

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

TURKEY

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

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SUMMARY of the Report

Political NEWS

Kurdish politician Zana was sentenced to three years in prison by a Turkish court for spreading terrorist propaganda. Seven members of the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) were reportedly killed by the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) during operations carried out in Hakkari. Turkish commandos have captured nine pirates aboard a boat in the Gulf of Aden, the Turkish Armed Forces said in a statement on Thursday.

An executive of the ruling Justice & Development (AK) Party said on Monday that the constitutional amendment bill was re-opened to signature. Turkish government's constitutional amendment bill includes 26 articles. The bill envisages amendments to 23 articles of the Constitution, and abolition of the provisional Article 15 of the Constitution. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) is now certain that the CHP, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) will not support the package. However, the AK Party believes a significant number of deputies from these parties will vote in favor of the package. Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç has claimed that the package will get yea votes from at least 20 deputies from the CHP and the MHP. The CHP needs the signatures of 110 deputies to take the package to the Constitutional Court, which does not seem possible at this time. The party needs 13 more signatures than it has deputies.

The realization that the CHP will not be able to block the package from passing in Parliament has also lead Baykal to announce that his party would be willing to back the AK Party's package if two proposed articles that make changes to the structure of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) and the Constitutional Court and a third one that seeks to make it more difficult to shut down political parties by giving Parliament a say in whether a party can face closure charges at the Constitutional Court facing are dropped. However, these three articles are the core of the package and in and of themselves the reason why the package was prepared by the government.

Observers also note that Baykal's proposal to pass the package together with the AK Party in Parliament is an indirect acceptance of the current Parliament's mandate to make constitutional changes. Earlier, Baykal had claimed that the current Parliament -- the 23rd Parliament -- does not have the authority to make constitutional changes because both the AK Party and the BDP, previously the Democratic Society Party (DTP), had been subjects of Constitutional Court trials seeking to shut them down. The AK Party, which currently has 337 seats in Parliament, needs 330 votes to get the package referred to a referendum and 367 votes to have it passed in Parliament without the need for a referendum.

Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, the leader of the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party, SUPPORTED THE REFORM PACKAGE and said also the process is advancing in the right direction.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said on Tuesday while delivered a speech at the Sarajevo Business Forum in Bosnia and Herzegovina that the government had never thought of holding early elections.

İstanbul Deputy Chief Public Prosecutor Turan Çolakkadı signaled on Thursday that they would detain the 25 generals and admirals who were to be detained during Monday's operations which are related with the Sledgehammer (Balyoz) coup plot if necessary.

According to the Sledgehammer plot, made public by a newspaper in January, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) had a systematic plan to create chaos in society by bombing mosques and attacking popular museums with Molotov cocktails. The attacks' desired result was to increase

pressure on the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government for failing to provide security to its citizens. The attacks were to eventually lead to a military coup. The plan was drawn up in 2003 and discussed at a seminar held at the General Staff's Selimiye barracks in March of that year.

Turkish President Abdullah Gül praised Doctors Worldwide (DWW) for their tireless efforts in 24 countries around the world, and particularly in Africa, during his meeting with DWW officials on Tuesday, a statement from the Presidency reported.

GEO-STRATEGIC NEWS

Turkey's Support to Iran over Nuclear Development Program

Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan has voiced scepticism over the effectiveness of any further sanctions against Iran in the dispute over its nuclear programme, saying he still supported a diplomatic solution.

Turkey PM Erdogan visit details to Bosnia and Herzegovina

During two-day visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey Prime Minister Erdogan said, "Turkey is aware of this historic duty," he told the audience. "Without providing peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there can be no peace and stability in the Balkans,".

The country is divided in two mini-states, one for the Serbs, the other shared by Bosniaks and Croats. The two are linked by a common government.

Erdoğan, who was one of the foreign dignitaries that attended a major conference for foreign investors on Tuesday, firmly opposed a possible division of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He also lauded the move by the Serbian Parliament last Wednesday to apologize for the bloody Srebrenica massacre, stating that the resolution is an important step towards reconciliation between the two nations.

