lots of schools, media outlets and business networks, the Gülen movement is certainly powerful, but not all-dominant in any part of society. Within the Islamic camp, they are just one of the many different communities. For the secularists, all of these people can be the same – they all pray too often and their wives wear the hated headscarf. But there are actually various groups of Naqshbandis, Qadiris, “Süleymancı,” “Erbakancı” or “Nurcus.” The Gülenists are just one of the several offshoots of the latter tradition.

But what do they aim for Turkey? While the secularist answer is, “to dominate, stupid,” I think they rather want to have a hospitable environment in which they can survive and grow.

To see why, you should look at the group’s origins. Islamic thinker Said Nursi (1878-1960), who laid the foundations for Gülen’s thinking, was a very apolitical figure who believed Islam can best be served in this age by an intellectual and spiritual struggle against atheism and moral decadence. Even this most moderate form of Islam was unacceptable for Kemalism, so, in the latter’s heyday (1925-50), Nursi was repeatedly imprisoned for his books. He and his followers, whose stated goal was “to save people’s afterlife” by preaching “the truths of faith,” only took a deep breath in 1950, when the center-right Democrat Party came to power.

A secret agenda?

Since then, both the followers of Nursi, and of Gülen, who further modernized Nursi’s thoughts and created a global movement out of them, have supported center-right governments. They, meanwhile,

distanced themselves from the Islamist parties founded by Necmettin Erbakan, whom they saw as a radical troublemaker. The reason was that the Nursi-Gülen tradition doesn't envision an "Islamic state." It rather seeks a liberal-democratic state that will be tolerant to its missionary work, which it carries out through publications, charity and education. The recent alliance between members of this tradition and the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, government should be understood within this context. Members of the Gülen movement supports the AKP because they know that the alternative (a military coup, or a military-orchestrated restoration government) will crack down on them severely, as happened in the late 1990s. This is a survival strategy, in other words, rather than a plot to dominate.

Finally, if the group really has a "secret agenda" to turn Turkey into a "Shariah state," then it is in deep trouble. For it now has schools in more than 100 countries, most of them non-Muslim and any radical thing it does in Turkey would ruin its reputation and faith mission throughout the whole world.

So, perhaps, the Gülen movement has to dominate the whole world first in order to take over Turkey!

But, well, your secularist Turkish friends might say, isn't that what all "learned elders" conspire for?

Where is Turkey in regard to its 'Armenian problem'?

ŞAHİN ALPA

TODAYS ZAMAN

15 March 2010, Monday

Turkey has a problem in brief called "the Armenian problem." It may be defined as the question as to how the Turkish state and society is to face its history concerning the great tragedy that befell Ottoman Armenians when the Union and Progress dictators during World War I, in response to the uprising by Armenian nationalists who sided with the Russian enemy, punished nearly the entire Armenian citizenry by forcefully

deporting them to Syria, thus leading to the deaths of several hundreds of thousands of them due to massacres, famine and epidemics. This question flared up recently when the Foreign Relations Committee of the House of Representatives of Turkey's "strategic ally" the United States on March 4 adopted a resolution to call on the president to declare the deportation and massacre of Ottoman Armenians in 1915 genocide. A week later, on March 11, the parliament of Sweden, Turkey's strongest supporter in the European Union, adopted a resolution calling for the recognition of not only the genocide of Assyrians, but also Armenians and Pontic Greeks in Turkey. The Swedish parliament became the 20th parliament to recognize the "Armenian genocide." Protesting the resolutions, the Turkish government recalled its ambassadors to Washington and Stockholm for consultations, in a measure not taken when the French, German, Italian, Polish and Russian parliaments had adopted similar resolutions.

There are different approaches to the "Armenian problem" in Turkey, both on a societal and a governmental level. Most of those who have some knowledge of the events of World War I in the Ottoman Empire subscribe to the official line which basically argues that what took place was reciprocal killings by Muslims and Armenians. Among them there are also those who share the concern that if the Armenian massacres were to be recognized as genocide, Armenians would demand property restitution and compensation, and Armenia would make territorial demands on Turkey. There is, however, also a minority of others in Turkish society, in growing numbers, at least since 2005, who recognize that the massacre of Ottoman Armenians was a great human tragedy, if not an intentional genocide comparable to the Holocaust, and claim that the Armenians deserve at least an apology.

These people organized, soon after the Turkish government proposed to the government of Armenia negotiations towards normalization of relations between the two countries, a conference in İstanbul that addressed the question "What happened to the Ottoman Armenians?" When Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink was murdered by ultranationalists (suspected of having ties with the Turkish "deep state")

in 2007, at least 100,000 people walked behind his coffin shouting “We are all Armenians!” In 2008, over 30,000 people signed a declaration apologizing to their “Armenian sisters and brothers” for what happened in 1915. And when President Abdullah Gül visited Yerevan that same year, a retired ambassador suggested that the Turkish government pay, even if symbolic, indemnities to the families of the victims of the deportation and extend Turkish citizenship to those of them who would so wish.

