

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

TURKEY

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POLITICAL NEWS

DEMOCRATIC KURDISH INITIATIVE

Erdoğan meets with cinema artists, thespians to seek support for initiative

20 March 2010, Saturday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will meet with cinema artists and thespians today for a breakfast at Dolmabahçe Palace in İstanbul.

During the meeting, the prime minister will explain the democratic initiative to the artists, listen to their opinions and answer their questions about the initiative. About 70 famous names from Turkish cinema and the theater world are expected to show up at the event, which begins at 10 a.m.

The event, held by Deputy Prime Minister Hüseyin Çelik, is expected to host Turkey's most famous and successful actors and directors. Among the stars who are expected to come are Necati Şaşmaz, well known for his character named Polat in the popular television series "Kurtlar Vadisi" (Valley of the Wolves), and Kenan İmirzalıoğlu, who plays the character Ezel in the famous television series of the same name. Also invited are famous screen names from Yeşilçam – Turkey's Hollywood -- Türkan Şoray, Hüşya Koçyiğit, Kadir İnanır and Hülya Avşar, as well as young stars Özcan Deniz and Özgü Namal and veteran thespians Yıldız Kenter, Ayten Gökçer and Müşfik Kenter.

Internationally acclaimed and award-winning Turkish directors Semih Kaplanoğlu, Cannes award winner Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Golden Bear winner Fatih Akın as well as Ferzan Özpetek, Sinan Çetin, Uğur Yücel, Osman Sınav and Mesut Uçakan have also been invited to the meeting. Later in the afternoon, Erdoğan will meet with the administrators from national radio and publishers in a reception at the Justice and Development Party's (AK Party) İstanbul branch. The prime minister had previously gathered with artists from Turkey's music world, including İbrahim Tatlıses, Bülent Ersoy, Seda Sayan, Sertap Erener, Fatih Kısaparmak, Arif Sağ, Neşet Ertaş and Hakan Peker, on Feb. 20.

Democratic initiative yields peaceful Nevruz this year

22 March 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

The government's democratic initiative was instrumental in helping prevent violence from breaking out at Nevruz celebrations held yesterday around the country during which people peacefully celebrated the beginning of the new year and the arrival of spring.

The government project, aimed at improving democratic standards, respect for human rights and differences in the country, brought about an atmosphere of mutual understanding and trust not only among the people but also between the state's security forces and the people. Considered the beginning of the new year by many cultures, particularly in the Middle East and Central Asia, Nevruz was peacefully celebrated at mass gatherings across Turkey. In festivities that took place from İstanbul to Mardin yesterday, no major incident was seen apart from several groups shouting slogans in support of the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its jailed leader, Abdullah Öcalan.

Statements of support for a lasting peace marked Sunday's celebrations. "From this massive gathering and enthusiasm of the 21st century, I have a single call for the Kurdish people's conscience. It is now forbidden for Kurds and Turks to shoot at each other," said Diyarbakır Mayor Osman Baydemir from the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) while addressing almost 200,000 people who came to celebrate the beginning of the new year and the arrival of spring in the city.

“It is now time for us to extend an olive branch to each other. It is now time not for a bullet but for an olive branch to bridge guerilla and soldier. It is now time not for an operation but an olive branch to connect soldiers and guerillas. The time has come for Turkish and Kurdish mothers to embrace one another. It is a sin to lose more time. I believe this enthusiasm will bring peace and freedom to both Turks and Kurds,” he said.

İstanbul was host to the second-largest celebration in the country, where more than 50,000 people welcomed Nevruz. Gathered at Kazlıçeşme Square in Zeytinburnu, people sang songs, danced folk dances and jumped over bonfires. In what has become a familiar scene from Nevruz celebrations each year, some groups carried posters of Öcalan and shouted slogans in support of him and the violent PKK terrorist organization. Most people came to the square with flags and banners of the BDP.

“Unfortunately, Nevruz was turned into a day of danger and enmity, and unwise past administrations tried to prevent the people from celebrating it. Unjust tension and unfortunate events took place. But now people have started to notice that Nevruz is no longer a matter of political demonstration,” Culture and Tourism Minister Ertuğrul Günay told the Anatolia news agency on Sunday, highlighting the change in the way the festival has been celebrated over the years. Günay also noted that the state used to be afraid of languages other than Turkish and saw them as a threat but said there is now a 24-hour state channel broadcasting in Kurdish.

Colorful celebrations marked the day in other southeastern provinces as well. In Mardin and Siirt, the governors shared the people’s enthusiasm by personally joining folk dances and jumping over bonfires, one of the most important rituals of the festival. Mardin Governor Hasan Duruer was accompanied by the city’s chief of police, Serdar Meriç, and garrison commander, Brig. Gen. Selim Mert, in jumping over the fire.

Tunceli was yet another province where people came together with state officials. Governor Mustafa Taşkesen argued that Nevruz was an opportunity to consolidate peace in Turkey. “This is one of our special days, when joy peaks and friendship, unity and togetherness are reinforced. Nevruz is a means of consolidation of societal peace and brotherhood through historical, cultural and social bonds which make us who we are,” Taşkesen stressed.

In Aydın, an official ceremony was held at Adnan Menderes University at which Deputy Governor Halis Peker was present. He said Nevruz is “Turkey’s traditional day of joy” and added that it is the best example for the joining of man and nature.

“Let’s see our future bright and leave darkness far behind us. Let’s perpetuate this fire of friendship in unity and togetherness. Indeed, these kinds of festivals lead us in that direction,” said Sivas Governor Ali Kolat following celebrations he attended with locals.

Gül lights Nevruz bonfire

President Abdullah Gül lit a Nevruz bonfire at Altınpark in Ankara on Sunday while also celebrating International Forestry Day. Conveying messages on global climate change, President Gül said forest fires mean the “loss of the nation’s territories.” Stressing that environmental issues and climate change are the most important problems facing the world today, Gül underlined that it is necessary to preserve nature for future generations in the best way possible. Gül also stated that the optimal way to protect nature is to plant a tree. “This has something to do with culture and perception,” the president said. Speaking during the ceremony, Osman Kahveci, the head of the Forestry General Directorate, said half of the world’s forests disappeared in the past century, adding that nearly 13 billion acres of forestland are destroyed each year due to forest fires. Stating that 27 percent of Turkey is covered by forests, Kahveci said 49 percent of these forests have been partly destroyed. **Emrullah Bayrak Ankara**

OTHER POLITICAL NEWS

Judiciary aspect most controversial in Turkish reform package, say experts

Tuesday, March 23, 2010 İZGİ GÜNGÖR

ANKARA — Hürriyet Daily News

A firestorm of controversy sweeps the country a day after the ruling government unveils its package of constitutional reforms, especially regarding the proposed changes to the structure of the judicial system and the top courts.

With Turkey's ruling party attempting to sell its new constitutional reform package to the country, legal experts believe the amendments' most crucial aspect is its proposals for the judiciary.

"The package will mostly affect the judiciary [in a negative way]. The judiciary needs improvement, but it would be bastardized by these amendments," Mümtaz Soysal, a professor of constitutional law and a long-time government critic, told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review.

"The administration's influence over the judiciary will increase. The justice minister and his undersecretary will maintain their presence on the country's judges and prosecutors' board, for instance. The package will thus form unreliable arbitration institutions," Soysal said.

The ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, unveiled the reform package Monday. While the need for a comprehensive overhaul to the Constitution is widely accepted, the AKP's reforms have been met with broad suspicion, especially for the judiciary-related articles.

Such controversy is unsurprising given the frequent clashes between the government and the judiciary, which has frequently blocked the ruling party's bills.

The AKP had earlier implied the planned amendments would especially concern the judiciary. In this, the criticism the party received centered largely on the package's timing, as well as the articles that would restructure Turkey's major judicial institutions and grant Parliament the power to prevent the closure of political parties.

Timing not coincidental

"The fact that the judiciary-related articles are bulky is itself noticeable and raises questions: the amendment for the Constitutional Court is three pages, for instance," Turgut Tarhanlı, dean of the law faculty of Bilgi University, told the Daily News.

"It seems that it is the government's discomfort with the judiciary so far that prompted it to go forward with this package. There are some positive changes, but the package principally envisions the reorganization of the judiciary, especially in the wake of the recent tension with some judicial bodies. It is a move that would relieve the AKP," Tarhanlı said.

He said the timing of the package was not coincidental, noting that it was introduced in the aftermath of the tension between the Supreme Board of Prosecutors and Judges, or HSYK, and the government.

"The HSYK's structure may change. But the timing of the package and the way it was introduced has a political implication," Tarhanlı said.

"And the package lacked some important issues that have to be included, such as the election threshold and the removal of parliamentary immunities. The package gives the way for trials of 1980 coup plotters but involves no article and displays no political will to eliminate the grievances of the victims of the coup," he said. "It is a kind of package that will cause stomach ulcers."

For Ümit Kocasakal, an associate professor of law from Galatasaray University, the amendments aim to take control of the judiciary, a criticism also voiced by the judiciary itself.

“The package is against the principle of the separation of powers and the second article of the Constitution. The article says Turkey is a state of law that guarantees the principle of the separation of forces,” Kocasakal said.

‘Package empowers Parliament’s role’

“Power is increasingly being accumulated in the hands of the legislative and executive branches through reforms, which is entirely against democracy and the separation of powers,” Kocasakal said. “It is not true for Parliament [and even the president] to appoint members for the judiciary and decide on party closures. It is the AKP’s own Constitution.”

Ekrem Ali Akartürk, a professor of constitutional law at Yeditepe University, also said the package’s most controversial items were related to the judiciary and that the package would most affect the judiciary negatively.

The amendments anticipate judicial independence, but the package doesn’t serve this purpose especially with the changes on the procedure on party closures and restructuring the judicial institutions, according to Akartürk. With the planned reforms, Turkey’s major judicial institutions such as the Constitutional Court and the HSYK will also lose their court label or identity and will turn into institutions dominated by members from other disciplines rather than members of the judiciary, he said.

“The judiciary’s independence is possible through the HSYK’s independence. But the presence of the justice minister and his minister on the board is not preferable in terms of its freedom,” Akartürk said.

“HSYK members would also be elected from among lawyers and academics, for instance. The number of the judicial members will decrease in the board. But it is not appropriate for members from outside the judiciary to decide on issues that concern the judiciary,” Akartürk said.

“It is the same for the top court. Even an ordinary citizen could become a member, which I haven’t come across anywhere in the world. The membership of the top court requires specialization on law. It is turning into a kind of council that collects people from other disciplines. The courts will lose their specialized status.”

There are also problems regarding amendments to the procedure for party closures, Akartürk said.

“The power is granted to Parliament on party closures while the judiciary itself should have the authority on that. Nowhere in the world are prosecutors obliged to ask for Parliament’s permission to open a closure case against a party,” Akartürk said. “In a way, parties are granted the right to close each other, which may result in undesirable bargaining among the parties.”

Council of State brings 4/C to Constitutional Court

Wednesday, March 24, 2010

ISTANBUL - Daily news with wires

HURRIYAT

The Council of State, Turkey’s top administrative court, has applied to the Constitutional Court to demand the overturning of a legal article that enables state institutions to hire temporary personnel, according to news agencies.

The relevant article, publicly known as “Article 4/C,” precipitated protests of workers from Tekel, the former state monopoly for alcohol and tobacco.

After Tekel was privatized, workers were given the choice of either accepting alternative public employment under the article 4/C or seeking private-sector employment. Most workers, however, balked at the conditions of the 4/C article because it grants workers fewer rights than regular workers.

The Council of State's application came after an individual opened a case against the Turkish Statistical Institute, or TurkStat, at the Council of State.

The person, who was officially retired, was working under the 4/C article and demanded severance payment but was refused because he was declared ineligible for severance after retirement under 4/C.

Article 4/C breaches fundamental rights in the Constitution, including social security rights, The Council of State said in its decision.

Roma people live nomadic lives after demolitions in Sulukule

Tuesday, March 23, 2010 SEVİM SONGÜN

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

Many Roma people who moved to apartments in the Taşoluk neighborhood provided by the Mass Housing Administration, or TOKİ, have returned to their original neighborhoods in and near Sulukule for socio-economic and cultural reasons. Most say the apartment expenses were beyond their incomes and also the life there was not suitable for them because they prefer houses with gardens near relatives and neighbors

Members of Istanbul's Roma community continue to live like nomads since the demolition of their houses, despite new apartments offered by the government, according to observers and NGOs.

After the houses of the Roma people living in the Sulukule neighborhood of Istanbul's Fatih district were destroyed during an urban transformation project carried out by the Fatih Municipality over the last three years, renters were allowed to move into apartments built by the Mass Housing Administration, or TOKİ, in the Taşoluk neighborhood of Istanbul's Gaziosmanpaşa district.

The initiative is part of government efforts to improve living standards of Roma people in Turkey, but members of the Roma community in Sulukule say they are still suffering from the results of demolitions.

Moving did not solve problems

Moving some Roma people to Taşoluk turned out not to provide a solution since many of them returned to Sulukule only months later after selling their apartments.

"We could only stay four months there [in Taşoluk]. It was not suitable for us," said Faruk Say, a Roma who returned to Sulukule. After the house he rented with his wife and two children in Sulukule was demolished, Say chose to move to the TOKİ apartments in Taşoluk. He said living in Taşoluk was socio-economically difficult for them.

"There was no life for us there. The streets were dark after nine. It was a lonely neighborhood," said Say. "The monthly expenses of our apartments were more than we could afford."

"We should be earning 1,000 Turkish liras a month in order to live in the apartments in Taşoluk. There are many expenses other than rent, for example the natural gas, electricity and apartment expenses," Say said.

Almost half returned

Roma people live and work in Sulukule as either musicians or vendors, making a living with low incomes, and their rents are also low. However, the municipality claimed that the Roma people were given good opportunities in Taşoluk. “They were all renters, but they still had the chance to own an apartment in Taşoluk by paying 250 liras each month,” said Mustafa Çiftçi, the project coordinator from Fatih Municipality.

After 15 years of monthly payments, those renters would be the owners of the apartment, said Çiftçi, adding that they all received 100 liras in rent support from the municipality. However, Çiftçi agreed that almost half of the 127 Roma people who moved to Taşoluk either sold or rented their apartments and returned to Sulukule or nearby neighborhoods.

According to Hacer Foggo, however, the numbers were less. She said only six or seven families remained in Taşoluk, according to Hacer Foggo, a member of the Sulukule Platform. “Most sold their houses starting from 5,000 liras and then returned to their old neighborhood. But now they are moving like nomads from one house to another since they cannot pay the rent,” she said.

Foggo, who works at the Zero Discrimination Association, told the Daily News there should be research done in Sulukule to study the needs of locals before the start of the urban transformation project. “The reasons why some children did not attend school or disabled people were not leaving home should be examined, and social projects to improve their lives should be produced,” she said

Sevcan Küçükatasayar, 20, a former renter in Taşoluk who returned to Sulukule, said they could not live in an apartment building. “We used to live in a big house with a garden. All our relatives were in the same neighborhood. But in Taşoluk, my father opened a tea house and it went bankrupt because nobody went there,” said Küçükatasayar.

Meanwhile, some Roma people said they were happy in Taşoluk. “Those who have a stable job can live there,” said Şahin Kumralgil, who lives in Taşoluk but spends his time in Sulukule. Many of the Roma who returned to Sulukule are also tired of talking to press and have lost hope for a better future, according to Şükrü Pündük, head of the Roma Association in Sulukule.

Removal of Discriminatory sentence

The ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, Bursa Deputy Ali Koyuncu also prepared a proposal asking for the removal of a sentence with discriminative connotations from the law, Anatolia news agency reported. The sentence reads: “The Interior Ministry is responsible for the deportation of gypsies and foreign nomads.”

Atatürk Airport to have 50 million passenger capacity

Tuesday, March 23, 2010

HURRIYAT

Year 1971. Atatürk Airport was then named Yeşilköy Airport.

The airport, which was opened for international traffic in 1953, had just one runway. It was the 06-24 runway on the Florya-Ataköy route, which is currently closed due to maintenance. The number of passengers was 1.33 million, including 727,000 domestic, 392,000 international and 214,000 in-transit. And a master plan was being prepared.

A unit of the Ministry of Public Works was conducting the study. According to the predictions, Yeşilköy’s annual number of passengers would reach 15 million within 15 years, by 1985. There was a plan to launch the 18-36 runway with a length of 3,000 meters to meet the increasing traffic.

With the growth, the aim was to extend the 06-24 runway toward Ataköy by 500 meters and reach 2,800 meters and construct a parallel runway to the 18-36. This way hourly plane capacity would climb to 87, according to 1971 values. Today, Atatürk Airport carries 30 million passengers annually.

According to the figures announced by the Airport Council International, ACI, Atatürk is among the four airports with a stable traffic increase. But the extension of the 06-24 runway comes 39 years later. The hourly traffic, which would reach 87, can reach only 60 with the use of the two runways simultaneously. Parallel runway cannot even enter the agenda due to unplanned settlement around and the fact that the master plan could not be implemented.

Orhan Birdal, managing director of the State Airports Authority, expressed new investments worth around 1 billion Turkish Liras in the Atatürk Airport.

Atatürk Airport has become the most important delivery point of the region also with the growth of Turkish Airlines in the recent years. However, the airport's infrastructure could not adapt to the rapid growth. Due to the closure of the 06-24 runway for works, the State Airports Authority restricted several flights including charter passenger cargo, business jet and helicopters, apart from tariff flights till July 1.

A nearly \$1 billion liras investment is taking place for the terminal's growth, runway extensions, plane parking and air traffic systems at the Atatürk Airport. With the completion of the SMART project, which will modernize the air traffic system, the capacity will be re-evaluated. The goal is to bring Atatürk Airport's annual passenger capacity to 50 million within the upcoming 10 years. The 06-24 runway, which dates back 1953 and has a length of 2,300 meters, is being extended by 250 meters toward the Ataköy route. The runway will shorten aircraft's braking distance.

Through rapid exit ways, planes will leave the runway without losing time after landing. The 06-24 runway is being raised to CAT3 standards. Planes will be able to take off and land easily even in case of 50-meter visibility. They will not be obliged to divert to other airports in foggy weather. The 18-36 right runway will also be raised to CAT3 standards.

Meanwhile, ground tracking radars have been installed on Atatürk, Ankara Esenboğa and Antalya. The planes will be monitored constantly.

The talks between the Transportation Ministry and the Ministry of Defense are in the last phase. With an agreement to be signed in the upcoming days, a blockhouse area will be taken. Aircraft parking lot problems will be solved at the airport.

According to a law draft proposed to the Parliament, all State Airports Authority staff will get additional compensation. The meltdown of salaries will be covered. Personal rights will be arranged again.

Half of foreign drug traffickers caught in Turkey smuggle heroin

19 March 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Fifty-two percent of foreign drug traffickers caught in Turkey in 2009 smuggled heroin while 50.8 percent of Turkish drug traffickers caught abroad in the same period smuggled cannabis, a National Police Department report has revealed.

The report, prepared by the department's Anti-smuggling and Organized Crime Bureau, also shows that 19.5 percent of foreign traffickers in Turkey and 16.3 percent of Turkish traffickers abroad were caught with cocaine. A total of 21.8 percent of Turkish traffickers arrested in other countries were caught with heroin.

According to the report, the number of Turkish citizens arrested abroad decreased between 2006 and 2009, though the number of foreigners caught in Turkey increased in the same time period. Officials from the National Police Department believe the increase in the number of foreign drug traffickers caught in Turkey stems from a rise in cooperation between drug gangs and Turkish citizens.

In 2009, 409 foreign traffickers were taken into custody in Turkey and 311 Turkish citizens were apprehended abroad while 437 foreigners were caught in Turkey and 354 Turkish citizens were caught abroad in 2008. In 2005, 203 foreigners were caught in Turkey and 353 Turkish citizens were caught abroad.

Iranian citizens topped the list of foreign drug traffickers apprehended in Turkey in 2009 and were most often caught with heroin, opium and methamphetamine. Foreign nationals caught with heroin mostly came from Georgia, Turkmenistan, Albania, Bulgaria and Macedonia. Other arrested foreigners include Bolivians, who were caught with cocaine, Azerbaijanis, who were caught with heroin and cannabis, and Nigerians, who trafficked heroin and cocaine.

Turkish nationals apprehended abroad were mostly involved in drug trafficking in countries with large Turkish populations. The report also notes that the amount of drugs seized on Turkish citizens is low, implying that many of them carry drugs for personal use.

Turkey fails in fighting violence against woman

21 March 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Last week, a parliamentary deputy submitted a question motion demanding a response from the justice minister on why so many women who are victims of domestic violence are killed by their husbands or abusive lovers despite having applied to the police and prosecutors for protection several times.

Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) Van deputy Fatma Kurtulan filed the motion, motivated by the violent death of nursery school teacher Saadet Ulus, who was killed in Ardahan's Göle district by her stalker, Yalçın Algan, against whom she had filed complaints at the prosecutor's office several times.

Algan (42), had become obsessed with Ulus (24), tracked her down to Ardahan, where she had been assigned for work, and butchered her with a cleaver for not reciprocating his feelings. It later came to light that Ulus had filed a complaint against her stalker while she was still living in İstanbul. Despite the complaint, Algan -- whose rap sheet includes stabbing a woman in 2004 and who was wanted for homicide -- was able to track her down and even rent a room at a hotel using a fake ID where he literally hunted her for a month.

Sadly, Ulus is not the only example where state authorities failed to save a woman's life despite prior warning. She was laid to rest on March 13, one day after another violent incident in Adana, where Yasin İlbaş started knocking loudly on the door of his ex-wife, Cemile Seçil Sansür, and ex-mother-in-law Gülten Sansür's (43) house, demanding to see the couple's 18-month-old daughter. The two women called police, who came and left the scene, saying it was an "intra-family" matter. İlbaş returned about 30 minutes later with a gun and shot the two women. Cemile Seçil Sansür was severely injured, while Gülten Sansür died during the shooting. The family has sworn to take the case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), blaming police negligence for the incident. On March 15, a butcher cut off the nose and ears of his pregnant

wife, identified as Aysun K., in Bingöl in retaliation for Aysun complaining to the police of persistent domestic violence.

Turkey’s ECtHR conviction

Gökçe Kartaler, a volunteer from the Mor Çatı (Purple Roof) Women’ Shelter, says that although the laws in place are not bad, there are major problems in their implementation. Recalling that Turkey has been found guilty by the ECtHR of failing to protect its female citizens who have applied to authorities for protection from violence and abuse, Gökçe says new institutions that would extend the capacity of social service providers and security forces in the country should be formed.

“The state in Turkey cannot protect those women who apply to authorities for protection from violence. But in fact, ensuring the safety of women is the state’s duty according to the Constitution, the law and international agreements to which Turkey is a party.”