The Sarajevo Business Forum offers over 600 businessmen from mainly Muslim countries and global organizations investment opportunities in the energy sector, food production industry, tourism and infrastructure. In addition to Erdoğan, Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos and leaders from the region also attended the forum.

During his visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Erdoğan also attended the opening of a new building of International University of Sarajevo, in which 900 out of a total of 1,300 students are Turkish.

Turkish foreign ministry condemns statement of Israeli FM

Turkish Foreign Ministry condemned on Tuesday the statements of Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman against Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

The ministry's spokesman Burak Özügergin said that the statements of Lieberman --made after the criticisms of Erdoğan against Israel's attacks and attitude about Jerusalem-- were beyond the limits, inappropriate and groundless. Israel's Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman has suggested that Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reflects attitudes similar to those of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

Turkish envoy travels to Armenia

An official says a top Turkish envoy is in Armenia for talks on the delayed ratification of agreements to improve ties. As Turkish and Armenian leaders prepare to meet with U.S. President Barack Obama in Washington, Turkish Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu is making the rounds in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan sent Sinirlioğlu as a special envoy to Baku on Friday to convey a letter to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. The Turkish diplomat previously held high-level talks in Yerevan on Wednesday.

Turkey attempts to breathe life into Armenia reconciliation process

A senior Turkish diplomat arrived in Yerevan yesterday to deliver a letter from Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan as a process of rapprochement aimed to restore relations between the two estranged neighbors has come to a stalemate.

Israel main threat to peace in Middle East, says Erdoğan

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has continued his criticism of Israel, saying the Jewish state is the main threat to peace in the Middle East.

Turkey hopes better Greek ties lower defense costs

Turkey and Greece say they hope efforts to improve their relations will lead to reduced defense spending in both countries.

The countries have been at odds for years over airspace boundaries and flight procedures over the Aegean Sea that forms the border between them. For decades they have engaged in an arms race and their warplanes often engage in mock dogfights. He says Turkey's prime minister will visit Greece next month. Greece is suffering from a severe economic crisis and plans to cut defense spending in 2011 and 2012.

Turkey and Greece an Agreement on five new Confidence Building Measures

Turkey and Greece have reached an agreement on five new Confidence Building Measures during the visit of Greek Deputy Foreign Minister Dimitris Droutsas to Ankara on Thursday.

Below is a list of the new Confidence Building Measures:

- 1- Turkey and Greece will jointly host educational programs at centers of Partnership for Peace with the contributions of other countries involved in the partnership.
- 2- Students of War Academies will receive seminars from commanders of the two countries.
- 3- A Greek military division/brigade will be assigned to the 3rd Army Corps and a Turkish military division/brigade will be assigned to the Greek NATO Army Corps for educational purposes.
- 4- Mutual visits will take between the War Academies of the two countries.
- 5- War Academies will conduct joint scientific events. They will hold joint academic programs, seminars, and symposiums and publish articles for the military magazines/newspapers.

Turkey and Greece declared on Thursday that the new Confidence Building Measures will strengthen bilateral relations.

Washington's atomic weapons on Turkish soil to come to the agenda

An agreement reached between US President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on March 26 on the terms of a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) is expected to bring to the agenda US Cold War-era atomic weapons located at Turkey's Incirlik Air Base as well as in some other European countries.

Azerbaijan may bring up military intervention in Nagorno Karabakh issue, executive

An Azerbaijani presidential executive said on Friday that Azerbaijan might bring a military intervention on the table regarding Nagorno Karabakh dispute if peaceful means failed.

Saudi Arabia to build 25 schools in quake-stricken Elazığ province

Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek on Friday said that Saudi Arabia will build 25 school buildings in the eastern province of Elazığ, which was hit by a magnitude 6.0 earthquake nearly three weeks ago.

Talat: Election loss would kill Cyprus peace talks

Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat has warned that talks to reunify ethnically divided Cyprus would collapse if he loses to a hard-liner in elections this month.

Talat said a failure of the talks would scuttle Turkey's bid to join the European Union, harm relations between Greece and Turkey, fan instability and undermine economic growth in the eastern Mediterranean.