There are, however, differences of opinion amongst a minority. A smaller group believes that the genocide resolutions adopted by an increasing number of parliaments help Turkey to face its history. The greater part believes that parliaments are not entitled to pass judgment on history, that the resolutions are motivated not only by humanitarian, idealistic considerations but also by hopes of winning votes in elections or to take revenge on Turkey for this or that reason. They think that for Turkey to face up to history it is necessary for the veil of ignorance among Turkish people covering the fate of the Ottoman Armenians to be lifted with the help of the normalization of ties between Turkey and Armenia. They assess the genocide resolutions negatively because they trigger a nationalistic backlash and thus hinder the normalization of relations. I firmly belong to this group.

Turning to the governmental level, one may argue that the current Justice and Development Party (AKP) government in Turkey differs from all previous governments that have refused to establish diplomatic ties with Armenia and closed the borders when Armenians invaded Azerbaijan in the war over Nagorno-Karabakh. This government suggested to the Armenian government in 2005 negotiations towards normalization of the relations between the two countries, and the negotiations moved as far as the two sides signing protocols last October to establish diplomatic relations and open borders. Ratification of the protocols has unfortunately stalled, mainly due to Ankara, under pressure from Azerbaijan, with which it has close cultural and economic ties, and the powerful Azeri lobby in Turkey declaring ratification dependent on Armenia taking steps towards normalization with

Azerbaijan. And, unfortunately Armenia, which is occupying a fifth of Azerbaijan's territory, forcing close to a million Azeris to become refugees in their own country, shows no sign of taking steps in that direction.

There is a difference of opinion concerning the AKP government's policy among those who want Turkey to face its history. Some believe that it is no different from previous governments in denying the Armenian genocide or tragedy. Others give credence to the idea that the AKP government, too, discreetly believes that normalization with Armenia is necessary if Turkey is to ever face its history. It is possible also that the AKP government is divided in itself over these lines. What can be done at this stage to help solve Turkey's "Armenian problem"? That is the subject of another column.

Hidden economic woes

MICHAEL KUSER

TODAYS ZAMAN

14 March 2010, Sunday

My brother in San Francisco lost his job last month when the catering company he worked at went out of business.

They tried to hold on through the recession and my brother's earnings fell by half over the last year, but finally the owners couldn't do it anymore and called it quits.

California law requires owners and employees to pay into the unemployment insurance fund, so everyone is covered. My brother was not too excited about receiving unemployment benefits, figuring that he would get only a fraction of his already low pay, but he had a pleasant surprise when he learned that the state bases the benefits on the highest earnings quarter in the past 18 months. In effect the state will pay him almost as much now as he was earning at half-pay, plus he will save the \$300 he spent each month going into the city and back. And he doesn't have to work.

Of course he likes to work and wants to work. My brother figures he's applied for a hundred jobs so far and hasn't heard a peep, says that you can't trust the official unemployment figures because they don't reflect the millions of people whose full-time jobs have turned into part-time jobs. He says that probably half of young people don't have work. That struck me, for a friend here in Turkey said the same thing this week. My friend visited his mother in Mersin and said everyone goes to the malls but they don't do much shopping, that young people roam the streets and go home at night to watch soap operas with their mothers. Another friend from Adana corroborated this, said the best time to do anything is when "Kurtlar Vadisi" is showing on TV, since the streets are empty.

Both of these intellectuals condemn the soaps as the opiate of the masses, say that the government must be happy to have a dumb and docile population, this at the most crucial point in modern Turkish history, when each citizen has much to think about.

I don't believe that the prime minister and his Cabinet want to lead a nation of zombies, but then they are busy playing parts in their own long-running soap opera, which runs under the title of, a real grabber, "Negotiations with the International Monetary Fund." This week Turkish officials said they are no longer discussing a follow-up stand-by loan with the IMF, though they have invited a delegation from Washington to hold regular Article IV consultations in May. This isn't quite as exciting as wondering whether Ahmet will leave his wife for that trashy girl from the radio station, but it's the best you can do with loan talks. Be still, my beating heart.

Speak of shaking, seismologists say that several earthquakes striking Haiti, Chile and Turkey in quick succession do not mean anything unusual, that it is only by coincidence that the quakes struck populated areas, and therefore it only feels like the earth is splitting at the seams. We're still waiting for the big one here, and the future remains very difficult to predict.