In June of last year, the ECtHR ruled for the first time in its history against a state for overlooking a domestic violence case. The court said that Turkey failed to sufficiently prosecute a man who abused his wife and murdered his mother-in-law. Nahide Opuz, the murdered woman’s daughter, has been pursuing the case since 1995, when her stepfather and husband began to beat her and threaten her mother. The Turkish police, however, repeatedly overlooked the case. When her husband finally stabbed and shot Nahide’s mother to death, his life sentence was reduced to a three-year term by a Turkish court on appeal. In its verdict, the ECtHR ruled that the Turkish court was guilty of “judicial passivity” in this case and had violated articles 2, 3, and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The judge required the Turkish state to pay \$41,700 to Nahide in damages.

Social services units needed

Kartaler says that following Turkey’s conviction at the ECtHR, a protocol was signed between the Interior Ministry and the Ministry for Women and Family Affairs. However, there have been problems executing it. “According to the protocol, when a woman goes to a police station, the officers have to file records without demanding proof of violence. If the woman doesn’t want to go home, she should be referred to a women’s shelter. However, the police rarely fulfill their responsibility.”

However, the police department is not the sole culprit, Kartaler says. The Social Services and Child Protection Agency is also badly equipped to handle domestic violence cases. She stresses that there should a 24-hour unit dealing only with domestic violence complaints. The police do not have a social services agency to which they can direct a victim of domestic abuse outside of work hours. Police officers are also uninformed about what course they should take when confronted with a domestic violence complaint. “Many security officers have no idea what to do in such cases. They do not know that they should notify prosecutors.”

Keeping in-house social services experts in police stations could remedy the problem, in addition to a 24-hour service dealing only with domestic violence issues.

Another important measure would be providing better training for police officers on how to handle domestic violence cases. Kartaler admits that in addition to the lack of a number of agencies that could help the situation, the dominant patriarchal mentality is still one of the most important obstructions in improving the situation of victims of domestic abuse. To change that will undoubtedly take longer and more than government-induced measures to fight. And this is one fight that Turkey’s women cannot afford to lose.

Gülen movement is a chance for humanity, American professor says

22 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The Fethullah Gülen movement is a chance for humanity, Rice University Professor Jill Carroll said while speaking at a high-level conference in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius on Saturday. The Baltic Turkish Culture Academy and Vilnius Pedagogical University jointly organized a conference on Gülen and the Gülen movement's ideas on dialogue and tolerance. Speaking during the conference, Carroll, who is the author of a book called "A Dialogue of Civilizations: Gülen's Islamic Ideals and Humanistic Discourse," said the Gülen movement is open to innovation and that dialogue has become part of the movement's life. "The Gülen movement is a chance for humanity," Carroll stressed.

With the participation of Ian Williams from Birmingham University and İhsan Yılmaz from Fatih University, this international conference on Islam and interfaith dialogue is the first of its kind in Lithuania. The conference, which featured the ambassadors of Azerbaijan and Spain, the consuls general of Turkey, Kazakhstan and Italy, and Lithuanian government officials, started with an opening speech by Vilnius Pedagogical University Rector Algirdas Gaizutis. Noting that dialogue seeks cultural cooperation, Gaizutis said they had translated one of Gülen's books into Lithuanian. The rector said they are living in a more global world with open-minded people and that Gülen's ideas have been received with great respect.

Explaining why she wanted to write about Gülen in her book, Carroll said it was necessary to study morals, freedom, education and responsibility, which are the basis of tolerance, and this is the reason why she wanted to compare Eastern and Western thinkers. Stressing that the best achievement of Gülen is his ability to implement his ideas, Yılmaz said many people may have similar ideas but what makes him unique is his ability to execute his thoughts. Williams said he has been following Gülen's activities for more than 10 years and that only Gülen truly represents service to humanity.

Meanwhile, Amsterdam's Vrije University also organized a panel discussion on Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi and Fethullah Gülen's peace initiatives over the weekend. Speaking during the discussion, Dutch scholar Abdulwahid van Bommel said Gülen is indeed undertaking good activities for dialogue. "This is very important for the Western world. Muslims need people like Fethullah Gülen," van Bommel said. Karel Steenbrink from Utrecht University's Intercultural Dialogue Platform said Mevlana and Gülen are popular because of their teachings and open dialogue. "While the Gülen movement is not an Islamist movement, it is also not a sect or a tariqat [a religious order]. This volunteer movement is open to everyone with its peaceful and embracing character," Steenbrink said.

Indictment: Cage plan against non-Muslims already in operation

22 March 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

A new indictment into an alleged Naval Forces Command plan called the Cage Operation Action Plan suggests that the subversive plan had already been put into operation against Turkey's non-Muslim community.

The indictment was accepted by the İstanbul 12th High Criminal Court on Friday. The document calls for jail sentences of up to 15 years each for three admirals and 30 naval officers on charges

of membership in a terrorist organization. The Cage plan is an alleged navy 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 indictment, the plan had already been put into operation in a number of İstanbul districts. Letters that included threatening messages were sent to non-Muslim Turkish citizens from the Kasımpaşa Post Office on May 3, 2007. "A two-page letter that bears the title 'Final Warning' was sent to a number of Armenian schools in İstanbul. The letter reads that the movement has been launched for the future of the Turkish people," the indictment says. The Cage plan also called the killings of Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink, Catholic priest Andrea Santoro and three Christians in Malatya part of their "operation." The group intended those killings to foment chaos in society, but this failed to happen.

The 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.

According to the indictment, the plot was coordinated and led by retired Adm. Ahmet Feyyaz Öğütçü. The document also points to Vice Adm. Kadir Sağdıç and Rear Adm. Mehmet Fatih İlgar as the "number two and three men" behind the plot. The two were interrogated last month by İzmir prosecutors as part of the Ergenekon probe. The plan was intended to be put into operation by a team of 41 members of the Naval Forces Command. The plan was divided into four phases: "Preparation," "Raising Fear," "Shaping Public Opinion" and "Action."

As part of the "Preparation" phase, the names and addresses of the country's prominent non-Muslims were to be determined. The action plan would then move to the second phase. Letters that included threatening messages would be sent to non-Muslim residents of Turkey. In the "Shaping Public Opinion" phase, the AK Party government would be accused of ignoring the "approaching threat" to the country's non-Muslim population in articles to appear in the media. The most appalling phase of the plan, "Action," would include the assassination of prominent non-Muslim figures. At that point, propaganda would point to the AK Party as the cause of the incidents. The party would be accused of falling short of ensuring the security of non-Muslims in the country. The action plan defined Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as an "enemy."

'Museum attack would be worse than Council of State attack'

The indictment also states that a planned bomb attack against young visitors at the Rahmi M. Koç Museum also outlined in the Cage plot would have a more severe impact on society than the 2006 shooting at the Council of State that left a senior judge dead. The Council of State attack is also believed to be the work of Ergenekon. The plan for a bomb attack at the museum was exposed in May of 2009 after a large number of explosives were discovered in a submarine at the museum. A military investigation into the find determined that the explosives at the bottom of the submarine had been forgotten by commandos.

Ergenekon prosecutors, however, decided that the findings of the military investigation were too weak to ease concerns over the discovery of explosives at a museum. The prosecutors examined the submarine at the museum and reached the conclusion that it was not possible for the commandos to forget such a large amount of explosives in a submarine.

The Cage plan noted that the explosion should occur on a day when the museum was visited by a large student group. The indictment states that the planned explosion would serve the purpose of coup plotters in the military.

CHP announces not to support government's constitutional reform package

22 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's main opposition party has said that it would not support the government's constitutional amendment package.

Hakkı Süha Okay, deputy group chairman of the Republican People's Party (CHP), said after meeting with a delegation of the ruling Justice & Development (AK) Party formed by Turkish State Minister & Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Çiçek, Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin and Deputy Group Chairman Bekir Bozdağ in Ankara on Monday.

"The delegation informed us on the package. But we have not yet made a detailed study on articles. If the amendment to provisional article 15 is brought to the parliament separately, we will support it. But we will not support the package," he said.

The delegation will pay visits to the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) later in the day about the constitutional amendment package.

Turkish government seeks to reform constitution

22 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's government spokesman says the government aims to amend several articles of the constitution to make it more democratic and to strengthen the country's bid to join the European Union.

Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Çiçek says amending the constitution -- a legacy of the 1980 coup -- is a must for the sake of the country's EU bid. He says the government will seek the support of opposition parties on Monday.

The government has said it will take the reform package to a referendum if Parliament fails to reach consensus to pass it. Çiçek says the government wants to "elevate the standards of democracy."

The package includes measures such as making it harder to ban political parties and reforming the way judges and prosecutors are appointed.

Turkish reforms set for parliament, referendum seen option

Wednesday, 24 March 2010 15:21

World Bulletin / News Desk

Turkey's government will submit to parliament before the end of the month draft constitutional reforms, referendum is seen option.

Turkey's government will submit to parliament before the end of the month draft constitutional reforms that have riled the old secular elite, Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Cicek said on Wednesday.

Justice and Development (AK) Party announced on Monday a constitutional bill, proposing

amendments to 22 articles and abolishment of the Article 15 of the constitution.

Cicek who briefed the representatives of news papers and TV channels Wednesday on the government's constitutional amendment bill, said the constitution itself was the root cause of many problems in Turkey.

He said Turkey was trying to run the state wheel with a problematic constitution, noting that all segments of the society was longing for a new constitution.

Cicek said the current constitution which gave priority to security and state over the individual was outdated, noting that in the contemporary world the individual was given precedence over the state.

He said the government would continue to seek consensus in the parliament until Friday. He said however that it was not always possible to find consensus, noting that otherwise they would carry the issue to referendum.

Cicek said the proposed draft bill was not final, signalling that they were open to criticism and suggestions.

The government lacks the two-thirds majority in parliament needed to amend the constitution without other parties' support, but may call a national referendum to push through the changes.

"Referendum option"

Senior judges have warned that the changes would "encroach on the principle of separation of powers", and the opposition has threatened to ask the Constitutional Court to block the package.

The government bill among other things aims to change the constitution of the Supreme Board of Judges (HSYK) and Prosecutors and the Constitutional Court, and tie opening of closure cases against political parties to the permission of a parliamentary committee.

Opposition parties which are sceptical of the government bill, have also severely criticized the efforts, and said the move aimed at taking over and politicising the judiciary.

The government which denies accusations argues that the bill aims at making Turkey more democratic in line with EU's expectations.

AK Party government which is touring the opposition parties in a bid to raise support in the parliament for the bill, stated it would carry the amendment package to referendum if it failed to get the required support.

Turkish State Minister & Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc said that the government would put constitutional amendments on referendum if consensus with opposition parties can not be achieved.

"We will seek a consensus and dialogue until the end," Arinc told reporters.

Constitutional amendments in Turkey need a two-thirds majority --367 votes-- of the parliament, which requires the government to receive support from opposition parties to pass the reform.

Votes from the Justice and Development (AK) Party's 337 deputies may put the planned reform on referendum as any constitutional amendment receiving more than 330 votes but less than 367 need to be submitted to popular vote. However, government's amendments to constitution are severely criticized by the opposition.

"It (constitutional reform) will be put on a popular vote if we can not reach a majority to pass these reforms. So, people will decide directly, by the help of a referendum, whether or not there is a consensus," Arinc said.

Both the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) and second opposition Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) declared they would not support the bill.

The government bill foresees amendments to 22 articles of the Constitution, including the articles 10, 20, 23, 41, 53, 69, 74, 84, 94, 125, 128, 129, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 156 and

159.

Details

The bill aims to bring the right to collective bargaining for civil servants and the other public workers and tie closure of political parties to permission of a parliamentary committee, which is currently only under the authority of the Constitutional Court.

The government bill to amend the constitution aims to abolish the provisional article 15 of the constitution which prevents trial of generals who led the coup on September 12, 1980. The bill also aims to enable trial of military personnel at civilian courts on charges of crimes they commit against security of the state and the constitutional order.

The bill increases the number of members of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors, also bringing arrangements to allow the parliament to elect members to the court.

The bill also paves the way for appeals to the decisions of the Supreme Military Council (YAS) at courts, which are currently outside of judiciary supervision.

The bill also aims to enable trial of military personnel at civilian courts on charges of crimes they commit against security of the state and the constitutional order.

Turkish Government Foresees Amendments to 22 Articles of Constitution

Monday, 22 March 2010

USA K PUBLICATION

The Turkish government envisages amendments to 22 articles of the Constitution.

Members of the ruling Justice & Development (AK) Party are visiting the opposition parties, the Republican People's Party (CHP), the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), to submit the constitutional amendment bill.

The bill includes amendments to 22 articles of the constitution_ the articles 10, 20, 23, 41, 53, 69, 74, 84, 94, 125, 128, 129, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 156 and 159.

The bill also envisions abolishing the provisional article 15 of the constitution which does not allow trial of the members of the Council of National Security formed after the military intervention on September 12, 1980.

The mentioned articles regulate equality before the law; privacy of individual life; freedom of residence and movement; protection of the family; right to collective bargaining; principles to be observed by political parties; right to petition; loss of membership of a deputy; bureau of the assembly of the Turkish parliament; recourse to judicial review, general principles regarding provisions relating to public servants; duties and responsibilities, and guarantees during disciplinary proceedings regarding public servants; supervision of judges and public prosecutors; military justice; the organization of the Constitutional Court; termination of membership of Constitutional Court; functions and powers of the Constitutional Court; functioning and trial procedure of the Constitutional Court; military high court of appeals; and Supreme Council of Judges and Public Prosecutors.

Security tight in Parliament over potential plot to assassinate PM

23 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Extraordinarily high security measures were taken at Parliament yesterday as Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan arrived to join his Justice and Development Party's (AK Party) parliamentary group meeting due to an alleged attempt to assassinate Erdoğan, police sources said.

Officials said an anonymous tip-off the police received on Monday was the source of Tuesday's tight security. However, no details were immediately available on the content of the anonymously submitted information.

The police applied measures taken when US President Barak Obama visited Turkey last year, officials said. The main service entry was closed to access starting early hours in the morning. Police set up barriers at all entrance and exit points in Parliament to fend off a possible attack.

Turkey's PM says open to compromise over reforms

Wednesday, 24 March 2010 16:54

WORLD BULLETIN

Erdogan accused those who oppose to the proposed amendments of "trying to protect their own privileges."

Turkish premier has said his government would submit planned constitutional amendments to referendum if opposition parties failed to extend support to the package.

"We have no prejudices, no preconditions. We will wait until the weekend for them to extend support and to make their contributions. If they don't, we will submit [the amendments] to the parliament and put on popular vote," Recep Tayyip Erdogan told a ceremony in the Turkish capital, Ankara. "Our doors are wide open for reconciliation for those who have any proposals or criticisms," Erdogan said.

The Turkish premier said the proposed amendments package aimed at making Turkey stronger and more democratic, adding that all segments of the society agreed that Turkey needed a new constitution.

"Everyone is complaining about the constitution. Everyone wants to have it amended. And here is the opportunity and the time for change," Erdogan said.

Erdogan accused those who oppose to the proposed amendments of "trying to protect their own privileges."

"There is no room for personal interest or expectations in this draft package. And those who try to protect their own seats and positions need to quit involving their own interests in this process," Erdogan said.

Turkey's MHP says against govt reforms

Wednesday, 24 March 2010 16:12

WORLD BULLETIN

Sandir said that MHP would not support the package.

An executive of Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) said on Wednesday that his party was against the government's Constitutional amendment package.

Speaking to reporters, MHP group acting chairman Mehmet Sandir said that MHP would not support the package.

Noting that MHP did not think the package was "sincere, honest and serious", Sandir said that Constitutional amendment was not made through majority of votes; the decision to amend the

Constitution was made unanimously.

Constitutional amendment package was prepared by the government and envisages amendments to 22 articles of the Constitution.

On Monday, a delegation of the ruling Justice & Development (AK) Party paid visits to the Republican People's Party (CHP), the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) and MHP to give information about the Constitutional amendment package.

Main secularist opposition CHP also stated it would not support the package.

Pirates hijack Turkish ship in Indian Ocean

23 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Somali pirates seized a Turkish ship with a crew of 19 Turks and two Ukrainians in the Indian Ocean on Tuesday morning, Turkish media reported.

The Maltese-flagged MV Frigia was hijacked 1,000 nautical miles east of the northern coast of Somalia, the counter-piracy EU Naval Force (Navfor) Somalia said in a statement.

It did not identify the hijackers but said the 35,000-tonne ship had been closer to India than Somalia and some 400 nautical miles outside the normal Navfor operation area.

"My men have hijacked a Turkish ship from the Indian Ocean and they are now heading towards me here in Haradheere," a pirate known only as Ali told Reuters by phone from the Somalian coastal town, a base for many hijackers.

The ship had been sailing east from Port Said to Thailand.

However it now appears to be heading west towards one of the known pirate ports on the coast of Somalia, EU Navfor said.

Turkish cargo ships have been hijacked in the past and NATO-member Turkey's warships patrol the Gulf of Aden as part of an international mission to try to prevent piracy, which has surged off the Somali coast in recent years.

GEO-STRATEGIC NEWS

Turkey must restore 'trust' for Israel-Syria mediation

Wednesday, March 24, 2010 FULYA ÖZERKAN

WASHINGTON - Hürriyet Daily News

Turkey must regain Israeli trust to resume the indirect negotiations between Israel and Syria that were halted by last year's Gaza war, according to the former leader of an influential pro-Israel lobby in the United States.

"Until the flare-up between Ankara and Jerusalem last year, the indirect talks were proceeding in the direction of a conclusion. Trust must be re-established for Turkey to play its rightful regional leadership role," Tom Dine, former executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review in an interview late Tuesday.

AIPAC, a high-profile, pro-Israel lobbying organization, will hold a major convention this week in Washington, with over 7,000 people expected to attend.

Turkey hosted four rounds of indirect talks between Israel and Syria in 2008 but they were suspended following the resignation of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in September that year and the Gaza war.

Dine, an advocate of U.S. engagement with Syria, sought to establish networks in Washington and conducted intense meetings in Damascus to lay the groundwork for improved relationship between Syria and the U.S.

“I was publicly supportive of Turkey’s role as the host and mediator of the previous indirect talks. Because I was deeply involved in a U.S.-Syria Track II diplomatic effort at the same time, I was close to what was taking place, traveling several times to both Syria and Israel to encourage the two governments and their elites to move forward toward a long-awaited conclusion,” he said.

‘Wrong direction’

Damascus is warm to Turkish mediation but the current Israeli government has aired reservations about Ankara’s impartiality as bilateral ties soured due to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s withering and repeated criticism of Israeli policies in Gaza.

“Turkish-Israeli relations are currently moving in the wrong direction. There is so much in common between the two societies, so it is a shame that the direction is off course,” according to Dine.

As two stable democracies in the same region, Dine said the two neighbors share similar concerns and interests as two strong, political-military establishments that are highly professional.

Turkey and Israel could help each other achieve two elusive but critical goals, he said; namely, a final settlement creating two states, Palestine and Israel, as well as a peace treaty between Syria and Israel.

“Right now, because of current tensions and personal hurt and anger among leaders, the two publics are feeling the strain and Turkey is not helping push the parties [involved],” Dine said, adding that this state of affairs has resulted in a disconnect in the eastern Mediterranean.

“I would be optimistic if both sides re-found the needed common ground that does exist and worked on a positive, not negative, future agenda. That is hard work but I would be optimistic if that labor were happening,” he said.

Asked if Turkey had received the Israeli lobby’s support during the passage of an Armenian “genocide” resolution in a U.S. House panel earlier this month, Dine said he could not speak for the “lobby,” suggesting only that U.S.-Turkish relations should be the priority.

“U.S.-Turkey relations currently need lots of repair work and rebuilding, bilaterally and multilaterally. Those of us who work and participate in matters of contemporary foreign policy confront this fact everyday in our efforts to achieve a close and trusting relationship,” he said.

Ankara unworried about Merkel's 'privileged partnership' talk

Wednesday, March 24, 2010

Ankara - Hürriyet Daily News

Turkey appears relatively unworried by continued talk of a “privileged European Union partnership” for the country from Germany’s chancellor, who is scheduled to pay an official visit to Turkey on March 29-30.

“The EU decisions [taken so far] are flexible according to politicians. Continuity is the main principle in states’ policies,” Foreign Ministry Spokesman Burak Özügergin told reporters Wednesday.

Speaking to Turkish journalists in Berlin prior to her Ankara visit, Chancellor Angela Merkel said a privileged partnership for Turkey, in lieu of full accession to the EU, is the best way forward for relations between the country and the bloc.

“What Merkel thinks about Turkey’s EU accession is not new for us. But our stance is also quite clear and well known. Turkey is considering no option except full membership,” Özügergin said. Contrary to Merkel, her coalition partner and German foreign minister, Guido Westerwelle, expressed his support for the Turkish EU bid during an earlier visit in January.

“As Westerwelle also stressed here, the principle of ‘pacta sunt servanda’ is important,” Özügergin said in reference to the necessity of following the dictates Turkey and the EU have already signed with each other.

In line with this, the spokesman also said he expected Germany to continue its policy of enabling the accession talks to proceed.

The accession negotiations are an “open-ended process,” but if Turkey and the EU opt for a privileged partnership, they could agree on 28 of the 35 chapters that each candidate country would have to fulfill, Merkel said.

In spite of her pessimism toward Turkish membership, Merkel also said she would urge the Turkish government to implement the Ankara protocol by opening its air and sea ports to EU-member Greek Cyprus.

Irish President McAleese backs Turkey’s EU bid

Tuesday, March 23, 2010

Ankara-Hürriyet Daily News

Ireland’s President Mary McAleese re-affirmed her country’s support for Turkey’s EU accession process and declined Armenian allegations of “genocide” on Tuesday.

McAleese, the first Irish President visiting Turkey, was welcomed in an official ceremony at the presidential palace in Ankara.

President Abdullah Gül called on Irish businessmen to invest Turkey, thanking McAleese for Ireland’s constant support to Turkey’s EU bid during a joint press conference.

McAleese said Ireland and Turkey had close historical ties despite the geographical distance between the two countries and gave thanks for the Ottoman aid during the Great Famine in 1847. “The sultan of the Ottoman Empire sent three ships, full of foodstuff, to Irish ports in Drogheda. Irish people never forgot this unique generosity initiative. The symbols in the Turkish flag, the crescent and the star, have become the symbols of the region. Moreover, we see the Turkish symbols on the uniforms of the soccer team,” she said.

Asked Irish position towards the Armenian allegations of “genocide,” McAleese said. “Ireland supports all the measures that will encourage friendship.”

Social consensus needed for reforms, EU commissioner says

Monday, March 22, 2010 DÖNDÜ SARIŞIK

ANKARA — Hürriyet Daily News

Turkey has yet to reach a consensus in passing reforms necessary for EU accession, according to the union’s enlargement commissioner, Stefan Füle. In an interview with the Daily News, Füle calls for ‘a consensus between political parties and different segments of society,’ and says, ‘Unfortunately, this is lacking somewhat in Turkey at the moment’

Developing a national consensus is crucial to implementing the reforms necessary for Turkey's European Union accession, according to the EU's commissioner for enlargement.