"This will be a disaster not only for Turkish Cypriots, but also for Turkey and for the Turkish-European Union progress. It will be, in total, a big retreat for the Turkish side," Talat told The Associated Press in an interview Friday aboard his campaign bus as it toured remote villages in northern Cyprus.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Turkey's annual inflation figures, announced as 8.58 percent for March 2010, are in line with expectations, an economist said on Monday. Turkey's industrial production rose in February compared to a month earlier, strengthening expectations indicating that the country's economy grew more than 10 percent in the first quarter of 2010. The Finance Ministry announced on Saturday that it plans to impose equal withholding taxes on foreigners and Turkish nationals for bonds and investment funds. Turkey is likely to have a good tourism season this year if Spain and Greece do not reduce prices, a travel agency official said on Tuesday

Six labor confederations made a joint decision on Monday to celebrate this year's May Day at Taksim Square.

Turkish Confederation of Labor Unions (Turk-İş) President Mustafa Kumlu said a group of six labor confederations including Türk-İş has decided to have a mass gathering at Taksim Square this year, as they tried to do in 2009. Last year, protesters fought with police and eventually gained access to the square. In 1977, unknown assailants attacked during May Day celebrations in Taksim, firing shots from buildings around the square, leaving 34 dead and 136 injured.

SOCIAL NEWS

Turkish police have rounded up nine more suspects, including a former international footballer, in connection with a match-fixing probe, the Anatolia news agency reported. The Turkish Soccer Federation (TFF) was allegedly involved in match fixing in an attempt to enable Turkey to take part in the 1996 UEFA European Football Championship, Euro 96, the Vatan daily reported yesterday. Police detained 24 suspects, including famous former soccer player Rıdvan Dilmen, in a raid on Tuesday for wiretapping businessmen and celebrities. The National Committee on Cigarettes and Health, or SSUK, organizes a conference in Istanbul that brings together academics and experts from Turkey, Hong Kong and India. Using facts and figures, they argue that Turkey's smoking ban has not led to more cigarette smuggling and call for further cigarette tax hikes in the country. Turkey shaken by increase in youth suicides. Three students attempted to commit suicide over the past three days as a result of poor performance in school in the provinces of İstanbul, Erzurum and İzmir. About 100,000 pink balloons cascaded down on people walking on İstiklal Street yesterday for April Fool's Day. The balloons had smiley faces on them and read "Smile İstanbul.

POLITICAL NEWS

Turkish court jails Leyla Zana to 3 years over pro-PKK speech

Thursday, 08 April 2010 22:38

World Bulletin

Kurdish politician Zana was sentenced to three years in prison by a Turkish court for spreading terrorist propaganda.

Kurdish politician Leyla Zana was sentenced to three years in prison by a Turkish court on Thursday, the latest in a series of convictions against her for spreading terrorist propaganda. State-run Anatolian news agency said she was convicted by the court in the southeastern Turkish city of Diyarbakir for speeches she made at a Kurdish political congress and a protest meeting in 2008.

Zana and her lawyer did not attend the hearing. They were not immediately available to comment on the verdict.

Courts in Turkey have imposed a series of prison sentences on Zana in recent years under anti-terrorism laws, but she is still at liberty as these cases are at the appeal stage.

She drew international attention in 1994 when she was convicted by a state security court of having links to the separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militant group after she spoke in Kurdish at her parliamentary oath ceremony.

She was released in 2004 after Turkey's appeals court overturned her conviction.

More than 40,000 people have been killed in the conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK since the rebels took up arms in 1984.

UN refugee agency wishes to see an empty Makhmour camp

EMINE KART ANKARA

06 April 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The United Nations' refugee agency strongly believes that it has a role to play in the evacuation of the UN-run Makhmour refugee camp in northern Iraq and is patiently waiting for Turkish authorities to eventually seek their expertise in resolving the issue.

"The Makhmour camp is a very sensitive issue, but it doesn't mean that because it is sensitive we should not say anything," Michel Gaudé, the outgoing representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Ankara, told Today's Zaman in an interview held last week, only a few days before his departure from Turkey.