International credit rating agency Fitch took a stab at the future this week when they discounted the idea of upgrading Turkish sovereign

debt to investment grade. “Even if things were to go reasonably well, it is unlikely we would get to investment grade this side of elections until we are relatively confident that constitutional reform that will be needed can pass through without serious political unrest,” Fitch senior director Edward Parker said at a conference. “We don’t expect things to get serious as they seemed to be in 2007 and 2008, but we can’t completely rule out any extreme events.”

By coincidence, Economy Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan this week attended a conference on the future of Turkey. The only official news to come out of that meeting was Babacan’s statement regarding talks with the IMF. And that’s too bad. If they had any solid information on the future of Turkey, they owe it to the country and the world to lay it on the line. You could bottle that and sell it, maybe advertise it on the soaps.

Turkey blames everybody but itself

AMANDA PAUL

TODAYS ZAMAN

14 March 2010, Sunday

If there was an award for passing the buck and blaming others, Turkey would surely be near the top of the nominee list. It really never ceases to amaze just how often Turkey does this.

These days, US President Barack Obama has been on the receiving end of Turkey’s wrath, with Ankara accusing Washington of having no strategic vision and of failing to take the necessary steps to prevent the approval of the Armenian “genocide” resolution by the US House Foreign Relations Committee last week. I sometimes wonder who is the superpower, the US or Turkey? In any case, between now and April 24, when Obama delivers his annual message, Turkey will be obsessed. It is really sad that we have to witness this scene over and over again.

Turkey’s criticism has been ever harsher this year, and Ankara seems to be expecting Obama to resolve this issue once and for all. If he does not, well, as Foreign Minister Davutoğlu has threatened, strategic ties may

go adrift -- meaning that Turkey will develop even closer ties with the Russians, Iranians, Africans, South Americans, etc., with Turkey possibly becoming an increasingly unreliable partner for the West. With the ambassador already recalled and State Minister Zafer Çağlayan's visit cancelled, Turkey is really piling on the pressure. Çağlayan's visit was supposed to develop further economic ties with the US under a model partnership framework suggested by Obama. With Prime Minister Erdoğan due to visit Washington in April, what will happen next is anybody's guess, but I would expect once we get into May the rocky sea will calm down again.

I don't believe Obama can make the genocide issue disappear as Turkey requests. In fact, the genocide issue is not going to go away in the US or anywhere else, with the Swedish parliament narrowly approving a resolution last Thursday recognizing the 1915 mass killing of Armenians in Turkey as genocide and prompting the Turkish government to recall its ambassador there, too, in protest. While Foreign Minister Carl Bildt said he regretted the decision because it would serve as another blow to Turkey's reconciliation with Armenia, the fact is that Turkey could have moved the process forward months ago but preferred not to. So now they blame the US, the Swedes and the Armenians. In fact, anybody but themselves. If Turkey believed reconciliation with Armenia would make the genocide issue go away, then they were and are fooling themselves. As long as there is an Armenian diaspora on this planet, they will continue to push everywhere they can for recognition of the genocide, no matter how many historic commissions or rapprochements there are. The genocide issue is their life's cause.

In addition, the Jan. 12 ruling by the Armenian Constitutional Court resulted in Turkey questioning whether Armenia remains committed to their promise to ratify the two protocols for the normalization of relations with Turkey. Perhaps Ankara would do well to take a good look in the mirror. It is Turkey more than any other entity that is responsible for the difficulty in the current reconciliation. Turkey has crippled the process by insisting on a parallel process on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which is clearly not going to happen any time soon.

And here again Turkey blames Armenia for the lack of progress when in fact Armenia is no more to blame than Azerbaijan.

Turkey is well aware that the process is in danger of failing and is looking everywhere it can to find others to blame. Probably it would please Ankara no end if Armenia were to announce that it was fed up with Turkey's imposed Karabakh preconditions and withdraw its signature from the protocols -- as they have threatened to do. This would give Turkey the perfect scapegoat for the failure of the process. If I were sitting in Yerevan, I would do precisely the opposite. I would not withdraw the signature; rather, I would take the initiative and have the protocols ratified in the Armenian parliament as soon as possible.

And of course the blame game is not simply limited to this issue; it is alive and kicking on many others, too. On Cyprus Turkey always claims to be driving forward a solution and continues to deny any wrongdoing in the past rather continuing to state that its role in the Cyprus conflict was to bring peace to the island and placing the blame elsewhere for the continued division. It is the same when it comes to the membership negotiations with the EU. Blame for the stagnation of the talks always lies at the feet of the EU. But this approach should come as no big surprise given the fact that many Turks are simply unable to accept or acknowledged that their country, and the Ottoman Empire before it, has ever behaved in a way that was less than perfect. They are unable to deal with the past and have trouble acknowledging that sometimes Turkey does make mistakes. Rather they prefer to point the finger at others.