"Negotiations are moving forward with new legislation being passed by the Turkish Parliament. Such reforms consolidate the democratic, market-oriented path taken by Turkish society and help the country compete and integrate with global markets," the EU's commissioner for enlargement and European neighborhood policy, Stefan Füle, told the *Hürriyet Daily News and Economic Review* during an interview last week.

The ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, has been seeking support for a constitutional amendment package but the opposition seems unlikely to back it.

"Difficult and demanding reforms require open debate. But to achieve results and reach the end goal, what is needed above all is a spirit of dialogue, compromise and consensus between political parties and different segments of Turkish society," he said.

Coming from the Czech Republic, which was a candidate country less than six years ago, Füle said, "I'm therefore best placed to know how demanding and difficult accession negotiations are."

He said national consensus is critical in meeting the accession criteria. "[This] means, concretely, a spirit of compromise between the political parties on the required reforms. Unfortunately, this is lacking somewhat in Turkey at the moment."

Füle said there were also difficulties in achieving the spirit of compromise in the Czech Republic. "Once found, however, such compromises proved decisive."

After holding talks in Ankara and Istanbul last week, Füle said: "Bringing Turkey closer to the EU belongs to my highest priorities. This is not an easy task, neither for Turkey nor for me, but I am thoroughly convinced that it is worth every effort."

Turkey's accession would reaffirm the EU claim of the universality of secular democracy, he said. "An EU with Turkey as a member would be a much more influential and credible international political player and an example of coexistence for hundreds of millions of people. This would turn the concept of the 'clash of civilizations' into the alliance of civilizations."

Asked about a recent European Parliament report that criticizes Turkey and urges it to immediately open its ports to Greek Cypriot ships and planes, he said, "It is a product of intense debates across the various groups."

"In any case, the European Parliament did not question the accession process of Turkey. It expressed criticism on a number of points. It is part of the overall democratic debate in the EU. Such a debate is normal. It will continue and evolve until the very end of the accession process, and even beyond – the same way there will be a debate in Turkey on the EU."

Asked about Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's harsh criticism toward the union, Füle said: "We should learn from these debates, not reject them. They will help us better address the concerns expressed on various issues."

Many experts argue the deadlock on the divided island of Cyprus might completely freeze the Turkey-EU accession process.

A comprehensive settlement on Cyprus, ending the 46-year-long problems, is in the interest of all, Füle said.

"It would be first of all a turning point in the history of Europe. It would also give a fresh momentum to Turkey's accession negotiations, as several chapters could be opened and some even closed."

Noting that the ongoing peace negotiations under the umbrella of the United Nations were “a historic opportunity which should not be missed,” Füle said, “[All parties should] put all their weight behind the negotiations in view of a comprehensive settlement.”

Sweden supports reforms in Turkey

19 March 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The Swedish government announced that it would provide not only political but also financial assistance to reforms that have been fulfilled in Turkey on its path towards EU membership. The Swedish government adopted a new strategy for development cooperation with Turkey for the period 2010-2013.

"Turkey's future membership of the EU remains the strongest incentive for further democratic reforms in the country. Through this new strategy, Sweden is strengthening its support to the development of closer relations between Turkey and the EU. The measures in this strategy will be an important contribution to the reform efforts needed for Turkey to fully meet the criteria for EU membership, particularly within such areas as democracy, human rights and gender equality," says Minister for International Development Cooperation Gunilla Carlsson.

Sweden's development cooperation with Turkey is to help it achieve the goal of reform cooperation in eastern Europe: strengthened democracy, equitable and sustainable development, and closer ties to the EU and its basic values. The support will be targeted at areas requiring the greatest reforms before Turkish EU membership, and will be strengthened through a dialogue with Turkey on issues such as deeper EU integration, gender equality and women's participation in the democratic development of society, and freedom of expression. The needs of the least developed geographical regions of Turkey must be taken into account.

"Turkey is an important partner for Sweden in many areas, and Turkish EU membership is strategically important for the EU. Several challenges remain in the accession process, with a further need for reform in such areas as public administration and the legal system. Sweden is in a position to provide support in connection with these needs and can help strengthen civil society by supporting organisations working for the rights of minorities and other groups in need," continues Carlsson.

Sweden's broad commitment to Turkey also includes academic cooperation administered by the Swedish Institute. Grant programmes provide Turkish students with the opportunity to study human rights and European studies in Sweden. Swedish students are also given the opportunity to conduct 'minor field studies' in Turkey.

47 European Parliament members establish 'Friends of Turkey' group

19 March 2010, Friday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

The Friends of Turkey informal parliamentary friendship group was established this week in the European Parliament and counts among its members 47 European MEPs hailing from parties as diverse as the Christian Democrats, the Socialists, the Liberals, the Greens, the European Conservatives and the Reformists

Former Slovenian Prime Minister Social Democrat Alojz Peterle was chosen to lead the group, while Fatih Aydođan, German Socialist İsmail Ertuđ's assistant, was elected general secretary. Elected unanimously, Friends of Turkey group chairman Peterle said the group, whose charter was signed by 47 deputies from various parties and 15 countries, will be very active in the European Parliament. He also said the group will launch initiatives to enhance Turkey-EU relations.

Among the group's members are the spouse of Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt, Anna Corazza-Bildt; Sandra Kalniete (Latvia); Jaroslaw Leszek Walesa (Poland); Birgit Schnieber-Jastram (Germany); Georg Bach from Luxembourg's Christian Democrats; İsmail Ertuđ, Knut Fleckenstein, Jutta Steinruck and Peter Simon (Germany); Emine Bozkurt (the Netherlands); Richard Howitt and Claude Moraes (UK); Tanja Fajon (Slovenia); Ioan Enciu and Victor Bostinaru (Romania); Boguslaw Liberadzki (Poland); Said El-Khadraoui (Belgium); Baris Zala (Slovakia); Evgeni Kirilov (Bulgaria); Raimon Obiols (Spain); and Kader Arif from the French Socialists.

Metin Kazak (Bulgaria); Jelko Kacin and Ivo Vajgl (Slovenia); Graham Watson, Andrew Duff, Sarah Ludford and Michael Cashman (UK); Marietje Schaake and Sophie in't Veld (the Netherlands); Michael Theurer and Alexandra Thain (Germany); Liisa Jaakonsaari and Anneli Jaatteenmaki from the Finnish Liberals; EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee co-chairperson H el ene Flautre, Catherine Greze and Karima Delli (France); Fransizka Keller and Jan Philipp Albrecht (Germany); Raul Romeva i Rueda (Spain); Indrek Tarand (Estonia); Heidi Hautala (Finland); Judith Sargentini from the Dutch Greens and Sajjad Karim from the Dutch European Conservatives and Reformists are also among the members of the group.

Syria's al-Assad offers help for Armenia-Turkey detente

Tuesday, March 23, 2010

DAMASCUS - Daily News with wires

HURIYAT

Syria's president offered his country's services in helping establish normal relations between Armenia and Turkey while hosting his Armenian counterpart Monday.

"Syria is ready to play a role ... for the establishment of Turkish-Armenian relations that can ensure normal stability and security in the region," Bashar al-Assad told a joint news conference Monday alongside Armenian President Serge Sarkisian.

"I think ... officials in Armenia have given us their full confidence, which is why we are starting immediate steps, especially since President Sarkisian encouraged us [to do so]," he said.

Al-Assad also praised Yerevan's decision to normalize its relations with Turkey despite "many difficulties," according to a report by Agence France-Presse.

Turkey mediated several rounds of indirect negotiations between Syria and Israel in 2008, but little progress was made. Syria suspended the talks in response to Israel's military offensive in Gaza, and Israeli officials said Turkey's scathing criticism of Israel's role in the conflict has disqualified it as a mediator.

Long divided over the issue of killings of Armenians during the last days of Ottoman Empire in World War I, Ankara and Yerevan signed an accord in October to establish diplomatic ties and open their border.

The process has hit snags, however, with both countries accusing each other of lacking commitment to the deal. Continued progress was dealt a further blow by a recent United States House committee's approval of a resolution that labels the killings as "genocide."

No questioning

Sarkisian, who is in Syria until Wednesday, said his country supported "peaceful solutions and dialogue to resolve the dispute ... without questioning and forgetting its history."

In an interview with Syria's Al-Watan newspaper, Sarkisian said the "genocide" resolution in the House Foreign Affairs Committee is an "internal affair of the United States, which we do not interfere with."

"We did not make the recognition of the Armenian genocide a precondition for the establishment of Armenian-Turkish relations, since we stand for the improvement of relations with Turkey without any preconditions," Republic Radio of Armenia quoted Sarkisian as saying.

"I do not think the attempts to tie the process to the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by other countries are correct. One thing is obvious to me – the longer it takes to normalize our relations, the more countries will adopt such resolutions," he said.

Commenting on the long-standing territorial dispute with Azerbaijan, Sarkisian said: "When the people of Nagorno-Karabakh receive a real opportunity to implement its right to self-determination and when practical mechanisms of security and development are created, the return of these territories to Azerbaijan may be viewed as a concession from the Armenian side, provided, of course, that the corridor linking Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh is kept."

The Armenian president appealed to Azerbaijan last week to sign a non-aggression pact which he hopes would prepare the ground for continued talks about the future of the Karabakh region. Nagorno-Karabakh is an enclave in Azerbaijan that has been occupied by Armenian forces since the end of a six-year conflict that left about 30,000 people dead and displaced 1 million prior to a 1994 truce.

The territory's unilateral independence is not recognized by the international community. The presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan have been negotiating on the issue under the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, but little progress has been made so far.

Gül: Ball in US court for resolution of 'genocide' tension

19 March 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

President Abdullah Gül has dismissed further talks with the US administration on easing tensions over a congressional panel vote endorsing Armenian claims of genocide, saying the ball is in the US court now to work on ways to restore ties.

Gül, speaking to a group of journalists aboard a plane en route from Cameroon to Turkey late on Wednesday, said he had already discussed the matter with US President Barack Obama, referring to a phone conversation they had right before the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs voted on a resolution on March 4. "We spoke once already, and I won't speak once again. We have already said what we have to say and done what we have to do. The rest is up to them," Gül said. Turkey recalled its ambassador in Washington and canceled senior-level contacts with the US following the vote by the US House committee. Ankara resents the US administration for not doing enough to block the vote -- apparently out of a belief that this could pressure Ankara to ratify two protocols pending in Parliament to normalize ties with Armenia -- and wants a clear and solid message that it is opposed to such congressional moves to judge history.

Turkey rejects Armenian claims of genocide at the hands of the Ottoman Empire and says Turks and Armenians were both killed as Armenians revolted against the Ottoman Empire in collaboration with the Russian army for an Armenian state in eastern Anatolia.

But only a week after the US vote, the Swedish Parliament endorsed a similar resolution with a 131-130 vote, prompting Turkey to withdraw its ambassador in Sweden and cancel a scheduled visit by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Erdoğan raised the stakes on Tuesday, when he said in an interview with the BBC that Turkey could deport some 100,000 undocumented Armenian immigrants.

Gül said Erdoğan's remarks were "interpreted differently" and added that he believed that the prime minister meant to underline that there was no hostility toward Armenians.

"The prime minister meant to underline a positive thing that Turkey does," he said. "These people are working in Turkey and help their families [in Armenia]. I believe he said those things to show that we have no feeling of enmity toward them, that we do not discriminate against them."

"Humanitarian and political issues should be separated from each other," Gül said, and underlined that Erdoğan was very sensitive about humanitarian issues. "Sometimes remarks could be understood differently," Gül added. The president also questioned the number of Armenian illegal immigrants, saying it is not 100,000. He said earlier that there were about 40,000 Armenians illegally residing in Turkey. Turkish-Armenian groups say the number is much lower, about 10,000-12,000.

Erdoğan was criticized by rights groups, which say his remarks amount to using Armenians illegally residing in Turkey as a political bargaining chip, stating that they could be expelled when things go wrong in the political sphere. Undocumented Armenian immigrants, mostly women from the impoverished countryside, work as cleaning ladies and in other low-skilled jobs in İstanbul, where many settled after an earthquake in their homeland in 1988.

'EU will change stance on Turkey'

Gül also responded to questions on Turkey's bid to join the European Union and dismissed suggestions that there was a slowdown in the process. Gül said the process was in a "routine" phase, where EU experts inspect the compatibility of Turkish laws with EU standards and that technical accession negotiations are being opened on policy chapters one by one. He said the main challenge was the improvement of standards in Turkey. "Once we catch up with EU standards, it will only take five minutes to open and close the negotiating chapters," he said, emphasizing that once Turkey meets the EU's political and economic standards, those skeptical of Turkey's accession will automatically change their mind. "It is also true that we are taking the accession process slowly in order not to scare the EU," he added.

He also dismissed suggestions that Turkey's ambitious democratic initiative was put on hold and said reforms have already improved standards in Turkey.

He also warned Israel, saying that even its closest ally, the United States, is disturbed these days by Israeli policies. "If even the US is disturbed, one needs to think about it," he said.

Genocide' tension leads to delay of annual ATC meeting

22 March 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN ANKARA

The American-Turkish Council (ATC) and the Turkish-American Business Council (TAİK), joint organizers of an annual conference on relations between the United States and Turkey have

announced that the 29th Annual Conference on US-Turkish Relations, scheduled for April 11-14 in Washington, D.C., will not be held as scheduled.

This change is required because of the impossibility of holding the conference as planned,” the ATC said in a press release on Friday, recalling that earlier this month a US House committee approved a non-binding resolution calling on US President Barack Obama to recognize the World War I killings of Anatolian Armenians as genocide.

While expressing regret about the postponement, the ATC and TAİK stressed their confidence in the durability of a strong trade and investment relationship between Turkey and the US and said they have agreed to reschedule the annual conference at a later date. The ATC and TAİK said they believed that this decision will lead to a stronger and more effective conference.

“The ATC and a number of our corporate members had worked very hard on Capitol Hill to defeat this resolution in the committee, but with the advice that no ministers, no military officers and few senior-level bureaucrats and business leaders from Turkey would attend the April conference, we had to act. To protect the integrity of the conference and to minimize the ATC’s financial losses, the executive committee directed the cancellation of the event,” James Holmes, a retired US ambassador and the president and chief executive officer of the ATC, said in a separate statement.

Last week, the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association (TÜSİAD) called off a trip to the US scheduled for March 16-17, arguing that it would be tainted by the current tension between Ankara and Washington.

Foreign Trade Minister Zafer Çağlayan had already announced that he had postponed a planned trip to the US.

Sarksyan: Turkey has no moral right to blame us for anything

22 March 2010, Monday

TODAY’S ZAMAN ANKARA

Armenian President Serzh Sarksyan has suggested that Turkey intended to use foreign legislative bodies’ resolutions on the killing of Anatolian Armenians as a “pretext” for stalling the ongoing normalization process between Ankara and Yerevan.

During an official visit to Paris last week, Sarksyan was asked in an interview with Euronews whether he believed that there was any particular reason for the timing of a US House committee’s recognition earlier this month of the killing of Anatolian Armenians during World War I as genocide as it came amid reconciliation efforts between Armenia and Turkey.

“We are currently in discussions with Turkey on the issue of re-establishing our relations. This should be done without any preconditions, and I think that Turkey has no moral right to blame us about anything or to impose any conditions. Re-establishing relations without preconditions means we are not under any obligations to stay away from any of the possible topics,” Sarksyan responded in the interview, the transcript of which is on the Web site of Public Radio of Armenia.

“Let’s say that, by some miracle, the Turkish Parliament ratifies the protocols, the Armenian Parliament does the same, we re-establish our relations and a third country, which is against us re-establishing our relations, on purpose takes up the genocide issue. Will the Turks, therefore, use this as a pretext and break off relations?” Sarksyan added.

ATAA sends letter to US President Obama regarding Armenian resolution

23 March 2010, Tuesday

todays zaman

Assembly of Turkish-American Associations (ATAA) has sent a letter to United States President Barack Obama requesting that Obama make a public statement to that a resolution supporting Armenian allegations regarding the incidents of 1915 is not brought to the floor of the General Assembly of the House of Representatives.

As a leading voice of over a half million proud Americans of Turkish heritage and many more Americans who support the US-Turkish model partnership, the Assembly of Turkish-American Associations (ATAA) urges that you continue to discourage a Congressional vote on House Resolution 252, which narrowly passed the House Foreign Affairs Committee by a vote of 23-22 on March 4, 2010," the ATAA said.

"That H.Res. 252 so narrowly passed out of HFAC indicates that Congress remains deeply divided on this measure and its underpinnings. By asking Chairman Berman not to promote the resolution, you have signaled your understanding that the resolution is misguided and incriminates a key ally, Turkey, and a key heritage community, the Turkish Americans. As has been demonstrated by the recall of the Turkish Ambassador, the mere commencement of a consideration of this matter by the US legislature is likely to severely disrupt US-Turkish relations, as well as derail the ratification of the Armenia-Turkey Protocols in which you have so wisely invested," the ATAA underlined.

"The United States and Turkey enjoy a model partnership, whose pillars include the fight against global terrorism, efforts for peace and stability in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and the broader Balkans and Middle East, and democratic and economic development from Africa to Central Asia. The United States and Turkey are also important trade partners, as US exports to Turkey are more than 10 billion USD and create thousands of American jobs," the ATAA emphasized.

"The United States must speak with one voice on Turkish-Armenian reconciliation. We can not simultaneously encourage ratification of the Protocols while prejudicing the outcomes of one of their elements - the envisaged joint historical commission. Rather, your assessment offered to the Turkish Parliament on April 6, 2009 ought to remain the basis for US policy on this matter: The best way forward for the Turkish and Armenian people is a process that works through the past in a way that is honest, open and constructive," the ATAA indicated.

"The Turkish people will now be interested to see whether your Administration will restore America's credibility as a neutral party and supporter of the Protocols, or permit further deterioration by Congress action or in an April 24 statement," the ATAA underlined.

"The ATAA respectfully submits that you please:

1. Make a public statement that H.Res. 252 should not be submitted to a floor vote;
2. Openly and unambiguously support the delicate rapprochement that is currently underway between Turkey and Armenia, while standing firmly against any action by other parts of the United States government that might pose an obstacle.

The ATAA further submits respectfully that any statement or proclamation you may offer on April 24, continue United States policy not to characterize the Armenian case in terms of a crime, as well as initiate a new United States policy to remember and honor the more than one million Ottoman Muslims who perished in eastern Anatolia during the Armenian Revolt (1880-1919) under identical conditions of war that affected Ottoman Armenians," the ATAA stressed.

TURKEY'S POSITION ON ARMENIAN ALLEGATIONS

Turkey has long been facing a systematic campaign of defamation carried out by Armenian lobbying groups. The Armenian diaspora has lately increased its organized activities throughout the world for the recognition of their unfounded allegations in regard to the events of 1915 as "genocide" by national and local parliaments.

Armenian groups living in various countries try to get the publication of many books on their allegations concerning the events of 1915 and articles written by authors close to Armenian views in well-known magazines and newspapers. Armenian organizations also orchestrate many meetings, conferences and symposia in order to garner support and to give them as much publicity as possible. Armenian groups make sure that researchers and authors close to the Armenian views take part in these meetings so that the issue always remains on the agenda. Armenian circles, similarly, sponsor the making of documentary films that advocate Armenian claims. They also encourage the broadcasting of these films in many television channels. Public opinion especially in Western countries is affected by these films, books and articles published every year and their Parliaments are left under constant pressure to recognize the Armenian allegations as "undeniable historical truth". The activities of diaspora organizations are also supported by the Armenian state. It is known that Armenian diplomatic missions abroad carry out certain activities so that their allegations are recognized in national legislatures.

Until today the parliaments of Argentina, Belgium, France, Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, Canada, Lebanon, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, Uruguay, Greece, the Greek Cypriot Administration, Poland, Germany, Lithuania, Chile, Venezuela and the European Parliament passed either resolutions or issued statements. In addition, some local parliaments in the USA, Canada, Britain, Australia, Argentina and Switzerland passed similar resolutions.

Turkey is of the view that parliaments and other political institutions are not the appropriate fora to debate and pass judgments on disputed periods of history. Past events and controversial periods of history should be left to the historians for their dispassionate study and evaluation. In order to shed light on such a disputed historical issue, the Turkish Government has opened all its archives, including military records to all researchers. Furthermore, Turkey encourages historians, scholars and researchers to freely examine and discuss this historical issue in every platform. In order to have an objective and complete analysis of the Turkish-Armenian relations, the Armenian archives should also be opened and made available to the public and researchers. For reaching the truth, historians must have access to all related archives.

In this respect, in 2005, Turkey has officially proposed to the Government of Armenia the establishment of a joint commission of history composed of historians and other experts from both sides to study together the events of 1915 not only in the archives of Turkey and Armenia but also in the archives of all relevant third countries and to share their findings with the public. Unfortunately, Armenia has not responded positively to this initiative, yet. Turkey's proposal is still on the table.

If accepted by Armenia, Turkey's proposal for setting up a Joint Commission of History would also serve as a confidence-building measure paving the way for a dialogue towards normalization of relations between the two countries.

Turkey and Armenia signed protocols in 2009 to normalize relations.

Dozens of Turkish diplomats and family members as well as Turkish citizens have either been assassinated or wounded in attacks perpetrated by Armenian terrorists during the 1970s and 1980s.

DECLARATION BY TURKISH PARLIAMENT

It is the belief of the Turkish Parliament, that both Turkey's and Armenia's interests lie in reconciling Turkish and Armenian nations who have lived for centuries on the same territory in mutual tolerance and peace, in setting them free from being hostage to deep prejudices emanating from the war years, and in creating an environment which will enable them to share a common future based on tolerance, friendship and cooperation.

To this end, the Governing and the Main Opposition Parties have made a proposal which aims to shed light on historical facts through scientific research and to free history from being a burden for these two nations. This proposal envisages the establishment of a joint commission composed of historians from Turkey and Armenia, to open without any restriction their national archives, to disclose the findings of their research, which will also cover the archives of related countries, to the international public and determination between two countries the establishment and working methods of the said commission.

The Turkish Parliament approves and fully supports this historical proposal.

The cooperation of the Government of Armenia is essential for implementing this initiative. In this respect, if Turkey and Armenia can not look at history from a common perspective, the legacy that both parties would leave to their children and future generations will be nothing but feelings of prejudice, animosity and revenge.

Wisdom and logic command Turkey and Armenia not to be afraid of breaking the taboos by working jointly, and to face their history by uncovering all aspects of the human calamity they together experienced. This is the way to prevent the past from casting a shadow over our present and future.

The Turkish Parliament underlines the fact that this proposal by the Republic of Turkey should be considered, in essence, as a peace initiative. If Armenia wishes to establish good neighborly relations with Turkey and develop a basis for cooperation, it should not hesitate to accept Turkey's proposal for a joint evaluation of history.

The Turkish Parliament would also like to emphasize that all states and statesmen who wish to contribute to world peace and stability should leave aside domestic political considerations and look positively at Turkey's proposal based on reconciliation and commonsense. In this respect, those states which sincerely want the normalization of Turkish–Armenian relations and desire the establishment of peace and stability in the Caucasus, are expected to support this initiative, and, to refrain, in particular, from activities that can weaken it.