More than 10,000 Turkish Kurds who fled Turkey in the 1990s at the height of clashes between the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Turkish state are now settled in the Makhmour camp. Ankara insists that the camp must be closed down, saying it has turned into a training ground for the PKK. An agreement for the voluntary repatriation of the refugees was drafted in 2004, but talks to finalize and put it into effect have failed to materialize.

In April 2007, a Geneva meeting of officials from Turkey, the United Nations and Iraq -- which US officials attended as observers -- to discuss the future of residents of the camp ended without a concrete outcome, as the sides failed to agree on where the Makhmour camp refugees should be settled in Iraq if they refused to return to Turkey.

"Once a colleague of mine was interviewed by a journalist, and he was asked what the best memory he had of his UNHCR career was. And he said, in a provocative manner, it was the day when he set a refugee camp on fire -- because the camp was empty and useless after the repatriation.

So I wish one day soon it will be the same for Makhmour and that all the civilians, and I'm insisting on the fact that we are dealing with a civilian population, not with any other component, not with terrorists, not with armed people, but with the civilian population -- we hope that they will be given the possibility to return in safety and dignity and reintegrate in the country. I wished I had been able to set an empty Makhmour camp on fire before leaving," Gaudé said. Since November 2008, when a trilateral mechanism was formed between Iraq, Turkey and the US in order to combat the PKK, the Makhmour issue was dealt with by this mechanism almost solely as a security issue.

A small group of Makhmour residents returned home in October as a goodwill gesture to support the government's ambitious Kurdish initiative -- a democratization plan aimed at expanding the rights of Turkey's Kurds.

Last week, it emerged that the Diyarbakır Chief Prosecutor's Office has drafted an indictment after investigating the return of 34 people from the Kandil Mountains and the Makhmour refugee camp.

The indictment pointed out that the Makhmour refugee camp is under the supervision of the UN, "but it is understood that the camp is under the control of the terror organization as information obtained from the people who came from that camp indicated, and it is the terror organization that decides who will go to Turkey from that camp."

When reminded that the UNHCR has been excluded from the resolution process regarding Makhmour, Gaudé was careful in his remarks. Noting that the UNHCR has open and friendly dialogue mainly with the Foreign Ministry on the issue, Gaudé said: "As the UNHCR, our obsession, and I'm insisting on the word 'obsession,' is to find a solution. Worldwide we have plenty of reasons to be frustrated because there are situations where we don't find solutions. "For us and I think for many people including Turkey the best solution for the civilian population in Makhmour, 13,000 people, the best solution is to return home, peacefully. And we think that we have a role to play because we have been involved with this group while they have been in exile in northern Iraq ... So these people are your compatriots; the best place for them to live is certainly not a refugee camp. The best place is at home. If an earlier timeframe will be defined that will allow them to return peacefully as normal citizens of a big country like Turkey, we will be happy. If we can help, we'll be happier."

Recently, a Turkish Foreign Ministry official stated that for Turkey "the Makhmour camp is associated with a place which was turned into a safe haven for terrorists," and thus "Turkey's priority regarding Makhmour is terrorism." When reminded of those remarks and asked whether he felt satisfied with Turkish authorities contacts with the UNHCR, Gaudé said: "The situation is developing so maybe in a few months we will be asked to help, and our purpose is to help. We don't want to be a problem; we want to be a solution ... We have been asked for help by the population in Makhmour; they want us to be with them at the time of any return."

Turkey to continue on path of growth, says Erdoğan

Thursday, April 8, 2010

PARIS – Anatolia News Agency

HURRIYAT

Turkey's primary aim is to continue its encouraging growth performances, the country's prime minister said late Wednesday during a trip to Paris.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said Turkey had successfully overcome its test during the global financial crisis.

"We will continue to be cautious. We aim to go on with the pleasing growth performances in 2010 and beyond," Erdoğan said during a meeting at the Movement of the French Enterprises, or MEDEF, in Paris.