On this connection, the responsibility primarily falls upon the countries which took decisions regarding the Armenian allegations in their Parliaments. If these countries attach importance, as they claim, to the improvement of the relations between Turkey and Armenia, they should demonstrate their good will and support our proposal to set-up a joint commission of history between the two countries.

The Turkish Parliament considers the adoption, for political purposes, of decisions by foreign Parliaments regarding certain pages of Ottoman Armenians history which are still subject to discussion among world historians and to pass judgment, through legislation, on the veracity of a specific version of a still disputed historical issue, as inappropriate, pointless, arbitrary and unjust acts and condemns them.

The Turkish Parliament stresses that those who think it is possible to impose on Turkey to rebuild its history on one-sided and misleading assessment of propaganda material through a campaign of intense international pressure and those who make their calculations on this presumption are totally mistaken, and declares that this, under no circumstances, will ever happen.

The above mentioned declaration by the Turkish Parliament was originally made on April 13, 2005.

Turkey may apply international law against Armenia bills

Wednesday, 24 March 2010 15:51

WORLD BULLETIN

Turkey considers resorting to international law as an option to halt Armenia bills.

A Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman on Wednesday said Turkey considered resorting to international law as an option in its efforts to head off foreign parliaments from affirming Armenian allegations on the incidents of 1915 in the Ottoman Empire.

"We are evaluating all options and appealing to international law is one of them," Burak Ozugergin told reporters at a weekly press briefing when responding to a question.

Swedish parliament approved earlier this month a resolution that confirmed Armenian allegations just a week after a U.S. House foreign affairs panel adopted a similar resolution.

Ozugergin said such resolutions "did harm" to Turkey's relations with countries which approved them as well as with Armenia.

Somali pirates hijack Turkish-owned cargo ship

Tuesday, March 23, 2010

BRUSSELS - Daily News with wires

Suspected Somali pirates seized a Turkish-owned cargo ship in the Indian Ocean on Tuesday, well outside a patrolled zone, according to the European Union's anti-piracy naval force announced.

The Maltese-flagged Frigia, with a mainly Turkish crew of 21, was heading from Port Said in Egypt to Thailand when it was hijacked in the early morning.

"The action took place some 1,000 nautical miles east of the north coast of Somalia, i.e. 400 nautical miles outside of the normal EU naval force operating area," said EU's NAVFOR Spokesman Commander John Harbour by phone.

"She has turned around and is clearly heading toward one of the Somali pirates' strongholds," Harbour said.

The crew comprised 19 Turks and two Ukrainians, he said. Reports said the boat was loaded with fertilizer and was now heading toward the southern Somalian port of Eyl. An official from the Izmir-based owner of Frigia, Kayra Maritime, said they had no contact with the ship since early morning.

"All security measures were taken. A ship was hijacked in such open waters for the first time," Ayhan Ugurlubay told Anatolia news agency, adding that they also informed the relatives of crewmembers.

Huge pirate activity

In the past few weeks, NAVFOR, NATO and the U.S.-led combined task force have disrupted 17 pirate attacks. "By disrupting such a large amount of pirate activity, the pirates have again had to move their operations well away from the Somali coast to achieve success," said Harbour.

Tuesday's attack took place closer to the Indian sub-continent than Africa.

Somali pirates have become a chronic hazard for shipping in the region. They hijack vessels exclusively for ransom payments, which are regularly made.

Turkish cargo ships have been hijacked in the past and NATO-member Turkey's warships patrol the Gulf of Aden as part of an international mission to try to prevent piracy, which has surged off the Somali coast in recent years.

The Turkish ship Yasa Neslihan was hijacked in October 2007 with a crew of 20 people. The ship, carrying iron ore from Canada to China, released in January. Andrew Mwangura, East Africa's coordinator of the Seafarers Assistance Program, said he was not sure whether ransom was paid.

Also in 2008, Karagöl, owned by the Istanbul-based Turkish shipping company, YDC Maritime, was hijacked off the coast of Yemen with 14 crewmembers aboard. The ship, which was reported to be carrying 4,500 tons of unspecified chemicals, was subsequently released in January 2009.

Last year, another the Turkish-owned cargo ship, MV Horizon-1, carrying dry sulfur from Saudi Arabia to Jordan was hijacked with its 23-member crew including a female third officer. In October, the vessel was released with its crew.

Islamic scholars to rethink jihad in Turkey's Mardin

Monday, March 22, 2010

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

A radical "fatwa," or religious opinion, decreed by a scholar in Mardin seven centuries ago will be questioned next weekend in the same city by an international team of top Islamic scholars. More than 20 authoritative clerics from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and other predominantly Muslim countries will discuss why "jihad," or holy war, should be understood in a more peaceful perspective.

The story goes back to the 13th Century, when much of the Muslim Middle East was occupied by Mongols. The latter destroyed many Muslim cities and massacred whole populations, but over time, some of the ruling Mongols converted to Islam. Yet they continued to implement their pre-Islamic "yasa," or law, rather than the Shariah devised by Islamic scholars. It was Ibn Taymiyyah of Harran, a scholar from the strict Hanbali school, who condemned this "half Islam" and renounced the Mongols as hypocrites rather than real Muslims. He also argued it was a religious obligation for "real Muslims" to wage jihad on these "apostates."

In the modern age, radical Islamist groups such as the Takfir wal-Hijra (Excommunication and Exodus) of Egypt have referred to this fatwa by Ibn Taymiyyah in order to denounce and attack Muslims who disagree with their interpretation of the Shariah. Terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda have also used the same source of justification.

"This justification for violence, known as the Mardin fatwa, has become a tool for radical terrorist groups," said Aftab Malik, head of an Islamic Institute in Britain and one of the organizers of next weekend's meeting. "That's why we have chosen Mardin." The Artuklu University of Mardin, which will host the event, made the purpose even clearer by naming the event: "Mardin, the Land of Peace."

An influential name who has helped organize the event is Ibrahim Kalın. Kalın replaced Turkey's current foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, last year as the top advisor to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. "This is an important opportunity to show the world that Islam is in fact a religion of peace and tolerance," Kalın said.

NATO helicopter with Turkish soldiers on board crashes in Afghanistan

Tuesday, March 23, 2010

KABUL - From wire dispatches

hurriyat

A helicopter operated by Turkish forces made a "hard landing" in central Afghanistan on Tuesday, injuring at least four people. A provincial spokesman told Agence France-Presse news agency that one of the Turkish soldiers on board was killed and three others injured but NATO denied there were any deaths.

The General Staff also confirmed four people were wounded in a crash at a Turkish-run base in Midan Shar, the capital of Wardak province. The helicopter experienced technical problems as it tried to land at the base, said the provincial deputy police chief, Mirzak Khan. It hit a hill as it was coming down and rolled over, he added.

"There are no fatalities," said Lt. Col. Todd Vician, spokesman for NATO's International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF.

The crash happened as two helicopters were landing at the base, Shahid said, adding that both belonged to NATO member Turkey. One crashed into a hillside near the base, known as a provincial reconstruction team, while the other landed safely, he said.

A witness said the chopper's rotor blades had apparently clipped the side of the hill, after which it began to spin out of control while hovering just above the ground.

"We were watching the two helicopters as they were both hovering to land, one did land and the other all of a sudden hit the hills nearby, and smoke started coming out of the back and the blades started falling apart and flying everywhere," said the witness, Mohammad Zarif. "We could see that one soldier was lying on the ground and three others were inside," he added.

Turkey has 1,835 troops in Afghanistan, according to NATO, and controls the provincial reconstruction team in Wardak, which has been a relative hotspot for insurgent activity.

Provincial reconstruction teams are playing a pivotal role in the new counter-insurgency strategy for speeding an end to the Afghan war, coordinating military and civilian efforts.

The insurgency has been intensifying over the past year, as the Taliban has spread its footprint to gain a permanent presence in up to 80 percent of the country, according to experts. NATO and the United States are boosting troops figures to 150,000 in coming months, as counter-insurgency efforts peak.

South Korean diplomat offers assistance to quake victims

19 March 2010, Friday

TODAY'S ZAMAN ANKARA

Along with a letter expressing his sorrow and best wishes for recovery in the aftermath of a deadly earthquake in Elazığ, South Korean Ambassador to Turkey Bae Jae-Hyun has sent a check to Elazığ Governor Muammer Erol, making a charitable donation to victims of the quake. Minister Counselor and Consul General of South Korea Heechul Lee handed the check to Erol at the latter's office on Wednesday. "We regretfully learned that an earthquake in the Kovancilar and Karakoçan districts of Elazığ occurred on March 8, 2010. I regret greatly the loss, would like to express my sorrow, wish patience and a speedy recovery for the families and make a modest contribution to those injured in the earthquake on behalf of the People of the Republic of Korea.

I hope for continued success in the development of Elazığ and for the well-being of the people in Elazığ,” Ambassador Bae said in the letter.

The magnitude 6.0 earthquake killed 41 people and left hundreds homeless, with many residents of villages in Elazığ province currently living in tents.

Turkish FM: "Turkey supports efforts for solution of Darfur problem"

21 March 2010, Sunday

today's zaman

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said on Sunday that Turkey supported the efforts of all international organizations to solve Darfur problem.

Davutoğlu attended International Donors Conference for Darfur which was held by Organization of the Islamic Conference and co-chaired by Turkey and Egypt.

Representatives and various non-governmental organizations from over 80 countries as well as officials from Turkish Red Crescent and Red Cross are participating in the conference in Cairo. Davutoğlu, speaking in the opening of the conference, said that the situation in Darfur affected the whole region negatively. He added that the problems in Sudan could not be solved only by one country.

Davutoğlu wanted international community to cooperate and exert efforts to solve the issue.

He noted that Sudan was an important country which was a bridge between races, cultures and religions in Africa. He added that instability in this country would affect the whole continent.

Davutoğlu said that the stability of Sudan would contribute to development of peace, harmony and prosperity in the region.

Turkish state-run TRT and Jordanian JTV sign protocol

21 March 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish state-run TRT channel and Jordanian JTV signed a cooperation protocol on Sunday.

TRT Director General İbrahim Şahin and JTV Director General Saleh Qallab signed the protocol in a ceremony which was also participated by Jordan's Media Affairs and Communication Minister Nabil al-Sharif and Turkish State Minister and Deputy Premier Bülent Arınç.

Arınç said that this cooperation would help Turkish and Jordanian people to learn each other better.

Noting that TRT and JTV would cooperate in technical issues and programs, Arınç said that the channels would shoot documentary films, and introduce the two countries to each other.

Turkey pledges \$75 mln at Darfur donor meeting

22 March 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

A one-day development and reconstruction conference for Sudan's Darfur region that was held in Cairo on Sunday and co-chaired by Egypt and Turkey has raised \$2 billion for projects including cement plants, roads and villages for displaced people.

Turkey pledged \$60-75 million through 2015 for water, education and agricultural projects, while Algeria pledged \$10 million with a focus on health and job training. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu represented Turkey at the meeting.

Investment in infrastructure, health, education and agriculture is vital to ending conflict in Sudan's Darfur region and nurturing the relative peace from recent cease-fire deals, Egypt said. "Since the beginning of the crisis in Darfur, the basic issue has been one of development, which has taken on political, tribal and social dimensions," Egypt's Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit said in an opening statement. "This is what makes us certain the core solution to the Darfur crisis must focus on increasing rates of development and improving the standard of living for each citizen in Darfur," he added.

The donor conference was backed by the 57-member Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) but also included representatives from China, the United States, Russia, Britain, France and others.

Sudan has been pushing to resolve the conflict in its western Darfur region before elections next month and has signed cease-fire deals with two rebel groups since February.

Some fighting has continued, however, and talks toward a final peace pact with the main rebel group, the Justice and Equality Movement, have been faltering.

Donors have convened several conferences for Sudan, stricken by multiple conflicts over the years, but complicated aid structures have held up some spending and not all pledges have fully materialized.

Turkey says Israeli planes allowed to overfly 'on condition'

22 March 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN WITH WIRES ANKARA

The Turkish Air Forces Command has confirmed that two Israeli Gulfstream fighter jets which flew over Turkey last Wednesday had been given official permission to do so after fulfilling certain conditions.

In an announcement posted on its Web site on Saturday, the Air Forces Command referenced earlier news reports that two Israeli Air Force Gulfstream V-type jets, equipped with sophisticated intelligence equipment, flew over Hungary the same day a Syrian man was gunned down inside his luxury vehicle in Budapest.

In a possible sequel to an assassination in Dubai, Israeli spy planes flew uninvited and unannounced over Budapest, the same day a Syrian man was shot to death in his car there, Hungarian media reported Thursday.

The two Israeli jets flew more than 1,300 miles over Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania on Wednesday before flying over eastern Budapest and then disappearing, the reports said. With a letter from the Turkish Foreign Ministry dated March 4, the Turkish Air Forces had given the two Israeli warplanes permission to transit Turkish airspace with a route from Nevatim, Israel, through Budapest and Varna, and back to Nevatim, the announcement said.

"With the permission of the General Staff, flight permission is given to the said planes on condition of obeying all rules stated in the Turkey Aeronautical Information Publication [AIP]; of using air corridors in Turkish airspace; of not refueling midair; and of not being equipped with electronic apparatuses intended for photography, exploration and intelligence," the statement said.

Earlier on Saturday, the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry has also announced that the two “unarmed” Israeli warplanes had been allowed access to their airspace. The ministry said the planes didn’t land on Bulgarian soil and that the use of air corridors is an extremely routine procedure, the Anatolia news agency reported.

Another statement came from the Romanian Defense Ministry on Saturday, which noted that the Israeli jets that flew over Romania on Wednesday had all the required authorizations.

As of Friday, Hungarian officials said that the two planes, which made a low-level pass over Budapest, had nothing to do with the death of a Syrian man in the Hungarian capital on the same day.

However, a breakdown in internal communications meant the Hungarian Defense Ministry was not informed about the flight, and when the planes were sighted and reported in a Hungarian daily, Prime Minister Gordon Bajnai ordered an investigation.

Israeli airline to resume direct flights to Turkey

23 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAY’S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Israeli airline El Al’s long-suspended flights between Israel and Turkey will soon resume now that El Al and Turkey’s Atlasjet have clinched a deal that will include daily flights between İstanbul to Tel Aviv starting in April, Israeli media outlets reported on Sunday.

The signing ceremony was held at El Al headquarters in Tel Aviv. El Al CEO Eliezer Shkedi and Atlasjet CEO Ali Murat Ersoy were both present. İnanç Özçakmak, Turkey’s tourism attaché to Israel, was also in attendance during the signing ceremony. “As Israel’s Turkish friends, we are excited about the cooperation, and we hope it will be an opening for the improvement of political ties between our two countries,” Ersoy said. The agreement includes code-sharing flights, meaning both airlines will be able to sell seats on each other’s flights.

Speaking after the signing of the document, which ends years of suspended flights between the two countries, Shkedi, a former commander in the Israel Air Force, said the agreement “is an important opportunity” for El Al. “We believe the cooperation between El Al and Atlasjet is an important bridge and contribution to the good relations between our countries and nations, and I hope we will go back to seeing this in the near future,” the El Al chief executive said.

Turkey urges Israel to comply intl law in Palestinian lands

Wednesday, 24 March 2010 15:47

WORLD BULLETIN

Ankara on Wednesday wanted Israel to abide by international law in Jerusalem and West Bank. Ankara on Wednesday wanted Israel to abide by international law in Jerusalem and West Bank. Speaking to reporters, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Burak Ozugergin commented on the recent situation in the Middle East, Israel's new settlements and Turkey's mediation between Syria and Israel.

Ozugergin said Turkey thought construction of 1600 houses which Israel planned was not right either with respect to timing or context.

"This may at least be defined as misfortune at a time when negotiations are underway to resume indirect peace talks between Israel and Palestine," Ozugergin said. He noted, "Turkey wants Israel to abide by international law in Jerusalem and West Bank. We always say even if they are

small, such kind of acts blur the big picture."

Ozugergerin said tension escalated in the Middle East recently and described the implementations in some places belonging to Islamic culture as "provocative practices". He said they should be halted.

Ozugergerin said the talks had reached to a stage when Turkey was mediating the talks, adding that interruption of the talks were because of the developments experienced in Gaza.

"Syrian party again and again expressed willingness to see Turkey as mediator. Although some signals also come from Israel, decision of the state is not clear," Ozugergerin added.

Ozugergerin reaffirmed Turkey's readiness to continue acting as mediator.

Turkey to decide on Iran gas investment in 2 weeks

Wednesday, 24 March 2010 11:46

WORLD BULLETIN

Washington is lobbying Turkey to support the threat of economic sanctions against Iran.

Turkey will decide within two weeks on whether to go ahead with investment in Iran to produce natural gas.

Energy Minister Taner Yildiz said late Tuesday the deal, with an estimated worth of \$5.5 billion, had political support in Ankara.

The decision to press ahead now rested with firms carrying out feasibility studies in the South Pars gas field, Yildiz told Reuters in an interview.

"We will decide within two weeks on our final decision on the investment in Iran," Yildiz said.

"This project has complete political support, but companies are carrying out the talks ... If the feasibility is not high we will not continue," he said.

A partner in the European Union-backed Nabucco pipeline project, Turkey supports the idea of using Iranian gas as throughput for the proposed pipeline, which aims to reduce Europe's dependence on Russian gas.

A net energy importer, Turkey is trying to secure more gas for itself and maximise its potential as a hub for cross-border pipeline projects linking Europe to suppliers in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Yildiz said Turkey planned to bid, along with Russian partner Gazprom and some U.S. firms, in future tenders to develop Iraqi oilfields.

Turkey was part of a Gazprom-led group that won rights last year to develop Iraq's Badrah oilfield.

The minister also said Turkey planned to finalise the privatisation of its natural gas grids this year.

Ankara has been pushing to speed up the pace of its privatisation programme, which slowed in 2009 due to poor market conditions.

Washington is lobbying Turkey to support the threat of economic sanctions against Iran.

Turkey demands more diplomacy over Iran

Wednesday, 24 March 2010 15:36

WORLD BULLETIN

The spokesman said there was need for diplomatic efforts, and defined diplomacy as a "game of patience".

Turkey on Wednesday said, diplomacy should be given more chance, rejecting calls from the United States to support more sanctions against Iran over Tehran's nuclear programme.

"There is still an opportunity ahead of us and we believe that this opportunity should be used effectively. Not less, but more diplomacy (is needed)," Turkey's Foreign Ministry spokesman Burak Ozugergin told a news conference.

Last week, Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon, the U.S. State Department's top diplomat for Europe, urged Turkey to support more sanctions against Iran, threatening Ankara could "face consequences" if it moves out of step with the international community.

Turkey, which has applied to join the European Union, is not the only country that demands more diplomacy over Iran, which says its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes.

China, a permanent, veto-wielding member of the Security Council, along with non-permanent member Brazil, have urged more time for diplomacy with Iran.

Ozugergin said, that Turkey thought Iran was approaching the issue with good will, and was working on the issue.

"The UN Security Council member states are discussing some new sanctions, however it is hard to say that the Council has a uniform view on the issue," Ozugergin said.

Ozugergin said Turkey's position on sanctions was obvious, and it was not only Turkey who thought "sanctions would not serve the desired goal".

The spokesman said there was need for diplomatic efforts, and defined diplomacy as a "game of patience".

"We think that Iran has good intentions on this issue and wants a solution. Otherwise, we would not be making such efforts. We inform our Western friends regularly about the impressions we get (from talks with Iran)," Ozugergin said.

He reiterated Ankara's opposition to any Middle Eastern country acquiring nuclear weapons and said Iran had the right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes like all other countries.

Ozugergin also said every one should wait for the result of tactics and strategic moves in such an important issue.

Turkey rebuffs US call to join Iran sanctions

24 March 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

NATO-member Turkey on Wednesday rebuffed calls from ally the United States to support more sanctions against Iran over Tehran's nuclear programme, saying diplomacy should be given more chance.

Turkey, a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, has been leery of a US-led push to back new sanctions on fellow Muslim nation Iran, which the West suspects is trying to develop atomic bombs.

"There is still an opportunity ahead of us and we believe that this opportunity should be used effectively. Not less, but more diplomacy (is needed)," Turkey's Foreign Ministry spokesman Burak Özügergin told a news conference.

Last week, Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon, the US State Department's top diplomat for Europe, urged Turkey to support more sanctions against Iran, saying Ankara could face consequences if it moves out of step with the international community.

Turkey, which has applied to join the European Union, is not the only country that insists on more diplomacy with Iran, which says its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes.

China, a permanent, veto-wielding member of the Security Council, along with non-permanent member Brazil, have urged more time for diplomacy with Iran.

Turkey has boosted ties with Iran and other Muslim neighbours since the AK Party first took office in 2002, and some commentators have expressed concern Ankara might be tilting away from its long-time Western allies.

Turkey has offered to use its access to the Iranian leadership to solve the nuclear dispute but frequent trips by Turkish officials to Tehran have failed to produce a breakthrough.

"We think that Iran has good intentions on this issue and wants a solution. Otherwise, we would not be making such efforts. We inform our Western friends regularly about the impressions we get (from talks with Iran)," Özügergin said.

He reiterated Ankara's opposition to any Middle Eastern country acquiring nuclear weapons and said Iran had the right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes like all other countries.

Turkey dismisses US call to join Iran sanctions

25 March 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey reiterated on Wednesday its reluctance to join the US-led push to further punish Iran for its controversial nuclear ambitions, saying diplomatic means should be pursued instead of imposing new sanctions.

It is not only Turkey, a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, who believes that sanctions "will not serve the desired goal," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Burak Özügergin told reporters on Wednesday at a regular press conference, when reminded of last week's remarks by a senior US official who said Turkey must show it is "on board" with the move toward new sanctions.

"Many would be disappointed if Turkey is an exception to an international consensus on dealing with Iran," Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Philip Gordon said last week. "There is still an opportunity ahead of us and we believe that this opportunity should be used effectively. Not less, but more diplomacy (is needed)," Özügergin said.

When asked whether an offer on the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) was still on the table according to Ankara, Özügergin said, "As long as you don't take something off the table, then it is on the table."

Russia, China, the UK, France, Germany and the US, collectively known as the P5+1, had offered to enrich Iranian uranium supplies to 20 percent for use in the TRR through the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The deal would have helped to allay international concerns that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons under the cover of its civilian program while providing the country with fuel for its nuclear reactors.

"We attach importance to the realization of this offer for ensuring progress along the process," Özügergin added.

Report: Bulgaria, Turkey to establish strategic cooperation council

22 March 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN ANKARA

Bulgaria and Turkey have agreed to establish a high-level strategic cooperation council similar to those Ankara has formed with Iraq and Syria, news reports said.

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's announcement came while speaking with a group of journalists late on Friday on board a plane en route from Plovdiv to Turkey as he wrapped up an official visit to Bulgaria. Turkey has also offered to establish similar mechanisms with Greece and Russia.

Meanwhile, in an interview with Bulgarian media, Davutoğlu once more disputed suggestions that he is a promoter of "Neo-Ottomanism." "As you probably know, the foreign policy of Turkey is based on the principle of 'zero problems' with its neighbors. To a great extent this policy of regional cooperation, peace and prosperity is pursued on the Balkan Peninsula and has been very fruitful, particularly when it comes to Bulgaria. Of course, the shared cultural values and common historical interests of the two countries are a catalyst in this process. The alliance of civilizations is another initiative of Turkey aimed at securing peace and wellbeing in the world. In accordance with the key principle of 'Peace in the Motherland, peace in the world' formulated by the great Turkish leader [Mustafa] Kemal Atatürk, the initiatives I mentioned are not aimed at achieving superiority either in the region or in the world. Our objectives are peace, cooperation and prosperity for all countries," he said.

Days after this visit, the Bulgarian parliament is expected to vote on a resolution recognizing the World War I-era killings of Anatolian Armenians as genocide, news reports said, noting that the vote was likely to take place this week.

Turkey's growing ties with neighbors increase cooperation on water

23 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey and its neighbors are taking advantage of their growing relations and are cooperating on many fronts regarding water, which used to be a constant source of trouble rather than peace. Since water resources often span geopolitical boundaries, sustainable use and protection of resources require international and regional cooperation.

Among the world's most well-known international rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris originate in Turkey and have a combined average annual water potential of about 87.7 billion cubic meters. They have the ability to meet the needs of Turkey, Syria and Iraq, but the water issue has been held hostage to politics rather than the technical aspects of water management.

"Turkey was not able to work together with its neighbors in the past because of other political disagreements," said İbrahim Kaya, an international law expert at the Ankara-based International Strategic Research Organization (USAK).

He added that when states have contested issues among them, it is also the share of water resources that is disputed.

One example in that regard is the idea to build a shared dam on the Asi (also known as the Orontes) River, which originates in Lebanon and flows through Turkey's Hatay province before spilling into the Mediterranean Sea. Political differences between the countries were holding them back from building a dam on the Asi River.

However, after Syria ousted outlawed Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, relations between the two countries began to normalize. Last year's preparations for the Fifth World Water Forum in İstanbul accelerated communication on the much-disputed water issue, not only between the two countries but also with Iraq.

Past periodic meetings of the Joint Technical Committee (JTC), held between 1982 and 1992 and then severed, were restarted and conducted both in Syria and Turkey in 2007 followed by a tripartite ministers meeting in 2008 in Syria.

“We want to use water to build peace. The joint technical committee meetings, which had been stalled for so long, have been restarted,” Turkish Environment Minister Veysel Eroğlu told Today’s Zaman last year on March 23 at the World Water Forum.

Turkey and Syria signed a memorandum of understanding in December of last year that they will build a shared dam on the Asi River, which has an annual water flow of 2.5 billion cubic meters. Eroğlu had said the dam would be called the “Asi Friendship Dam.”

“It’s a very important agreement because with that, Syria indirectly recognizes the Hatay province of Turkey,” Kaya said.

He also stated that Turkey’s Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP), which is a vast project that includes 22 large dams on the Euphrates and the Tigris, could be also expanded in the future to include Syria.

Turkey has signed agreements with Syria and Iraq in the past regarding how much water Turkey would release to these countries. However, Turkey releases more water than necessitated in these agreements especially because it has largely completed GAP.

Samir Salha, head of the public law department and the international law section at Kocaeli University, said the Middle East is the region where the problem is growing with increasing population and depleting resources, and on top of that the region is rife with unsolved disputes.

“It is true that Turkey has increased its cooperation with its neighbors, but there are also potential problems,” he said, pointing out political instability in Iraq.

“When Iraq becomes more politically stable, it will ask for new water policies from Turkey and Syria,” he said.

He stated that another area Turkey needs to be careful about is compliance with the European Union, which Turkey aspires to join.

The EU has a key piece of legislation on water, the Water Framework Directive, establishing a broad management approach based on river basin districts. EU countries are required to report their river basin management plans to the European Commission by March 22, 2010. These plans will detail concrete measures to achieve a “good chemical and ecological status” in 2015, as required by the directive.

The United Nations has said there are 263 transborder lakes and river basins on the planet, making up nearly one-half of the earth’s land and accounting for an estimated 60 percent of the world’s flowing fresh water.

Turkey wants visa exemption from Germany

Wednesday, 24 March 2010 15:57

WORLD BULLETIN

Ozugerin said Turkey expects Germany to keep following the principle of pacta sunt servanda. Ahead of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's two-day visit to Ankara, Turkey once again ruled out Germany's offer for a "privileged partnership" rather than full membership to EU.

Turkish Foreign Ministry Spokesman Burak Ozugerin said Wednesday that privileged partnership was simply not an option for Turkey.

Earlier this week, Merkel said she would offer Turkey alternatives to full EU membership during her visit to Turkey on March 29 and 30.

"I am of the opinion that we should rather aim for a privileged partnership, in other words a very close affiliation of Turkey to the European Union," German news agency DPA quoted Merkel as saying in an interview with Deutschlandfunk radio.

Turkey's stance is as clear as Merkel's, Ozugergin told a weekly press briefing, adding, "an option rather than full membership is unacceptable for Turkey."

Turkey is a candidate country for EU membership following the Helsinki European Council of December 1999. Accession negotiations started in October 2005 with the analytical examination of the EU legislation.

Ozugergin said Turkey expects Germany to keep following the principle of pacta sunt servanda. Asked whether or not Turkey would ask Germany to apply easy terms for visa requirements for Turkish citizens, Ozugergin said, "we do not expect easy terms, we want exemption."

Turkey Continues to Support Efforts to Establish Peace in Philippines

Wednesday, 24 March 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

ANKARA (A.A) - Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said on Tuesday that Turkey continued to support efforts to establish peace in the Philippines.

Davutoglu told a joint press conference with Filipino Foreign Minister Alberto Romulo, and said the international contact group, consisting of Turkey, Japan and Britain would continue to extend support for the peace talks between the Filipino government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

Underlining the significance of air transportation for the promotion of relations, Davutoglu said they agreed with Romulo in principle for launching of flights between Istanbul and Manila.

Davutoglu said they agreed to hold the Joint Economic Commission (JEC) meetings regularly, adding that the next meeting would take place in Manila in coming months.

Minister Davutoglu thanked the Filipino administration for their support to Turkey's observer member application to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, promising to support the observer member application of the Philippines to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

In his part, Romulo said Turkey was kind to except to be part of the international contact group. He said the JEC meeting to be held in Manila would help carry bilateral relations further.

Atatürk Airport to Have 50 Million Passenger Capacity

Wednesday, 24 March 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

Year 1971. Atatürk Airport was then named Yeşilköy Airport.

The airport, which was opened for international traffic in 1953, had just one runway. It was the 06-24 runway on the Florya-Ataköy route, which is currently closed due to maintenance. The number of passengers was 1.33 million, including 727,000 domestic, 392,000 international and 214,000 in-transit. And a master plan was being prepared.

A unit of the Ministry of Public Works was conducting the study. According to the predictions, Yeşilköy's annual number of passengers would reach 15 million within 15 years, by 1985. There was a plan to launch the 18-36 runway with a length of 3,000 meters to meet the increasing traffic.

With the growth, the aim was to extend the 06-24 runway toward Ataköy by 500 meters and reach 2,800 meters and construct a parallel runway to the 18-36. This way hourly plane capacity would climb to 87, according to 1971 values. Today, Atatürk Airport carries 30 million passengers annually.

According to the figures announced by the Airport Council International, ACI, Atatürk is among the four airports with a stable traffic increase. But the extension of the 06-24 runway comes 39 years later. The hourly traffic, which would reach 87, can reach only 60 with the use of the two runways simultaneously. Parallel runway cannot even enter the agenda due to unplanned settlement around and the fact that the master plan could not be implemented.

Orhan Birdal, managing director of the State Airports Authority, expressed new investments worth around 1 billion Turkish Liras in the Atatürk Airport.

Atatürk Airport has become the most important delivery point of the region also with the growth of Turkish Airlines in the recent years. However, the airport's infrastructure could not adapt to the rapid growth. Due to the closure of the 06-24 runway for works, the State Airports Authority restricted several flights including charter passenger cargo, business jet and helicopters, apart from tariff flights till July 1.

A nearly \$1 billion liras investment is taking place for the terminal's growth, runway extensions, plane parking and air traffic systems at the Atatürk Airport. With the completion of the SMART project, which will modernize the air traffic system, the capacity will be re-evaluated. The goal is to bring Atatürk Airport's annual passenger capacity to 50 million within the upcoming 10 years. The 06-24 runway, which dates back 1953 and has a length of 2,300 meters, is being extended by 250 meters toward the Ataköy route. The runway will shorten aircraft's braking distance.

Through rapid exit ways, planes will leave the runway without losing time after landing. The 06-24 runway is being raised to CAT3 standards. Planes will be able to take off and land easily even in case of 50-meter visibility. They will not be obliged to divert to other airports in foggy weather. The 18-36 right runway will also be raised to CAT3 standards.

Meanwhile, ground tracking radars have been installed on Atatürk, Ankara Esenboğa and Antalya. The planes will be monitored constantly.

The talks between the Transportation Ministry and the Ministry of Defense are in the last phase. With an agreement to be signed in the upcoming days, a blockhouse area will be taken. Aircraft parking lot problems will be solved at the airport.

According to a law draft proposed to the Parliament, all State Airports Authority staff will get additional compensation. The meltdown of salaries will be covered. Personal rights will be arranged again.

Turkish Helicopter Crashes in Afghanistan: 2 Injured

Tuesday, 23 March 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

ISLAMABAD (A.A) - A helicopter crashed in south-west Afghanistan on Tuesday injuring two individuals.

Sources told the AA that a Turkish helicopter, one of three serving as part of the ISAF's Kabul Regional Command, crashed due to bad weather conditions in Vardak province.

Two Turkish troops in the helicopter were rushed to a nearby hospital.

ECONOMIC NEWS

\$50 mln to be spent for Turkey's promotion in Russia

19 March 2010, Friday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Culture and Tourism Minister Ertuğrul Günay has said that a total of \$50 million will be spent by the public and private sectors to promote Turkey in Russia, with an expectation of raising the number of Russian tourists to Turkey to 3 million this year.

Günay, who was in Moscow to attend the International Travel and Tourism Exhibition (MITT), noted that the ministry had spent more than \$10 million on promoting the country in Russia last year despite the global financial crisis. This year the ministry has allocated \$8 million, but this figure is again expected to exceed \$10 million through to the end of the year, he said. "The private sector's spending on promotion will be some four to five times this figure. So jointly, the private and public sectors will conduct a promotion campaign worth some \$50 million in Russia this year." The number of tourists coming from Russia to Turkey is also expected to be around 3 million, he stated.

Turkish health tourism in need of incentives

Monday, March 22, 2010

ISTANBUL - Referans

HURRIYAT

A recent report presented to Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek by the Foreign Economic Relations Board, or DEİK, says Turkey has a great potential to grow in the health care tourism sector. To actualize that, however, the industry is in need of incentives from the government, mainly concerning a Value Added Tax reduction

If the necessary Value Added Tax, or VAT, incentive is passed for Turkey's health tourism, then the country could begin earning \$8 billion from the industry beginning in 2015, according to a report released by the Foreign Economic Relations Board, or DEİK.

Turkey's tourism industry, which is not just about the sea, beaches and sun anymore, has started to compete with Far East, said the report.

Based on DEİK's health report, Turkey, India, Israel and Singapore will start leading the global health tourism market eventually by offering affordable prices in health care services. Turkey currently lures in about 30,000 to 40,000 international patients and slowly but surely is eliminating its competitors. If the industry is offered a VAT reduction, then starting in 2015, some 1 million patients could be lured into the country, bringing in an income of \$8 billion.

According to the report, India, Turkey, Thailand, Singapore and Taiwan lead the current global health tourism industry. The cheapest country to provide health services depends on the illness. According to the report, the most expensive country is the United States. In the U.S. a by-pass surgery costs about \$129,000. The same surgery costs about \$11,000 to \$15,000 in Turkey. The country that attaches the lowest price tag to the aforementioned surgery is India with \$8,666.

Liposuction costs about \$3,333 in Turkey while the same surgery costs only \$1,200 in Thailand, \$2,500 in India and \$3,000 in Singapore.

Surgery with the gamma knife, a device used to treat brain tumors with a high dose of radiation therapy and the most accepted and widely used radiosurgery treatment, costs \$8,676 in Turkey.

The price tag for gamma knife treatment is \$40,000 in the U.S. while it costs \$25,000 in the United Kingdom and \$20,000 in Germany. Spine surgery costs \$7,125 in Turkey while it costs \$12,000 in India, \$9,000 in Singapore, \$7,000 in Thailand and \$5,900 in Taiwan.

The report was presented to Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek by DEİK and highlighted the importance of providing incentives for the industry in order to help Turkey grab a valuable spot in the international health tourism market. Healthcare services help lure in an influx of foreign currency to the country. Therefore, tax returns should be distributed for the purchase of tools used within the industry as well as for all health services, according to the report. If health tourism is exempt from taxes, that would help eliminate short term losses, and in the long run it would help the country gain.

There is a revival in health tourism activities in Turkey's southeastern cities, according to Dr. Azmi Ofluoğlu, board chairman of the Universal Hospitals Group. Wealthy Middle Easterners, who might face trouble getting visas for Western countries, began choosing Turkey as a health care services destination, he said. Investors need to look at the action in the southeast and figure out ways to benefit from the situation, Ofluoğlu added.

World Bank lends \$1.3 billion to Turkey

Wednesday, March 24, 2010

ANKARA – Hürriyet Daily News

The World Bank is set to support Turkey's program for responding to the financial crisis and continued reforms aimed at medium-term growth by granting a new loan.

The World Bank Board of Executive Directors approved Tuesday a Restoring Equitable Growth and Employment Program Development Policy Loan, or REGE-DPL, for Turkey worth 931 million euros (\$1.3 billion).

The REGE-DPL is a variable-spread euro-denominated loan, with a final maturity of 19.5 years, including a grace period of 16 years.

"We are pleased to support the government's policies and program to promote equitable growth and employment as Turkey emerges from the impact of the global financial crisis and returns to renewed growth this year," said Ulrich Zachau, country director of the World Bank for Turkey.

"We welcome the government's sound medium-term program and fiscal plan, the continued implementation of Turkey's path-breaking health and social security reform, and the strengthening of programs to improve access to education and job training and services, he said.

"We look forward to continuing our partnership with Turkey to improve the lives of the Turkish people," Zachau said.

Alcatel-Lucent opens research center in Istanbul

Wednesday, March 24, 2010

ISTANBUL – Hürriyet Daily News

Paris-based telecommunications company Alcatel-Lucent has opened a new research and development center in Istanbul.

Approved by Turkey's Ministry of Industry and Trade and supported by the Investment Support and Promotion Agency of Turkey, Alcatel-Lucent's new research lab will help the company boost its technology exports, according to a joint statement released Monday by Alcatel-Lucent and the agency.

Turkey has a great potential in terms of technical know-how and a qualified workforce, said Luis Martinez-Amago, president of Alcatel-Lucent's activities in the Commonwealth of Independent States and Central and Southern Europe, in reference to projects Turkish engineers take part in worldwide.

“With the opening of the 61st R&D center certified by Turkey’s Ministry of Industry and Trade, Alcatel-Lucent is more than ever ready to take advantage of opportunities offered by Turkey in terms of advanced technology and engineering resources,” said Martinez-Amago.

“We have established an active operating facility, consistent with Turkish law, within our structure. Through this center, we are aiming to increase Turkey’s contributions to Alcatel-Lucent’s global success,” he said.

The R&D center, which has been launched following a project work phase of three months, will initially employ 62 engineers. However, the figure is expected to be nearly 100 within a year.

The center will play a substantial role in the development and testing of some of Alcatel-Lucent’s innovative product offerings for service providers, such as small cells, also known as femto cells, IMS (a IP Multimedia Subsystem), Pre/Post-Paid Mobile Payment Development, touchatag products and services and Smart Metering solutions.

“The Alcatel-Lucent R&D center illustrates the dynamism of Turkey that attracts more and more overseas businesses. We are delighted that, once again, the Investment Support and Promotion Agency has helped pave the way for strategic and high value-added investments and has offered its knowledge and experience to optimize Alcatel-Lucent’s business,” said Alpaslan Korkmaz, president of the agency.

“We are carefully looking to multiply the coordination with several ministries like industry and trade, transportation and finance, to fine-tune the support schemes for technology and engineering centers, according to potential investors’ needs,” he said.

German fair company enters Turkey

Wednesday, March 24, 2010

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

Germany’s Messe Munchen International, or MMI, one of the world's leading organizers of trade fairs, announced Wednesday it will operate in Turkey. The company aims to accelerate its fair activities in the country with a new Turkish representative, Agora Tourism.

MMI also aims to open to the world through Turkey and Turkish firms, said Klaus Dittrich, managing director of the company.

“Our representative in Turkey will be Agora Tourism. With this representative we aim to accelerate our activities in Turkey. However, we also aim to expand our activities with both long or middle term partnerships and new fair projects,” he added.

Noting that MMI aims to make Turkey a fair hub of the region, he said: “We aim to invest in the fair sector of Turkey in order to evaluate its high potential in the business.”

“We are currently looking for new partnership opportunities in Turkey. We will provide opportunities for Turkish firms to present their products to the world market.”

Giving information on the current partnership projects of MMI, Dittrich said the company joined forces with the Building Information Center, or YEM and BAU Messe, an international trade fair for architecture, materials and systems. As a result of the collaboration a new information center, Turkey Built Information Center, was set up, he said.

MMI also signed a partnership agreement with Ekofair. “Ekofair will organize a fair in Istanbul titled “Logitrans,” which focuses on global transportation and logistics, in Istanbul on June 10. Next year, we will organize this fair together with Ekofair.”

MMI has partners in 90 countries and representatives in 64 countries. The company also organizes fairs in 154 different countries each year.

Istanbul office market expected to grow 8 pct in 2010

Tuesday, March 23, 2010

ISTANBUL - Hurriyet Daily News

Take-up in European office markets picked up in most major cities during the second half of 2009, reflecting a recovery from earlier losses, a new report by the global real estate services provider Savills states.

Among the 32 cities Savills assessed for its European Office Market Spring 2010 report, Istanbul was the only city where both supply and demand, as well as rent for offices, were increasing.

Office rental growth in Istanbul will total approximately 8 percent by the end of 2010.

Lydia Brissy, who is responsible for European research at Savills, said some of the cities showed particularly strong figures during the last quarter of 2009. “Thanks to restricted development, rents started to stabilize and even increase in a few European cities. This trend should spread to most locations during 2010,” she said.

Because of the economic uncertainty, some companies in Istanbul delayed moving during the first half of last year but gradually signs of recovery were recorded before the end of 2009. The annual take-up of grade A office space was 85,000 square meters, and demand was mainly driven by the telecommunication, IT, electronic, insurance and pharmaceutical sectors.

According to Savills, office stock in Istanbul reached 2.8 million square meters, and the average vacancy rate stood at 9.1 percent, slightly below the European average of 9.9 percent.

In terms of rental prices Istanbul is expected to be among the most expensive cities in southern Europe and the Mediterranean region. The most expensive prime rents in the region are found in Milan, where rents are projected to stand at 450 euros per square meter in 2010. Istanbul follows as the second most expensive city in the region with an average rent of 380 euros per square meter a year, followed by Rome and Athens.

In Athens, development has slowed significantly during the downturn, especially in terms of large-scale projects, which are hard to finance. More significant rent corrections are expected in the secondary segment of the market, which is going to experience declining demand, the Savills report stated.

Turks least likely to be planning a holiday this year

Tuesday, March 23, 2010 BETÜL ÇAL

ANTALYA – Hürriyet Daily News

Many European countries clearly differ from Turkey in terms of holiday understanding and preferences, according to a recent survey by the Gallup Organization Hungary. The survey highlights direct impacts of financial trends on holiday preferences as well as this year’s expectations

A recent survey on the attitudes of Europeans towards tourism showed that the proportion of those planning to take a holiday has increased this year compared to crisis-hit 2009, also revealing Turks' travel tendencies.

There is a striking difference in holiday understanding and preferences between many European countries, mainly western, and Turkey, the survey shows. While the former group sees traveling as a basic need, the latter can barely afford a proper holiday. Conducted by the Gallup Organization, Hungary, the survey included 27 EU member states as well as Turkey, Croatia, Macedonia, Norway and Iceland.

Evaluating the survey for the *Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review*, Jale Paktuna, former academic at the Faculty of Sociology, said that the financial trends in the world have a direct effect on people's vacationing preferences.

"Traveling is a choice on which people have full control and authority to make or not to make. You can survive on without holiday in 20 consecutive years, but cannot live long physically without shelter and food," she added.

Citizens of high income level countries can make some 'alterations' in case of facing a sort of economic problem that year, but people in some Eastern European countries which have relatively lower income levels can completely sacrifice their 'holiday luxury' for a few years or even more, said Paktuna.

According to the survey, while some 39 percent of EU citizens had made at least one short private trip and one holiday trip in 2008, the proportion decreased to 27 percent in 2009. One-third of EU citizens did not travel at all for leisure purposes in 2009.

The survey shows that there is an increase in the number of people who are planning to take a holiday in 2010 compared to 2009. While 33 percent of EU citizens did not travel in 2009, those who were certain that they would not travel this year were 21 percent. Among the respondents who were most likely not to go on holiday at all this year, Turkey came on first place with 44 percent.

Turks to be the least to travel away from home

While some 89 percent of Norwegian respondents were likely to travel, either for business or private purposes, at least once in 2009, Turkish respondents were ranked last in terms of the number of those traveling in the same year. Only 37 percent of Turkish people traveled at least once.

Mehmet Ali Çakar, a retired tourism operations manager, said that citizens of countries with high proportion of travelers feel they can afford these holidays once or more in a year. "Travelling is as real, natural and necessary for them as feeding, sheltering and reproducing. When having financial difficulties, they can decrease the number of holidays, but taking some sort of holiday will always exist in their lives," Çakar added.

Andrew Latimer, a 42 year-old Dutch tourist, said that traveling has almost become a custom for many Europeans, which can take different forms depending on the situation but it never vanishes away.

As for some reasons for not having gone on holiday in 2009, Turkey had the highest proportion of 30 percent of respondents who said they did not have time to go on holiday.

Paktuna said that different working conditions in countries also affect holiday preferences. "It would not be realistic to expect someone, who works or 'is made to work' 14 hours a day, six days a week and not be allowed to fully use his or her right of annual leave, to go on a two or three weeks holiday a year," she added.

Turkey unveils strategic energy plan

Wednesday, March 24, 2010

ANKARA - Anatolia News Agency

HURRIYAT

Energy import-dependent Turkey hopes to increase domestic power generation within the next five years, according to a recent report prepared by the country's Energy Ministry.

In a new energy plan for 2010-2014, Turkey plans to generate more of its own power, diversify natural gas suppliers, increase the amount of oil pumped to Turkey's oil hub of Ceyhan and begin the construction of a nuclear power plant.