Turkey's finance sector grew 8.5 percent in 2009, said Erdoğan. Turkey was the only country among the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, or OECD, which did not require any intervention into financial sector.

Erdoğan said the Istanbul Stock Exchange's benchmark ISE-100 topped European stock exchanges and was seventh in the world.

"The ISE-100 broke a historic record two days ago, and all these positive developments occurred thanks to stability and confidence," Erdoğan said.

Turkey's economy grew 6 percent in the final quarter of last year and ranked above other OECD countries with that growth. However, Turkey's economy shrank 4.7 percent in 2009 due to stagnation from the previous quarters, he said.

International organizations confirmed that Turkey would be among the most rapidly growing economies in 2010-2011, he said, adding that international rating organizations had changed Turkey's outlook to positive.

"Our growth target for 2010 is 3.5 percent," Erdoğan said. "But many organizations like the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and the OECD forecast growth above this rate [of 4.5 percent]." Turkey's net public debt stock's proportion to the gross domestic product is 45.5 percent, which is below European Union averages.

Touching on Turkey's exports, Erdoğan said Turkey earned \$102 billion from exports in 2009 and added that Turkish-French trade volume was 10 billion euros during this period.

Noting that this figure was insufficient, Erdoğan said Turkey would try and raise this trade volume to 15 billion euros.

There are roughly 900 French companies operating in Turkey with French investments in Turkey totaling roughly 438 million euros last year.

"France ranks third among other countries with the amount of investment it implements in Turkey," Erdoğan said.

Turkish investors have also started to enter French market, he said, adding that Turkish and French companies could cooperate in the "green energy" sector.

"We aim to contribute to energy security in Europe as we ensure our own energy security," Erdoğan said.

On the subject of natural gas, the prime minister said he believed Gaz de France would soon join gas distribution tenders in Ankara and Istanbul.

Seven terrorists killed in operations in Hakkari

02 April 2010, Friday

TODAY'S ZAMAN WITH WIRES İSTANBUL

Seven members of the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) were reportedly killed by the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) during operations carried out in Hakkari.

The operations were launched following the deaths of three soldiers in a land mine explosion on Tuesday and are continuing around Hantepe, in the Çukurca district of Hakkari. The TSK is after PKK members whose positions were determined by thermal cameras late on Wednesday.

Though not officially confirmed, the İhlas News Agency has reported that specially trained soldiers with the Çukurca 20th Gendarmerie Border Brigade Command chased a group of terrorists and have managed to kill seven thus far. Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.

Turkish commandos seize 9 pirates in Gulf of Aden

02 April 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish commandos have captured nine pirates aboard a boat in the Gulf of Aden, the Turkish Armed Forces said in a statement on Thursday.

The frigate Gelibolu, serving as part of a NATO anti-piracy mission, intercepted the pirate skiff while monitoring the security corridor for merchant shipping 80 miles from the coast on Wednesday, the statement said.

"Commandos performed manoeuvres to intercept the boat and captured nine pirates on board," it added.

The Turkish Armed Forces' website published photos of the pirates at sea in their skiff and later, after their capture, holding their hands above their heads.

Seaborne gangs have increased their attacks in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden in recent months, making tens of millions of dollars in ransoms from seizing ships, including tankers and dry bulkers. Several vessels have been hijacked this week alone.

Eyüp education delegation embarks on Southeast Asia tour, hails Turkish schools

04 April 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Come whoever you are'

'Come, come again, whoever you are, come!

Heathen, fire worshipper or idolatrous, come!

Come even if you broke your penitence a hundred times,

Ours is the portal of hope, come as you are.'

Mevlana

delegation from the Eyüp Education Directorate recently embarked on a tour of Southeast Asia, which took them to Malaysia and Indonesia -- where they visited schools in the Western and Central Java regions and signed many new sister school agreements.

Having already inked similar deals with several countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Japan, Macedonia and the United States, the Eyüp Local Education Authority recently signed 41 new agreements with schools in Java.

Aimed at boosting intercultural relations between Turkey and other countries, head of the Eyüp Education Directorate GÜsamettin Erdoğan set up an education team led by Eyüp District Governor Osman Kaymak.