At the end of 2009, Turkey had oil reserves that could meet consumption for a year and natural gas reserves enough for two months, the ministry report said.

Turkey's proven oil reserves are estimated at around 39.4 million tons while its natural gas reserves are 6.1 billion cubic meters. Turkey's annual oil consumption is around 31.1 million tons while its natural gas consumption is nearly 36 billion cubic meters.

Turkey imports natural gas from five countries, two-thirds of which comes from Russia. The Turkish government, however, wants to reduce its dependence on Russia and plans to cut the country's stake in Turkey's gas imports to below 50 percent in a bid to diversify suppliers.

Turkey also plans to raise its oil production through oil and natural gas exploration projects in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.

According to the strategic energy plan, Turkey plans to extend the duration of a crude oil pipeline deal with Iraq, finalize negotiations on the Nabucco pipeline project deal this year before beginning construction in 2011 and launch a project to connect Turkish and Syrian natural gas networks next year.

The government also aims to make Ceyhan, a port in the southern province of Adana, a wholly-integrated oil hub by the year 2015. By that time, the amount of oil pumped to Ceyhan is expected to reach 500 million barrels a year.

In terms of electricity, the Turkish government plans to complete the construction of several coal-fired thermal power plants and hydropower plants throughout the country by 2013. The proposed plants would have a total capacity of 8,500 megawatts.

Meanwhile, one of the government's priorities is to begin construction on the country's first nuclear power plant by 2014. At the same time, it also hopes to increase the ratio of renewable energy resources to 30 percent in total energy generation by 2023.

According to the government's plans for energy efficiency, Turkey will save 10 percent on its energy costs by 2015 and 20 percent by 2023.

Foreign companies seek to enter Turkish market

Tuesday, March 23, 2010

ISTANBUL-Hürriyet Daily News

In the coming five years, many important construction companies from Europe will try to enter the Turkish market, according to the founder of a research company that follows the construction sector.

"Turkey has great potential. We expect that there will be large demand in Turkey within five to ten years," Martin Langen of B+L Markdaten said during an international conference on markets and opportunities in the construction sector held in Istanbul.

Speaking to journalists on Monday, he said, "Turkey is the most interesting country for European construction companies because of its dynamism and fast growth."

There are two main factors in Turkey's growth, according to Langen. "The first is that in Turkish cosmopolitan cities, homes are not in the center of the city, meaning that they have not been built in the right places. The second is job opportunities and an increasing population."

Noting that a total of 400,000 new dwellings are expected to be built in Turkey in the near future, he said the fast growth of the construction sector may present some problems.

"When there is fast growth involved, a city may encounter infrastructure problems such as water supply, security and transportation. Those issues can be overcome if the growth is kept under control," Langen said.

New opportunities

Commenting on the current situation of Turkish contractors, Cihan Candemir, managing director of Yüksel Construction Company, said the business volume for Turkish contractors was \$155 billion between 1972 and 2009.

"We do not expect a business volume contraction in foreign countries in 2010. These business volumes will continue like they were in 2009," he said, noting that Libya, with 21 percent, had the largest market volume in terms of international business for Turkish contractors in 2009.

"Libya is still the largest market for Turkish contractors. On the other hand, Turkmenistan has a 13 percent business volume for the Turkish sector," he said.

Candemir said Algeria had begun to attract Turkish business away from Russia, in which there was heavy foreign involvement in the past.

"Russia no longer prefers to do business with foreign contractors. The country prefers to work with its own contractors. We think that Russia is no longer an opportunity for foreign countries," he said, adding that the country only represents a 7 percent business volume for Turkish contractors.

Oman, on the other hand, is a market which preparing to open to foreign contractors, he said.

"We are also doing some business in Oman. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia still holds business opportunities for Turkey," he said.

Babacan expects Turkey to grow between 3.7 and 5.5 percent in 2010

21 March 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish Deputy Premier Ali Babacan has put growth projection for Turkey in 2010 between 3.7 percent and 5.5 percent, higher than an earlier expectation of 3.5 percent.

Appearing on a televised interview on Sunday, Babacan said Turkey had come out of recession as of the fourth quarter of 2009, adding that the first three months of 2010 had seen "promising developments."

Babacan said the government's economy policies would lead Turkey out of the recession faster than other countries, adding the country would shrink less than an expected 6 percent.

He said budget deficit had taken a downward trend as many other countries tried to tackle relatively high budget deficits.

Turkey, Egypt should boost cooperation in aviation, minister

22 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The Turkish foreign minister said on Sunday that Turkey and Egypt should boost cooperation in air transportation

Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu met Egyptian Minister of Civil Aviation Ahmed Shafiq in Cairo.

Davutoğlu was in the Egyptian capital to participate in International Darfur Donors' Conference. During the meeting, Davutoğlu said Turkey and Egypt should increase air transportation, which he thought would-be an important step for economic integration of the two countries.

Davutoğlu said an air corridor should be established between Alexandria and Turkey.

"It is important for the two countries to be complementary of each other, not rivals," Davutoğlu also said.

The conference raised 850 million USD for Darfur projects.

President Gül invites Irish businessmen to invest in Turkey

23 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's president invited Irish businessmen to make more investments in Turkey.

Turkish President Abdullah Gül said at a joint news conference with President Mary McAleese of Ireland, "we want to further improve our bilateral relations with Ireland."

He thanked the Irish president for extending full support to Turkey's European Union membership process.

"Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu paid an official visit to Ireland a while ago. During the visit, the parties held detailed talks on several issues. We are determined to further develop our cooperation in the areas of tourism and education. Last year, some 120 thousand Irish tourist came to Turkey to spend their holiday. We welcomed recent increase in number of Irish tourists visiting our country this year," he said.

Highlighting importance of improving economic and commercial relations between the two countries, President Gül added, "I believe that President McAleese's visit will make a valuable contribution to efforts to boost our economic relations. Turkey-Ireland trade volume currently stands at around 1 billion EUR. But we have a great potential to increase it. We invite Irish businessmen to make more investments in Turkey."

President McAleese is currently paying a state visit to Turkey.

Turkish energy minister on Libananco case

23 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The Turkish energy minister said on Tuesday that he believed Turkey would win the "Libananco case

Speaking to a group of economy reporters in Ankara, Turkish Energy & Natural Resources Minister Taner Yıldız commented on today's hearing of the major arbitration case filed by Cyprus-based Libananco Holdings Co. Ltd. against the Republic of Turkey.

Describing the lawsuit as an extraordinary case in Turkey's economic and political history, Yıldız said he was sure that the arbitral tribunal, which was hearing the case in Paris today, would act objectively and with common sense.

"We have a 16-17 member delegation in Paris. This is a 10.1 billion USD case. I have high hopes that we will win," Yıldız said.

LIBANANCO CASE

Turkish Ministry of Energy & Natural Resources seized Uzan Group's CEAS and KEPEZ companies in the light of an application by Turkey's Energy Market Regulatory Authority (EPDK) in 2003.

Upon such development, Libananco Holdings Co. Ltd., which introduced itself as a company operating in the southern part of Cyprus, claimed that it was a partner of the said companies, and thus, it suffered loss due to the seizure.

With such claims, the company filed a 10 billion USD lawsuit against the Republic of Turkey. Turkey might have to pay a compensation up to 20 billion USD (including interests), if Libananco wins the case, sources said.

Babacan to meet with EU officials in Brussels

23 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Economy Minister Ali Babacan left for the Belgian capital, Brussels, late Monday to meet with a number of officials from the European Union.

Included on Babacan's schedule are talks with EU Monetary Affairs Commissioner Joaquin Almunia. Following a meeting organized by the Turkish Businessmen and Industrialists' Confederation (TUSKON), Babacan is scheduled to meet with Belgian Finance Minister Didier Reynders. The minister is also expected to see Antonio Tajani, the European transport commissioner, and EU Economic and Monetary Affairs Commissioner Olli Rehn. Babacan will return to Turkey late today.

Turkish investments in Egypt amount to \$1 bln in 2009

Wednesday, 24 March 2010 13:55

WORLD BULLETIN

Badr said Egypt desired to increase its trade volume with Turkey to 5 billion USD by the year 2013.

Egypt's commercial consul in Istanbul said on Wednesday that the investments carried out by Turkish entrepreneurs in Egypt had reached 1.1 billion USD in 2009.

During his visit to Izmir Chamber of Commerce (IZTO), Mongy Aly Badr, the Egyptian Commercial Consul in Istanbul, said that Egypt's imports from Turkey were much greater than its exports to the country.

Badr said Egypt desired to increase its trade volume with Turkey to 5 billion USD by the year 2013.

Pointing to the growing Turkish investments in Egypt, Badr said, "We try our best to make the Turkish investors in our country earn more money than they do in Turkey".

Badr also said that Egyptians preferred to consume Turkish products.

IZTO's chairman Jak Eskinazi said in his part that commercial activities between Turkey and

Egypt were on the rise.
Eskinazi also said Turkish investors saw Egypt as a "gateway to Africa".

Turkish university to establish first Gypsy research center

Wednesday, 24 March 2010 16:06

WORLD BULLETIN

This will be the first time a center will be established in Turkey to search the cultural features and social lives of Romani citizens.

A Turkish university will establish a Romani (Gypsy) Research Center within the framework of initiatives to solve problems of Romani citizens.

The Adnan Menderes University (ADU) in the Aegean province of Aydin will set up a Romani Research and Practice Center.

This will be the first time a center will be established in Turkey to search the cultural features and social lives of Romani citizens.

The university has set up a committee to make necessary preparation for the center. The committee will write a regulation, and send it to the Higher Board of Education (YOK) after it is ratified by the university senate.

The regulation will take effect after YOK approves it and it is published in the Official Gazette.

A workshop on Romani citizens took place in Turkey on December 10, 2009 within the scope of initiatives pioneered by State Minister Faruk Celik. Participants learned the problems and expectations of Romani citizens during the workshop, prepared a report and submitted it to the Council of Ministers.

Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan met Romani citizens on March 14, 2010.

Also, the Interior Affairs Committee of the Turkish Parliament will begin on Thursday to debate a bill amending a law on residence and travel rights of foreigners in Turkey.

An article of the mentioned law says, "the Interior Ministry is authorized with deportation of gypsies with no nationality or with a foreign nationality, and foreign nomads who are not bound to Turkish culture."

The bill demands annulment of this article.

The government plans to bring the bill to the Parliament General Assembly as soon as possible.

After this article of the mentioned law is annulled, Turkey will get rid of discriminative implementations against the Romani citizens.

World Bank approves €931 mln-loan for Turkey

Wednesday, 24 March 2010 13:31

WORLD BULLETIN

The World Bank approved on Wednesday 931 million Euro of loan for Turkey for equitable growth.

The World Bank approved on Wednesday 931 million Euro of loan for Turkey for equitable growth.

A World Bank statement said the World Bank Board of Executive directors approved a Restoring Equitable Growth and Employment Programmatic Development Policy Loan (REGE-DPL) for Turkey in the amount of 931 million Euro (equivalent 1.3 billion USD).

"With the REGE DPL, the World Bank supports Turkey's program of financial crisis response

and continuing reforms for shared medium-term growth," the statement said.

The statement said programs and actions taken by the Turkish government in 2009 and 2010 had helped reduce the impact of the global financial turmoil and economic downturn in Turkey and facilitated the transition to renewed medium-term economic growth with shared benefits for the Turkish people.

Such programs and actions ranged from sound fiscal macroeconomic policies to measures that supported small and medium-sized firms, helped maintain and expand credit, and address unemployment, the statement said.

"They also include continuing critical reforms essential for Turkey's long-term economic competitiveness and growth, such as the ongoing implementation of health, social security, and public financial management reforms, and improvements in the investment climate," the statement said.

The statement also said, "today, economic growth is resuming in Turkey and unemployment has begun declining, although it will remain a key challenge over the medium term."

Also, Ulrich Zachau, the country director of the World Bank for Turkey, said, "we are pleased to support the (Turkish) government's policies and program to promote equitable growth and employment, as Turkey emerges from the impact of the global financial crisis and returns to renewed growth this year."

Zachau said the bank especially welcomed the government's sound medium-term program and fiscal plan, the continued implementation of Turkey's path-breaking health and social security reform, and the strengthening of programs to improve access to education and training and job services.

"We look forward to continuing our partnership with Turkey to improve the lives of the Turkish people," Zachau also said.

The REGE-DPL is a variable-spread Euro-denominated loan, with a final maturity of 19.5 years, including a grace period of 16 years.

Turkish FM to visit Macedonia

Wednesday, 24 March 2010 13:16

WORLD BULLETIN

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu will pay a formal visit to Macedonia upon invitation by his Macedonian counterpart Antonio Milososki.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu will pay a formal visit to Macedonia upon invitation by his Macedonian counterpart Antonio Milososki.

A statement by the Foreign Ministry of Turkey said that Davutoglu would travel to Macedonia on Thursday.

He will be received by Macedonia's President Gjorge Ivanov, Parliament Speaker Trayko Veljanovski and Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski during his visit to this country.

Davutoglu will attend a dinner to be hosted by President Ivanov.

Turkish foreign minister will also give a conference on "Turkey's Foreign Policy and Balkans" in Skopje.

BUSWORLD Fair set to open in Turkey

Wednesday, 24 March 2010 13:44

WORLD BULLETIN

An international fair of coach manufacturers is set to open Thursday in Istanbul.

An international fair of coach manufacturers is set to open Thursday in Istanbul, featuring their latest models of buses, minibuses, midibuses as well as spare parts and equipment.

The third BUSWORLD Fair will host 168 companies from Turkey and around the world and it is set to remain open through March 28.

Thirty-five foreign manufacturers will take part in this year's event from Germany, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, China, France, the Netherlands, Britain, Spain, Switzerland, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Ukraine and India.

The fair saw near 11,500 professional visitors in 2008 as organizers expect more visitors this year.

Turkey to become 'world's most environmentally friendly country'

25 March 2010, Thursday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

The opening of the environment chapter in Turkey's EU accession talks is estimated to cost a total of 59 billion euros, of which 10 to 15 billion euros is expected to be contributed by the EU, with the rest covered by the government, Environment and Forestry Minister Veysel Eroğlu has said.

With this policy chapter, Turkey has the opportunity to become the most environmentally friendly country in the world," Eroğlu said in an interview with the Anatolia news agency yesterday. He explained that 34 billion euros will be used for water initiatives, 10 billion for wastewater and 15 billion euros for industrial pollution. Turkey has taken an important step with the opening of the environment chapter, one of the most vital areas in negotiations with the EU, the minister stated.

With the opening of the chapter Turkey will be able to benefit from EU funds, he said. "We are expecting an amount of 10 to 15 billion euros from the EU, but the chapter is estimated to cost around 50 billion euros altogether. The government will cover most of the cost," stated Eroğlu. Important environmental studies have been carried out in recent years in Turkey, he said, noting: "We have already launched projects on the elimination of solid waste, purification of wastewater, improvement of rivers and fighting pollution in rivers, lakes and the air. During this government's time in office, the number of solid waste treatment plants increased from 15 to 54. Furthermore, very important steps have been taken for the prevention of marine pollution. We currently have 300 blue flag and sea pollution measurement stations established across the country. Hence, the opening of the environment chapter is important for us. We are ready to become the world's most environmentally friendly country."

Turkey opened the environment chapter on Dec. 21, 2009, increasing the total number of chapters opened under Turkey's EU accession negotiations thus far to 12 of 35.

Turkey to decide on Iran gas investment in two weeks

25 March 2010, Thursday

TODAY'S ZAMAN WITH REUTERS İSTANBUL

Turkey will decide within two weeks on whether to go ahead with investment in Iran to produce natural gas, in a deal that would upset the US.

Energy Minister Taner Yıldız said late Tuesday the deal, with an estimated worth of \$5.5 billion, had political support in Ankara.

The decision to press ahead now rested with firms carrying out feasibility studies in the South Pars gas field, Yıldız told Reuters in an interview. The United States is seeking to isolate Iran over its nuclear program, which the West fears includes covert ambitions for nuclear weapons. Washington is lobbying Turkey and other countries to support the threat of economic sanctions. “We will decide within two weeks on our final decision on the investment in Iran,” Yıldız said. “This project has complete political support, but companies are carrying out the talks. . . . If the feasibility is not high, we will not continue,” he said. Turkey, a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, is skeptical about the efficacy of sanctions and has expressed doubts that Iran is building nuclear weapons.

A partner in the European Union-backed Nabucco pipeline project, Turkey supports the idea of using Iranian gas as throughput for the proposed pipeline, which aims to reduce Europe’s dependence on Russian gas. A net energy importer, Turkey is trying to secure more gas for itself and maximize its potential as a hub for cross-border pipeline projects linking Europe to suppliers in the Middle East and Central Asia.

The energy alliances with Iran and Russia have been a factor fuelling doubts about whether Turkey, having seen its bid for EU membership falter, has begun drifting away from its traditional Western allies. Yıldız said Turkey planned to bid, along with Russian partner Gazprom and some US firms, in future tenders to develop Iraqi oilfields.

Turkey was part of a Gazprom-led group that won rights last year to develop Iraq’s Badrah oilfield. The minister also said Turkey planned to finalize the privatization of its natural gas grids this year. Ankara has been pushing to speed up the pace of its privatization program, which slowed in 2009 due to poor market conditions.

SOCIAL NEWS

Operation rocks Turkish football

Wednesday, March 24, 2010

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

More than 40 people, including professional football players, were detained Wednesday on allegations of match fixing and manipulating football games.

The detainees include former Galatasaray player and current Istanbul Municipality assistant coach Arif Erdem, former Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe player Fatih Akyel, Istanbul Municipality goalkeeper Kenan Hasagic, Konyaspor goalkeeper Recep Öztürk and Kayserispor players Umut Koçin and Durmuş Bayram.

Kayseri police said Koçin and Bayram were sent to Istanbul and would testify as witnesses. The investigation, which was launched in August 2009 by the Sarıyer Prosecutor’s office after a complaint by the Turkish Football Federation, or TFF, mainly focuses on a Turkish Super League match between Istanbul Municipality and Gençlerbirliği last May. The game, which struggling Istanbul Municipality won 3-1, was also mentioned in an indictment prepared by German prosecutors against a Europe-wide crime gang. The gang is accused of trying to manipulate more than 200 matches in at least 11 countries, including Turkey, to maximize betting profits.

Goalkeeper Öztürk, who is also the son-in-law of Gençlerbirliği Chairman İlhan Cavcay, was playing for the Istanbul Municipality at that time and is accused by Bochum prosecutors of placing a 30,000-euro bet on the game.

The TFF said in a written statement Wednesday that the investigation was independent of the probe in Bochum. It added that officials were, nevertheless, sharing information with German authorities.

“The federation filed a complaint to the Sarıyer Prosecutor’s office on Aug. 4, 2009, regarding information it has on match fixing doubts in three games,” read the statement posted on the TFF’s official Web site. “The investigation by the Bochum prosecutors was made public in November, and the information and documents obtained from Bochum prosecutors and the UEFA have been shared with the Sarıyer Prosecutor’s Office.”

Match-fixing allegations have been on Turkish football’s agenda for some time, but the police and prosecutors have not been involved in most of the cases due to lack of evidence.

Hence, the latest operation could be a milestone, according to Vatan daily sports columnist Tayfun Bayındır.

“The TFF regulations do not have a criminal punishment for match fixing and illegal betting,” Bayındır told NTV Spor. “But if found guilty, the suspects will face jail time, which will be a first for Turkey.”

Bayındır said the police have been following the suspects since last August. “The situation is very serious. The evidence suggests this is organized crime,” he said, adding that he believed more suspects would be detained, “including very interesting names.”

Danish and American scholars discuss Gülen

20 March 2010, Saturday

TODAYS ZAMAN

World-renowned Muslim spiritual leader Fethullah Gülen has taught people how to live together despite their differences, Jill Carroll from Rice University said while speaking during a panel discussion on the role of Gülen at the Dialog Forum Foundation in Denmark on Tuesday.

In conjunction with Aarhus University and the University of Copenhagen, the Dialog Forum Foundation brought Danish and American scholars together to discuss Gülen’s contributions and his ideas on the art of living together. Carroll, who wrote a book about Gülen titled “A Dialogue of Civilizations: Gülen’s Islamic Ideals and Humanistic Discourse” in 2007, took part in the event. Carroll’s presentation attracted a great deal of interest. More than 100 influential guests from a wide range of fields attended.

Speaking before the start of the event, Dialog Forum Foundation Chairman Mustafa Gezen said they organized the panel discussion to increase awareness about the well-known Turkish intellectual in Denmark. “As they have elsewhere in the world, Gülen’s ideas will provide the means for the integration of people in this society and contribute to peace in Denmark,” Gezen said.

Beginning her presentation by talking about how she came to know about Gülen, Carroll said everything began after two doctoral students invited her to visit Turkey. “I have visited many cities in Turkey in order to understand Fethullah Gülen and have conducted research on the teachings of Gülen,” she explained.

Noting that thousands of people are impressed by his ideas, Carroll said Gülen is a scholar who teaches people how to live together. She stressed that Gülen’s approach is unprecedented. “We

cannot be the same. We cannot even be similar. However, we have to live together in this world. Gülen shows us how we can live together in peace,” Carroll said. Speaking to the Cihan news agency following the panel discussion, University of Copenhagen student Adrian Jensen said that if Gülen’s ideas had been widespread before, there would have been no caricature crisis in Denmark.

Samanyolu TV increasingly popular outside Turkey

21 March 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Private Samanyolu Television (STV), which broadcasts many programs, highly rated in Turkey, that promote values such as honesty, helpfulness and tolerance, is reaching out to other nations in the world thanks to programs it exports to these countries.

The channel’s programs that are broadcast in more and more countries are entering the list of the most popular programs there, leaving their rivals far behind.

STV has now around 20 of its programs broadcast in foreign countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kazakhstan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Azerbaijan and Mongolia. The TV station aims to expand its target audience to include Arab states and highly populated European countries.

“The Nation” (“Tek Türkiye”), “Axis of Righteousness” (“Doğruluk Ekseni”), “World of Mysteries” (“Sırlar Dünyası”) and “Fifth Dimension” (“5. Boyut”) are among the most popular STV programs overseas, Fatih Gök, a coordinator who is responsible for the channel’s international sales and acquisitions, told Sunday’s Zaman.

Among these programs, “The Nation,” for instance, tells the story of a young, idealistic doctor who travels to the Southeast from İstanbul -- without knowing that he was born in the region -- in a bid to help the people there, who have been suffering for decades from terrorism perpetrated by the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

“World of Mysteries,” which has a metaphysical theme, narrates “true” stories based on letters that are received from the audience in which they tell about an instructive incident they lived through. The program communicates the idea that life is not as straightforward as it appears and gives the message that one can make the world a better place if one wishes. It also tells the audience that “there is a fate beyond fate, and people’s choices are also a part of this fate.”

Gök noted that “World of Mysteries” is the most popular program of Afghans and Iranians. With regards to the influence of STV programs in the countries in which they are broadcast, Gök said: “The TV industry in Afghanistan had been occupied by Bollywood soap operas and movies, a situation about which the Afghan public was very disturbed. “World of Mysteries,” which began to be broadcast by the biggest TV channel of the country, TOLO TV, received much interest from the Afghan people, which prompted TOLO TV to purchase more STV programs,” Gök said.

He also noted that these programs were making dramatic changes in the lifestyles of people who watch them. Referring to a letter he received from an Iranian girl who identified herself as Helen,

he said she wrote in saying how watching the program “Life Lesson” (“Hayat Dersi”) made a change for the better in her family.

“I am writing this letter to thank you because you saved us from a big disaster. My father, an alcoholic, used to make life a nightmare for us. As soon as he started watching your ‘Hayat Dersi’ program, something that we have been longing for for years has happened. He almost quit drinking alcohol. He is now an addict of your program, not alcohol. He never creates trouble in our house now. I hope this program will continue to be broadcast in our country,” wrote Helen. “Life Lesson” is a program that dramatizes scenes that are based on true stories and introduces lessons. The program consists of three basic parts: “subject,” “life lesson” and “confrontation.” In the “subject” part, a real life situation is shown; the lessons that can be taken from this case are discussed in the “life lesson” part. In this second part, Muhammed Bozdağ, a communication expert and also the referee instructor of the program, invites the party to admit their wrongdoing and admit remorse for their actions while he encourages the party that was wronged to seek their rights. In the “confrontation” part, the wronged party holds the other party accountable for whatever they have done.

“The important thing with our series is that they bring real-life situations to television with sincerity. While watching these series, one inevitably says, ‘I lived through the same incident being told here.’ So people draw lessons for themselves from the stories being told in the series. They engage in self-criticism and face their mistakes, which helps them care more about moral values. And this helps people stop making mistakes or committing crimes,” explained Gök. About future projects, Gök said there were plans to export STV programs to European countries and Russia, while noting that the broadcast of these programs will contribute to dialogue with these countries.

“For example, if you think about broadcasting our series on a German channel in German, this will lead Turks living there to appreciate Germany. We contacted several ministers in Germany about exporting our series there and how they can win the appreciation of immigrant Turks. We are waiting for a reply from them. We believe that such a thing will develop tolerance and bring communities and the countries closer to each other.”

Brief information on the STV programs broadcast abroad can be found at the following Web site: www.samanyolubroadcasting.com.

Turkey sentenced over HIV infection through transfusion

24 March 2010, Wednesday

TODAY’S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

The European Court of Human Rights has ruled that the Turkish government must provide lifetime medical coverage for Yiğit Turhan Oyal, who was infected with the HIV virus when, having been born prematurely, he had to have a number of blood transfusions in 1996.

The transfusions were a necessary treatment for Oyal’s inguinal and umbilical hernia. His parents learned of the infection when he was about 4 months old; they were also told that the virus could develop into the more severe Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). According to a press release issued yesterday, the court’s verdict said: “The court held, by six votes to one, that the applicants [Yiğit Turhan Oyal and his parents, Neşe Oyal and Nazif Oyal] were to be paid 300,000 euros in pecuniary damage, 78,000 euros in non-pecuniary damage and 3,000 euros for costs and expenses. In addition to that award, the Turkish government is to provide free and full medical coverage to Yiğit Turhan Oyal for the rest of his life.”

Turkish Schools to Receive 100,000 Computers Every Year

Tuesday, 23 March 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

ANKARA (A.A) - Turkish Ministry of Transportation will either renew or provide 100,000 new computers to elementary and high schools all across Turkey each year, beginning in 2010.

Sources told the AA that the Ministry of Transportation has donated 600,000 new computers to the Ministry of National Education to date so that education in the Republic of Turkey reaches international standards.

Almost all of the computers in use have internet connections.

COMMENTARY

Pro-AKP liberals: Useful idiots?

Tuesday, March 23, 2010

MUSTAFA AKYOL

HURRIYAT

For the Kemalists, the liberals are either ‘useful idiots,’ as Lenin described Soviet sympathizers in Western countries, or they are ‘sold out’ pens who simply get paid by the AKP

One of the much-debated issues in current Turkish politics is the alliance between secular liberals and religious conservatives. The former is a tiny group of pundits, and their popular support is quite small, but their intellectual firepower is strong. The religious conservatives, on the other hand, have a much broader public base, but they need to articulate their demands for broader religious freedom in a more global language, which the liberals do speak.

The practical implication of this alliance is the support that most secular liberals have given to the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, government since 2002. This is not an unconditional and steady support, though. In fact, most liberals strongly criticize the government and the Prime Minister when they take nationalist or illiberal stances. Erdoğan’s recent blunder about “expelling illegal Armenian immigrants,” for example, was heavily bashed by these pundits. But they continue to think that the AKP is still better than its alternatives, and that it has indeed taken the right steps on several important issues.

The Turkish history of liberty

The Kemalists, however, always see something rotten in this alliance. For them, the liberals are either “useful idiots,” as Lenin described Soviet sympathizers in Western countries, or they are “sold out” pens who simply get paid by the AKP or somehow benefit from its ascendance. The common Kemalist mind simply can’t imagine how secular people would otherwise deviate from the noble path of the country’s archetypal secularism.

But Kemalism has its own intellectual firepower as well. This mainly works by focusing on the problems within the AKP, and showing them as if they were the only political trouble that Turkey has. The Kemalists, in other words, deliberately overlook the fact that for decades Turkey has been ruled by an authoritarian system dominated by the military and judiciary. Then they speak as if the AKP is simply a power-hungry government which tries to dominate an otherwise perfectly fine system.

One of the illustrations of this line of thinking was a piece which appeared in these pages yesterday. Its writer was criticizing the liberals for not opposing the AKP’s new package of

constitutional amendments. Two of these amendments were about giving the President and Parliament the right to appoint a minimal number of the members of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors, or HSYK, and the Constitutional Court – as it is the case in many EU countries. But, according to our writer, this would have increased the power of the executive, and it should have been opposed by anyone who wants more liberty. He was also quoting former US President, Woodrow Wilson, who said:

“The history of liberty is the history of resistance. The history of liberty is a history of the limitation of governmental power, not the increase of it.”

Wilson was absolutely right. But he was speaking in a slightly different context. For in the U.S., the government is the only centralized political power that can threaten freedom. In Turkey, however, there is always something higher than the government: the state. While the government is elected by the people, the state is made up of self-appointing bureaucrats, such as generals and judges, who rule the country according to their ideology, and allow the elected governments only a minimal authority on serious matters.

Moreover, history has shown that the main obstacle to Turkey’s liberalization has been the state, and not elected governments. Just look at the past decade and you will see how the state has, with or without success, blocked liberal reforms on almost every political issue -- from the freedom of the markets to that of expression, from the rights of the Kurds to those of Christians.

That’s why Wilson’s quote needs to be little adjusted to fit into Turkey: The history of liberty here is a history of the limitation of first state power, and then governmental power.

And if you are focusing only on the latter, but totally overlooking the first one, your self-description as a liberal will hardly be convincing.

A self-appointing caste

The constitutional amendment package needs to be seen within the same perspective. The problem is not that the government wants to “dominate the judiciary.” It is rather that the higher judiciary is a self-appointing ideological caste. The three main bodies, the HSYK, the Council of State, and the Court of Appeals, simply elect members of each other. The government wants the replace this co-optation system with a more democratic and pluralist one, in which all judges in the whole country will have a say.

Most Turkish liberals see that, and therefore it won’t be surprising to see them vouch for “yes” in the probable referendum on the constitutional amendment package.

The alliance between them and the religious conservatives, after all, is neither unprincipled nor accidental. It is the natural outcome of the history of liberty in this country.

Greek Cypriots blocking Turkey’s judicial reform

ABDULHAMİT BİLİCİ

20 March 2010, Saturday

TODAYS ZAMAN

It has become routine to criticize the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government because of the decline in activities to implement European Union reforms. Certainly these criticisms have some validity.

The momentum of the reforms that the government maintained until 2005 has declined due to domestic and foreign reasons. But what’s missing from these criticisms is the EU’s share of responsibility. A concrete example of how the EU has caused efforts to go downhill was pointed

out in the article written by H el ene Flautre, who replaced Joost Lagendijk, also known as the “son-in-law of Turkey,” as the co-chairman of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee. There was an interesting detail in Flautre’s writing. She wrote:

“We had invited Turkish Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin to the latest meeting of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC). I couldn’t believe what I heard from him, both during our conversation before the meeting and during the meeting. The minister was complaining that, despite opening of the 23rd acquis chapter on judicial reforms to negotiations, the EU has not sent the results of the screening process to Ankara although it was completed five years ago. The European Commission, on the other hand, says that the screening was completed five years ago, and sent to the council, i.e., to member countries. In other words, the screening results have been stuck somewhere between the European Commission and the European Council and have not been taken out of a drawer for the last five years. If this was about the opening of a chapter, it would be possible to talk about a ‘political’ maneuver from any member country. No, it was about the failure to communicate the results of the screening process to the candidate country. The Turkish justice minister justifiably asks: “When I introduce the judicial reform package to Parliament, if the deputies ask me, ‘Are you sure that the EU really wants us to make these reforms?’ then what can I say to them?”

I had the chance to speak with Ergin, who met with foreign journalists in Turkey at a meeting organized by the the Medialog Platform, on this matter. He confirmed that the screening of the 23rd acquis chapter, which concerns the judiciary and human rights, had been completed in 2006 but that the results of the screening process had still not been delivered. Explaining that they try to learn which reforms the EU expects them to make through nonofficial means, Ergin reproachfully said: “A portion of the criticisms from the EU are similar to a teacher who criticizes a student for not doing his homework when no homework was assigned. On the one hand, you say that reforms have slowed down; then on the other hand, you don’t send the report which shows what needs to be done.”

After the justice minister confirmed Brussels’ odd attitude, I decided to speak with a European official whom I believed knew the process very well. He said, “Unfortunately the minister is correct.” The official’s statement added another dimension to the issue. Normally, for every negotiation chapter, the commission needs to screen the current situation in Turkey and then prepare a report, which also contains the benchmarks Turkey must meet in order for the chapter to be opened. This report needs to be approved by the EU Council, where all 27 member countries have an equal say, and then be sent to Turkey. The commission did their part, but the report got stuck in the council. That is because the 23rd chapter is one of the chapters that Greek Cyprus is blocking. Don’t think that Turkey’s judicial reform has nothing to do with the Cyprus issue. This is what the EU’s structure is all about. Finding an excuse to use their veto power was no challenge for the Greek Cypriots. They wanted the commission to incorporate how human rights would be improved in northern Cyprus as well. When the commission refused, saying: “This is a negotiation process with Turkey. What does it have to do with Cyprus?” the process hit a wall, which is what the Greek Cypriot’s ultimately wanted.

Of course, the EU’s delay in sending the result of the screening process on judicial reform is strange and discouraging. But this report is not necessary to know what Turkey needs to do in this area. When we compare Turkey to European countries, our deficiencies in the area of law become crystal clear. After all, Minister Ergin, who gives the impression that he has a strong command over his files even though it’s been only nine months since he took office, brought up the judicial reform package as part of the EU process and showed in a presentation how the high

judiciary is organized in each EU country. The reformist picture Ergin painted, which recalled the AK Party's first years, and his criticism of the EU for not supporting Turkey enough in its reforms during the two-and-a-half-hour meeting, in which journalists from Reuters, The New York Times, the BBC, The Associated Press and Bloomberg attended, was inspiring.

The 'genocide' problem: states, parliaments and people

BERİL DEDEOĞLU

20 March 2010, Saturday

TODAYS ZAMAN

There is a heated debate in Turkey following the decisions of the Swedish Parliament and the US House of Representatives' Foreign Affairs Committee on the Armenian issue.

If we put aside Turkey's well-known official thesis on this subject, we must admit that there must also be a theoretical debate about this topic. A theoretical analysis of the role of third countries' parliaments that make decisions about events that occurred in a foreign country around a century ago is necessary because if one admits that this must become a customary practice without geographical and temporal limits, then it will be necessary to reconsider the whole of human history, from Attila the Hun to Roman times without forgetting colonialism. A second debate must be conducted about the relationship between the legislative and the executive bodies in a country. The Swedish government has clearly declared that their parliament's decision will not dictate the government's policies. Then, one must ask if parliaments' decisions will only be valid for those who back these decisions and will be irrelevant for those who oppose them from now on.

Staying on theoretical grounds, there is another point. It's obvious that through their decisions, parliaments try to put pressure on foreign countries. This pressure may be accepted as positive action if the only concern is to apply pressure in order to preserve human rights in that particular country. However, this always turns into a bargaining process in which states, firms, political parties and parliaments take part. This creates a situation in which the sufferings of the people are manipulated for the sake of political deals. Besides, if every ethnic or religious group asks for a parliamentary decision about the "genocides" they have been subjected to, interstate relations may become much too complicated.

In the practical domain, the fact that parliaments all over the world agree to consider laws about the genocide issue shows how global and widespread opinion on the Armenian issue is. Maybe this should be thoroughly analyzed. As Turkey is considered an interlocutor of these laws and declarations about the "genocide," and as Ankara itself considers these an insult to Turkey, it's obvious that the heaviest part of the burden is on Turkey's shoulders. However, these legislative developments create an atmosphere that pushes Turkey to adopt an intransigent official position and makes it impossible for Turks to consider this issue only from a humanitarian perspective. Because of this negative atmosphere, strategic struggles emerge against European countries and the US, new diplomatic problems are created (as if already existing problems weren't enough) and the democratization process in Turkey is seriously damaged. Under these circumstances, the government is easily accused of "treason" when it talks about reopening the Heybeliada Greek Orthodox Seminary or the resolution of the property problems of non-Muslim foundations in Turkey.

Doubtless, Turkey has serious steps to take on the Armenian issue. However, one mustn't expect that these steps will be taken if third countries keep putting pressure on Turkey. A positive atmosphere is necessary to make governments, individuals or civil society contribute to resolving this problem, along with the problems with Armenia, and to ensure the rapprochement of the peoples and the development of mutual empathy toward the other's sufferings. The current situation helps nobody but the lobbies in Turkey and elsewhere that benefit from an atmosphere of conflict.

Impact of Iraqi elections on Kurdish politics

EMRE USLU

TODAYS ZAMAN

21 March 2010, Sunday

Turkey's Kurds have recently been dealing with the question of whether the Kurdish initiative will be resumed without a dire Turkish reaction in the process.

Kurds in Iraq, on the other hand, have a completely different agenda. They are anxiously waiting to see how the March 7 election results will shape the future of Kurdish politics in Iraq.

Thus no matter how the situation evolves in Kurdish politics, we are witnessing historic moments for the future of the Kurds. A comparative analysis would show that the situation of Kurds in Turkey and Iraq is getting better every day. At least the Kurdish initiative would potentially establish bridges between Kurds and Turks. Yet the existence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) as an armed group remains the biggest risk before any peace initiative.

Furthermore, the PKK may escalate violence in upcoming months, which would further devastate the hope that the Kurdish initiative has established so far. Kurds in Iraq, however, may lose some of their influence in the central government because Muqtada al-Sadr's election victory may negatively influence the Kurdish deputies' role as the kingmakers. It appears that the Sadr movement is winning approximately 40 seats, equal to Kurdish power in the parliament. It means that the Kurds would not be an unavoidable cornerstone for politics in Baghdad. Further, al-Sadr's rigid position toward the US occupation and Kirkuk could potentially weaken the Kurdish hand in Baghdad. For this reason I expect that Kurds would reduce their nationalist demands from the central government to present Kurds as a potential coalition partner for the Maliki government.

Further, the election results in Kirkuk indicate that the Kurds would not annex Kirkuk in the coming years -- that would create questions among Kurds on their political parties' policies.

Therefore the opposition Goran, or "change," movement, may increase its significance in the coming years...

The impact of the election results in Iraq could wake the Kurds up from their long-lasting dream that the US and Europe have policies directed at the Kurds as a nation. Unlike the Kurdish nationalists and Turkish nationalists believe, neither the US nor the European countries have any policy toward the Kurds as a nation. The policies of the US and European countries is to provide for stability in the region because the stability of the region directly impacts their economy.

Therefore the strategists and leaders in Europe and in the US are now trying to understand whether the election results could harm the stability of the region.

Given that Turkey has become one of the energy corridors of Europe, they especially want to maintain the stability of Turkey. With this perspective, Europe and the US want to end the PKK violence in the region. Turkish politicians and Kurdistan politicians are well aware of this, but the PKK leaders just do not get it. Therefore one can assume that the European countries and the US would tighten their policies against the PKK in the coming months and years until they remove the PKK as a destabilizing element in the region.

Kurdish expectations of the West include benefiting from the globalization process, being a prosperous society in the region and becoming one of the pillars of stability in the region. It is up to the Kurds now to determine whether they turn the globalization process into a big political opportunity for themselves or follow their petty dream to have their small nation-state. Analysts in the West argue that if Kurds in Iraq adjust their demands to be in tune with globalization and develop policies to cope with the process, then they would be the winners of globalization. If they follow their nationalist dreams, though, they would risk their future and have to confront new fights and battles in the coming years.

Can the AK Party change the Constitution?

İHSAN DAĞI

22 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Yes it can, but only if it manages to rally popular support for a new constitution that is around 70 percent. Once the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) secures at least 330 votes in Parliament, paving the way for a referendum, it should persuade the people that the amendment package is just a prelude to a brand-new constitution.

Amending some articles of the Constitution may be a fresh beginning for a new round of democratic reforms, which is desperately needed to speed up the European Union accession process on the one hand and to consolidate democratization on the other.

When debating the content and methodology of constitutional change, we should keep in mind that however limited the amendment package may be, it will be a good thing in terms of Turkey's democratization. Political reform cannot be thought of without it including a constitutional dimension.

The reason for this is obvious: The Constitution of 1982, introduced by the military administration of the time, is the basis of undemocratic institutions, mechanisms and principles at play in Turkey today. The Constitution has an authoritarian spirit designed to protect the state vis-a-vis individuals. It did not set limits to the power of the state, but to the liberties of individuals -- which goes against the very essence of constitutional movements worldwide. The bureaucracy and the judiciary are appointed as vanguard institutions over the elected representatives of the people. Individual rights are stated but often weakened by phrases of "but" and exceptions. Kemalism is protected as the official ideology of the state. It is a constitution that hijacks sovereignty from the people and entrusts it to the bureaucracy and the judiciary. In short, the very logic and starting point of the 1982 Constitution contradict the principles and institutions of a contemporary liberal democracy.

Therefore, if Turkey needs reforms to broaden its democratic space, this requires constitutional change. In fact this has always been so. Since 1994 all major political reforms came with constitutional amendments. So it is important to have a constitutional change when the process

of democratic reforms seems to come to a halt. It may be the beginning of a new spirit for democratic reforms.

The ideal is, of course, to have a brand new constitution. But under the current circumstances, even a modest amendment to the Constitution would be a major achievement.

In this the ruling party cannot count on the support of other political parties inside or outside Parliament. No doubt the opposition parties will regard it as a partisan matter since it will have been initiated by the AK Party. They will portray it as an AK Party project.

Thus, if the amendment package is sent to referendum after a vote of over 330 in Parliament, the referendum will not be about the content of the amended Constitution but a “yes” or a “no” for the AK Party. Thus, it will turn into a plebiscite for the AK Party government.

Republican People’s Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal has already made this very clear by saying that the “referendum will be a historic opportunity for us all to pass a final judgment on the AK Party government.”

This is it. The content does not matter; broadening democratic space is not important; the development of Turkish democracy does not count. It will be an occasion for rivalry between the AK Party and the rest. The AK Party’s rounds of talks with opposition parties are thus unlikely to eliminate their objections.

As it is a referendum, the votes will be divided between yes and no. Those who do not support the AK Party will not vote yes in the referendum, whatever is in the package. So, the referendum will be an opportunity for the opposition to unite against the AK Party. If at the end the AK Party fails to break partisan solidarity in the grass roots of opposition parties, the constitutional referendum may be the beginning of the end of the ruling party.

If the AK Party is going to take this risk, I think the scope of change in the Constitution should be broader to include major reforms in the judiciary, civilian-military relations, higher education, political parties and the Kemalist principles. As no consensus will be forthcoming on the part of the opposition parties and groups, the AK Party should go for maximum reform in order to rally pro-reform social sectors.

Growing pains of Turkish democracy

AYDOĞAN VATANDAŞ*

22 March 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

In a recent op-ed piece, “Turkey’s Republic of Fear” (March 4, 2010), Soner Çağaptay, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), hurled cheap and unsubstantiated shots at Turkey’s current ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and the moderate, pro-democracy Fetullah Gülen movement.

First, let’s clarify who Mr. Çağaptay’s employers are: WINEP has its roots in and is still closely affiliated with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

This raises the question of whether the powerful pro-Israeli lobby group has an interest in seeing the global influence of Turkish moderate Islam decreased and inflaming anti-Muslim sentiment. Çağaptay falsely describes the Gülen movement as “ultra-conservative” and accuses it of funding Hamas and Chechen terrorists. Yet he presents no empirical data to support these extreme ideas; equating the Gülen movement with radical Islam is like saying all members of the Christian right are violent abortion clinic bombers.

Çağaptay, and anyone else who's spent time in Turkey, knows the truth about the nature of the Gülen movement: that the movement is visible and transparent, seeks integration with society rather than isolationism, is non-authoritarian in structure and does not reject modernization in favor of traditionalism. With absolute certainty, it is impossible to say that the Gülen movement has ever been associated with radicalism.

Recognized internationally for promoting dialogue and global peace, Mr. Gülen was invited to give the keynote address at the 2009 World Parliament of Religions in Melbourne, Australia. Mr. Gülen has always rejected the philosophy that violence is a legitimate means to a justifiable end. After the London subway bombings and suicide attacks in Israel, he criticized the terrorists who condoned such acts. "Unfortunately some condone acts of suicide bombings with the rhetoric of 'they have no other means.' If this is the only means Muslims have, let that means be buried deep in the ground together with the one who uses it," he said.

Then what motivates Mr. Çağaptay to be so brazen in his misrepresentation of Gülen and the AK Party? Could a recent shift in Turkish-Israeli relations be a motivating factor? I guess so! Mr. Çağaptay mischaracterizes the AK Party reign as a republic of terror when in fact, since voted into office in 2002, the AK Party has facilitated major constitutional and legislative reforms, leading toward greater democratization and preserving the secular structure of the government while creating a space for religious freedom. One shortcoming of the party is that Turkey has not yet been able to align its military-civilian relations with European Union standards.

However, important changes have been made to the judicial system, including the abolition of the State Security Court (DGM) system, but the judicial system's current structure and methodology continue to present some difficulties.

Turkish civil society has grown stronger. Cultural rights for the Kurds are beginning to be recognized -- and the AK Party has made progress on the Armenian issue. Finally, they have enhanced political dialogue; Turkish foreign policy is contributing positively to regional stability.

Some military generals thought that it was time to put a stop to the AK Party's burgeoning power; in countries like Turkey, democracy operates differently. Whenever democracy gains traction, the military grabs for power again. When the Democrat Party (DP) won 52 percent of the vote in the first free elections in Turkish history, on May 14, 1950, Adnan Menderes became prime minister. He later won two more free elections, one in 1954 and the other in 1957. No other Turkish politician has ever been able to win three general elections in a row. Then, in 1960, a coup d'état was staged by a group of Turkish army officers; the tribunals ended with the execution of Prime Minister Menderes, Foreign Affairs Minister Fatin Rüştü Zorlu and Finance Minister Hasan Polatkan on İmralı Island on Sept. 16, 1961.

The '70s were a time of political violence and economic uncertainty. The 1971 coup d'état, carried out on March 12, was the second to take place in the Republic of Turkey, coming 11 years after its 1960 predecessor.

In 1980, another junta was formed that instituted martial law and abolished all political parties. The junta was dissolved because of a new constitution, adopted in 1982.

On Feb. 28, 1997, the military pressured the democratically elected government to resign and allowed another civilian government to take power.

The Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) have always played a central role in the nation's political agenda. The military has long enjoyed the privilege of an autonomous position because of its role as guardian of the unitary republic, secularism and Kemalism.

And this brings us to the present: the latest coup attempt by the TSK was revealed in leaked military documents that were recently published in the liberal Taraf daily newspaper. The alleged plot aimed to create an atmosphere of chaos in the country through a series of violent acts that would eventually lead to a military coup.

While Mr. Çağaptay claims that the Turkish military denies the coup allegations, in fact the top army prosecutor has already announced that the coup documents are authentic and that the plans were staged in 2003 without the official permission of the Turkish General Staff.

Recent arrests of military generals in Turkey mark a milestone in the nation's democratic history. Four previous governments have been ousted by the military, and not one coup leader has ever been convicted.

As the right-wing military leaders planned this coup attempt, they failed to notice changes in Turkish civil society. A whistle-blower within the military who believed in democracy leaked the documents to the press. Meanwhile, the press has changed and diversified, making the publishing of these damaging documents possible. And finally, the common people, a broad-based electorate led by the Turkish middle class, were able to stand up to the elites. These arrests in Turkey are not signs of an authoritarian regime, but the healthy process of a maturing democracy.

Why is Europe planning an operation against the PKK?

İDRİS BAL*

23 March 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

There is an important distinction between Europe and the US in their stance against terrorism. Even though there are many aspects of the US that can be criticized, when it comes to counterterrorism, it acts based on principles more than European countries.

EU countries react strongly when their own safety is at stake and take effective measures, but when terrorism harms countries outside of Europe, they employ double standards. That said, operations against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) are now starting to take place in European countries as well. The most recent assault happened in Belgium. Similar operations have taken place in Germany, Italy and France. Is the EU finally starting to act according to its principles? Which factors may have encouraged EU member countries to take action against the PKK?

These operations are not as in depth as Turkey would like them to be, and they do not aim to completely eradicate the PKK from the countries that undertake them. But, regardless of their scope, it is very important that these operations are being carried out.

America's role in operations against the PKK in various European countries, the steps it has taken to cut off the PKK's financial resources, declaring PKK leaders in Europe drug barons, its cooperation with Turkey in counterterrorism and its appeal to the EU to take similar steps is integral to the operations in Europe.

Likewise, after the Sept. 11 attacks, terrorism was perceived as a global problem by a wider segment of society, and for the first time in its history Article 5 of the NATO Charter, which highlights that an armed attack against one ally should be considered an attack on all of them and the need for common defense, was invoked. This played a role, albeit a small one, in the change seen in the EU's approach towards terrorism in the post-Sept. 11 attacks, when sensitivity towards terrorism had peaked.

The EU recognized the PKK as a terrorist organization in 2002. This made it necessary for member countries to put this recognition into practice and take the necessary steps; in other words, the countries were required to take measures against the PKK. The operations are significant in this respect as well.

But were the operations in Europe just an outcome of putting the decision made by the EU into practice? EU countries realized that the PKK was not only a terrorist organization but also a formation that smuggled drugs, people and weapons and created instability in their own countries as well. In this respect, these operations should not be seen as just efforts to cooperate with Turkey in fighting terrorism but regarded as steps EU countries must take for the sake of their own domestic security.

The operations in question are also important in terms of ensuring stability and integration in European countries. Citizens with Turkish roots in these countries are bothered by PKK activities and its collection of money by force, and they hold the administrations of their respective countries responsible for this situation. This consequently leads to a security weakness in these countries. They need to take precautionary measures against the PKK and steps to prevent harmful activities from being carried out in order to facilitate the integration of Turks in these countries and to ensure internal stability. There are even some PKK sympathizers who find PKK activities disturbing. That is because the PKK is not a single entity. There probably are people within the PKK who are in favor of laying down arms.

In Turkey, a new effort that no other administration has ever had the courage to implement has been launched under the name of a democratic initiative, which aims to finish off terrorism and improve democratic standards in Turkey. The initiative is multifaceted, focusing on the economy, politics, law and foreign policy as well. In this respect, Turkey aims to develop cooperation with neighboring countries, the US, European countries and other countries as well to fight terrorism and is engaging in intense efforts to persuade countries to this end. This is another reason why the operations in Europe are important.

Moreover, due to the PKK's smuggling activities, money is flowing out of Europe. For every item that is smuggled into Europe, money is taken out of Europe. This economic cost displeases Europe.

It is a fact that counterterrorism operations in Europe are important for stability and integration within European countries and contribute to peace and stability both in Europe and the world. However, Europe's stance against terrorism needs to be based on principles instead of subjective reasons, and it must be sincere instead of hypocritical. It must be against terrorism and violence anywhere and everywhere. Emphasizing that nothing can justify terrorism is important not only for world peace but also to maintain brotherhood. It is also important in the context of Europe's consistency within itself, its discourse and the efficiency of the developing European common foreign policy.

Western wrongs and human rights

M.D. Nalapat

Wednesday, 24 March 2010 10:53

WORLD BULLETIN

It's a fact that Western countries today are far more technologically advanced than their Asian counterparts and their citizens live a "better life". But that does not mean human rights are better protected in the West. Instead, an honest examination would show human rights are far better

protected in Asia, at least when it comes to the most vulnerable sections of society such as ethnic minorities and residents without citizenship.

Take healthcare. In the United States, the epitome of Western culture, it is difficult for a person without a health insurance or enough money to get medical treatment. Visitors to the US, especially from poorer countries, may be refused access to healthcare.

In many European Union (EU) countries, the standard of medical treatment the underprivileged of other countries get is far below their national standards. Are the human rights of visitors who fall ill in Europe and the US protected? Why is the fundamental right to health neglected by the very countries that claim to be the torch-bearers of universal human rights?

Contrast this with Kuwait, for example. This small Asian country has an excellent healthcare system accessible not only to its citizens, but also to any visitor with a valid visa. And the cost for the best medical treatment is just 1 Kuwaiti dinar (or \$3.50). Wouldn't a person visiting the US even with a valid visa be laughed at and thrown out of the door if he/she enters a hospital with \$3.50 and seeks medical treatment.

Good medical care is not confined to Kuwait. The Arab spirit - in the best Asian tradition - ensures that every member country of the Gulf Cooperation Council provides excellent healthcare.

Hundreds of thousands of patients die each year because they cannot afford the medicines from American and European pharmaceutical companies because they have priced it out of the reach of most of the people to make huge profits. These companies fleece patients not only in other countries, but also in their own, saying the high costs are to fund research.

But the pharmaceutical cartel has enough power to get the EU to block low-cost Indian drugs from entering not only their home markets, but also those in Africa. US companies, on the other hand, use their judicial system to maintain their monopolies and continue crippling patients in America and Europe with their high costs.

If the authorities in these countries had the moral courage to resist the lures of the pharmaceutical giants, millions of their citizens would have benefited from low drug prices. But that in the Western paradigm is not a violation of human rights.

Then there are the super-rich US and EU speculators who cause immense damage to the global economy.

These unscrupulous traders have brought incalculable misery to hundreds of millions of people by driving up prices of oil, food, metals and other goods essential for the modern economy. Yet no one bothers to even talk about, let alone oppose, such rampant violation of human rights.

Some people in the developed countries even buy up (at very cheap prices) the debt of poor countries and then use their judiciaries or governments to force the poor nations to pay them huge amounts as damage or interests.

But how, in the first place, did the poor countries run up such huge debts? By taking loans from the rich world, most of which went into paying the salaries of the citizens of the lending countries.

Governments in rich countries pay billions of dollars in subsidy to their farmers, giving them an unfair advantage over their counterparts from developing countries. We know how "milk lakes" and "butter mountains" in developed countries are allowed to rot to preempt a drop in their prices while tens of millions of people starve in poor countries. We know about the \$40-billion subsidy that EU fishermen get to drain our oceans of fish. And we know about the vast stretches of forests in Brazil, Russia and Indonesia being destroyed by companies headquartered in the very countries that champion human rights. But again these have nothing to do with human rights,

because they fill the pockets of people in the rich countries. And here is something that most in the world, including India, are unaware of. The US government and its partner companies are pressuring the Indian government to enact a (corporate) law that would limit the liability of a foreign supplier of nuclear equipment to \$100 million even if their faulty plant design or criminal error kills tens of thousands of innocents. The central Indian city of Bhopal has suffered the world's worst industrial disaster that claimed or maimed tens of thousands of people. And the American company, Union Carbide, responsible for the tragedy has not paid proper compensation to the victims even after more than 25 years. Those talking human rights see no contradiction in depriving millions of people from the developing nations of fair compensation. Instead, they often bully local governments into agreeing to terms that discriminate against their own people in the name of "free trade". The world needs a comprehensive definition of "universal human rights", which should include the right to get cheap medicine and proper medical care, the right to equal market access for developing citizens, the right to be free of the disasters created by speculators and other unscrupulous traders, the right to protection of forests and control of fishing and the right to protecting our environment as a whole. The list can go on.

The case against threatening Iran

Bruce Riedel, Michael E. O'Hanlon

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WORLD BULLETIN

The case for a U.S. military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities remains weak. Washington does not know where all the underground uranium enrichment facilities are. They are tough to hit. Even if destroyed, they can be rebuilt. A strike might actually set back Iran's bomb program, but just one to three years. If President Barack Obama authorized one, especially without United Nations sanction, he could be viewed as repeating President George W. Bush's pre-emption mistakes, increase risks of an Iranian response and possibly help President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad bolster his domestic political position. In fact, we don't even favor keeping force on the table. You don't threaten a war you know is a bad idea. Doing so puts pressure on Obama to strike if and when diplomatic and economic approaches fail to rein in Iran's program. In addition, even if the charge is unfair, Obama's critics at home could accuse him of weakness, increasing the pressure on him to consider an attack. America's credibility might also be weakened, since Washington would be seen as having its bluff called. Future scenarios in which the United States might wish to credibly threaten an attack against an adversary, perhaps even Iran, would then be harder to handle. So the Obama administration would do well to stop talking publicly about a military option and, instead, tell regional allies a strike is highly unlikely unless Iran's behavior becomes far more egregious. But what about Israel? How should Washington think about the possibility that the Jewish state, having long heard Ahmadinejad's belligerent threats, might itself strike Iran? This could implicate Washington in the eyes of many, for Israel probably would not act without giving the United States tactical warning — if only to protect its own planes.

Yet, as long as Washington keeps the military option on the table, it is implicitly legitimizing Israel's right to do so, too.

Just as it makes little sense for the United States to attack Iran's nuclear facilities, it is also not a good idea for Israel — now or in the foreseeable future, under any plausible scenario.

The same military arguments are relevant. In fact, with its smaller air force and greater distances to fly, Israel would surely be less effective in demolishing Iran's underground facilities than America would — meaning that Iran's efforts might be delayed only a year or two. Tehran would likely lash out at the United States as much as at Israel — especially with 200,000 American GIs deployed in the region.

Also, Obama's efforts to improve relations with the broader Muslim world, demonstrated last year with his speech in Cairo, would be greatly complicated by what many would see as yet another American attack on a Muslim state.

A few Gulf states might privately welcome the strike. But most of the Islamic world would ask why a state that the Federation of American Scientists says has 80 nuclear weapons of its own was justified in attacking another that has yet to produce one such weapon.

This double-standard argument could resonate from Morocco to Indonesia. America's most vital partners in the war against Al Qaeda would have a harder time working closely with Washington on counterterrorism and bolstering defensive preparations that Iran's belligerence has helped produce in recent years.

It would also undermine governments in key regional states that welcome our presence and help. Jordan, Turkey, Pakistan and Indonesia would again have to explain to their angry populations why security partnerships were necessary with a foreign power too friendly to Israel and too inclined to strike any Muslim state that gets out of line.

This battle of perceptions, now starting to work in our favor, could turn against us.

An Iranian nuclear bomb would clearly be a bad thing. We must continue to do everything in our power, on the diplomatic and economic-sanctions fronts, to make it less likely — and to deter it if we have to.

To discourage Israel from any attack, we need to remind its leaders of three key points:

- U.S. security is implicated in how this is handled, too, because our troops and interests are exposed and subject to Iranian reprisal after any strike.
- An Iranian bomb would strengthen, not weaken, the U.S. commitment to Middle East security. Washington would need to more forcefully project a U.S. nuclear umbrella policy to protect regional friends. Iran would be put on notice that it should assume any nuclear strike against other countries in the region would lead to U.S. retaliation.
- Israel would actually be less alone if Iran got the bomb, since it would not be the only state threatened.

Finally, should Iran move to build nuclear reactors and plutonium-reprocessing facilities capable of producing enough plutonium for a large number of bombs, a different conversation could occur about whether military action made sense. Aboveground facilities, like reactors, are easier to strike — especially before they become operational.

These arguments alone cannot prevent Israel from carrying out an attack. It must make its own decisions.

But it would be more difficult for Israel to strike if Washington made its opposition to a strike clear and strongly recommitted to the long-term security of its friends in the region.

The Obama administration should have this conversation with Israel quietly — before we wake up one morning to a fait accompli.

Reasons behind opposition to reform package

FATMA DİŞLİ ZIBAK

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Today's ZAMAN

The opposition parties, the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), as well as the heads of some judicial institutions, have given the cold shoulder to a constitutional reform package initiated by the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government.

Although the package includes amendments to raise democratic and judicial standards in the country, they have said they will not lend it any support and that the government should seek a "consensus" on the package. Considering the fact that the package includes amendments that would be supported by anyone wanting the improvement of Turkish democracy, it seems that the real reason behind their opposition is their determination to protect the status quo and their grip on power.

Referring to the arguments of some circles who say the AK Party government should definitely seek a consensus on the reform package, Star's Mustafa Karaalioglu says the real aim of such demands is to prevent Turkey's Constitution from becoming a more civilian one. From past experience, he says everyone knows that the CHP does its best to prevent reforms it has not initiated at the cost of contradicting texts it has previously produced, exclusion from society and falling into an embarrassing situation in the eyes of the world. "So, the notion of 'consensus,' which is worn out, is the last trump card in the hands of this party and its supporters. They are trying to gain a right or a privilege in this way that was not granted to them by the public at the ballot box. The opposition, which failed in terms of the nation's will, contemporary judicial norms and world realities, is now desperately wanting a consensus," says Karaalioglu.

Regarding the CHP's complete rejection of the reform package, Zaman's Mustafa Ünal says it is not very difficult to understand the CHP's reaction because the party has always been pro-status quo and against change. Nevertheless, he has difficulty understanding the MHP's opposition to the package because there is nothing in its content that could upset them. "The MHP is having difficulty justifying its opposition to the judicial reform. Why shouldn't this Parliament make constitutional amendments? Why not today but tomorrow?" asks Ünal in the wake of the MHP's demand that the constitutional reform package be prepared after the next parliamentary elections. With regard to the reaction against the reforms by the supreme judiciary, which argues that the government is aiming to take the judiciary under its control, Ünal says only those who control the judiciary are concerned about others controlling it.

"The fight is between change and status quo," he adds.

Yeni Şafak's Fehmi Koru says some have a tendency to explain the opposition to the reform package simply based on the fact that it was created by the AK Party. Although he finds this argument accurate, he says it is far from explaining the whole reason behind their opposition. "The CHP's argument in opposition to the package saying that it marks a civilian coup staged by the AK Party reveals its intention to protect the status quo. Otherwise, why would the CHP be

opposed to amendments that reduce the authority of the judiciary to acceptable limits and increase the difficulty of closing political parties?” he asks.

Who can change the Turkish Constitution?

MUHAMMED ÇETİN

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TODAYS ZAMAN

It is universally acknowledged that the last several constitutions of Turkey were dictated at gunpoint following military coups and juntas. They were also influenced by opposing cliques and interests within the juntas, the status quo and its supporters and so these constitutions established and protected the state or system and its bureaucracy.

Moreover, their drafting was carried out by very few people; the 1982 Constitution was written by a team of only five people. So these constitutions and the systems they created have been criticized in academia as being “despite the people and against the people” rather than “by the people, for the people and of the people.”

The reform package drafted by the governing Justice and Development Party (AK Party) is not a whole constitution. It does not cover all the expectations and aspirations of the Turkish public so as to bring Turkish democracy and especially its judicial system and military on par with European and universal standards. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the proposed package is limited and reconciliatory in some respects, that it intentionally avoids for now any attempt to change the form, function and lack of accountability of certain courts and the military, it is enough to scare and incite the status quo into rejecting and mobilizing against it. For the public, on the other hand, although it is late and limited, the package is a useful and long-awaited start and a declaration of intent to normalize certain things in Turkey.

However, the proposed reforms to certain articles seem to be for psychological relief only. Take the suggested amendment to Article 125. The reform suggests that recourse to judicial review should be available against all actions and acts of the Supreme Military Council (YAS). But if personnel sacked by the military were to be reinstated to their earlier military position by the civilian courts, the military would make their lives a living hell.

Or take the proposed amendment to Article 15, which was included to appease the Republican People’s Party (CHP). The reform package suggests removing the provision that no allegation of criminal, financial or legal responsibility shall be made and that no application shall be filed with a court for this purpose in respect of any decisions or measures whatsoever taken by the junta or the National Security Council (MGK) formed after the 1980 coup. But considering the fact that many of the planners, makers and victims of the 1980 coup have passed away and that the statute of limitations means that cases are dropped or no longer viable after 30 years, why waste effort on pursuing the 1980 junta while the CHP and other interest groups are busy defending and protecting the coup planners of today?

Or take the way the government has avoided proposing amendments to the selection, function and accountability of certain judges, prosecutors and courts. As much as it fears more military intervention, the Turkish public is equally threatened by the growth of the “juristocracy.” Shouldn’t the government suggest the selection of judges by Parliament in line with the practice of EU countries?

If, as some higher judges have remarked, Parliament cannot make a new constitution, or if what Parliament is doing to reform, democratize and normalize is against the Constitution, then who will legislate, discuss and make laws and draft a new constitution? Are they suggesting that amendments, new legislation or a new constitution are so important that they cannot be entrusted to Parliament?

In making these points I do not mean to oppose the suggested reforms or amendments to Articles 15 and 125. Rather, it is important that we should reform our articles and constitution in such a way that future generations will not have to endure further judicial or military tutelage, complications and takeovers.

Predictably, the reform package is already being attacked and roundly rejected by the opposition parties and protectionists such as the judicial and military bureaucracy. Ironically, while the protectionist clique cannot seem to stop the military and judiciary bureaucracy from breaking the law, violating the constitution and planning putsches, they allege that amending the Constitution through a constitutional process is “unconstitutional.” When the military and judiciary stop interfering with the legislative and generals give up pronouncing verdicts on legal cases yet to be heard, the world and Turkey will be able to take them seriously.

After thorough public discussion, the government should not hesitate to take the package to a referendum if necessary. The public has the right to give the protectionists the answer they deserve. The suggested reforms might be limited in scope, but they are important; they may be weak, but they are a good start on the road to democratization, institutionalization, normalization, civic-mindedness, civilian rule and the supremacy of law.

What happened to the ‘high interest rate, low exchange rate’ argument?

İBRAHİM ÖZTÜRK

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TODAYS ZAMAN

Many analysts have been continuously arguing that both the government and other policymaking institutions such as the Central Bank of Turkey and the Treasury are pursuing a policy of high interest rates, which leads to the overvaluation of the Turkish lira.

The main reason behind this policy framework, they argue, is Turkey’s disinflation program. According to this, a high interest rate helps the government fight inflation through numerous channels. First of all, it helps control final demand components and therefore eliminates a demand-pull pressure on inflation. However, this has not been the case in Turkey with the exception of some external shocks after 2006 such as the dramatic rise in commodity prices that created excessive pressure on inflation almost everywhere. With the exception of these kinds of “abnormalities,” the share of final consumption demand has remained remarkably higher in total gross domestic product (GDP) since 2003.

Second, higher interest rates not only triggered a large volume of capital inflows and fueled high and easy growth, they also led to an overvalued lira -- reducing the pass-through effect of exchange rates on inflation and the cost of imports significantly. In sum, according to the arguments, easy source financing of high growth and an inflation-targeting regime are major causes behind the “high interest rate, low exchange rate regime.”

Cross-country studies on real exchange rates (RER) show quite convincingly that higher interest rates are significantly higher than many other similar countries (Figure 1). However, the mechanism behind this high rate is quite different than the argument outlined above.

Theoretically speaking, RER are composed of two major factors, where nominal exchange rate is multiplied by the inflation differential between the countries. So, as a reaction to high inflation differentials the lira must depreciate against the basket of currencies so that RER remain stable. During the financial crisis of 2001, the lira experienced a radical devaluation. After reaching an index value of 148 by the end of December 2000, the RER index declined to close to the 100 level during the 2001 crisis (April 2001), an almost 50 percent devaluation. During the crisis, the rate of inflation exceeded 100 percent for a time, and therefore, a record level of inflation differential between major countries emerged. This differential and other risk factors were reflected in the RER at the time.

Since then, however, Turkey's inflation has declined more than tenfold, and other major fragility factors also declined. With the exception of some conjuncture-driven fluctuations, Turkey attracted a big volume of capital inflows parallel to the declining risk factors and emerging pull factors such as long-term-oriented high yields other than interest gains throughout the years since 2002. This resulted indirectly in the overvaluation of the lira in the same period.

What is even more striking is that this so-called appreciation of the lira took place in an environment where almost all categories of interest rates have declined dramatically since 2002 (Figure 2). Despite this, Turkey's interest rates remained higher due to several other reasons. Turkey's comparatively higher policy as well as borrowing rates are determined by a set of factors including inflation, the savings-investment gap and some other risk factors. Due to this set of factors, Turkey's interest rates remained comparatively higher. This high rate, coupled with some other long-term-oriented pull factors, has resulted in a large amount of capital inflows for Turkey particularly since 2004.

Both interest rates and RER are determined by many complex factors in Turkey, and in that regard, a single factor-oriented explanation for the developments in these parameters is quite dangerous. In order to achieve lower rates of interest and more stable and competitive exchange rates, Turkey should continue its efforts to eliminate the structural factors that are causing the current complaints.