The delegation also included school principals, teachers and Parent-Teacher Association board members from several Eyüp schools. In an effort to support the presence of Turkish schools in foreign countries and strengthen relations between Turkey and the Indonesian people, the Turkish team set off for Indonesia.

The Eyüp Education Directorate delegation attended the 2nd Pribadi Social Science Olympiad (POIS) Science Fair that was jointly organized by the Pribadi Bilingual Boarding School and the Association of Social and Economic Solidarity with Pacific Countries (PASİAD) in Bandung on Jan. 28-29.

The science fair, which hosted 150 stands divided into various categories such as mathematics, robotics, physics and English, lasted two days. During the fair the Turkish stands presented cultural handicrafts by students from the Eyüp Informal Education Center and their teachers Bilge Özbütün and Şükran Uç, attracting much attention from locals.

Hundreds of attendees were fascinated by a live ebru (paper marbling) exhibition led by Eyüp Topçular Primary School teacher Esen Akgöl. Many people were interested in learning the magic world of ebru and asked for private courses. Akgöl left behind all her marbling equipment and an

information booklet at the school, promising to return soon to teach students how to control the water and the colors.

After the fair, the Turkish team visited several local schools, including Turkish schools in the area. It was clearly evident that the standard of education at the Turkish schools towered above all the rest; these schools are very prestigious in Indonesia, so it comes as no surprise that many Indonesians work hard to send their children to them.

There are many similarities between Indonesians and Turks. Like Turks, Indonesians are very kind, modest and warm-hearted. During the Eyüp delegation's visit, upon the invitation of high-ranking Indonesian education officials, academics and school headmasters, it became crystal clear that Turks are welcomed warmly and hospitably wherever they go.

Many thanks to Turkish schools

The Turkish staff at the Turkish schools helped the Eyüp delegation with transportation, translation and accommodation. The headmaster of the Pribadi Bilingual Boarding School in Bandung, Yenal Aksoy, in particular played a major role making the visit a huge success. He was the main organizer of the science fair and invited the Turkish team and catered to all its needs.

The Eyüp delegation had the opportunity to see first hand how Turkish schools abroad spread Turkish culture and education. "So far, Eyüp has signed a total of 140 agreements with sister schools all over the world. One of the main goals of these agreements is to emphasize that all the people of the world are brothers and sisters. These sister school projects are peace projects. They lead to peace and love in the world," Erdoğan said.

"We wholeheartedly believe that world peace can be achieved through love and brotherhood. If we can extend love and brotherhood through these sister school agreements, then it means we are successful and this gives us satisfaction. We have experienced great hospitality in the places we visited and we will continue these projects with many more schools all around the world," he added.

Another one of the team's aims was to boost the morale of Turkish staff living and devoting their lives to spreading Turkish language and culture abroad. With the support of the Turkish delegation behind them, they felt greatly honored and their confidence soared.

In one very interesting event, Ömer Demir, the principal of the Semesta Bilingual Boarding School in Semarang, had been trying to establish a Turkish primary school in the region but could not get permission from the directorate of education in Central Java. During a dinner held in honor of the Turkish education team upon their arrival in Central Java, education directorate head Kunto Nugroho promised to solve the issue.

As a matter of fact, warm relations between the two countries date back many years. When a powerful earthquake hit the Indonesian island of Sumatra in 2007, flattening hundreds of buildings and killing at least 70 people, and when a tsunami struck Banda Aceh in 2004, killing nearly 300,000 and leaving millions homeless, assistance sent by Turks and Turkish aid associations to heal the wounds of disaster victims brought the two nations much closer.

Memorable trip to Malaysia

Before flying to Indonesia, the Eyüp Education Directorate delegation stopped in Malaysia and visited a village school in Kuala Lumpur.

The delegation also paid a visit to the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur with the help of a Turkish academic, Serdar Demirel, who works there. The university educates its students in science, literature, medicine and all other fields with an Islamic perspective. Although

Turkey served as one of the founders of this university, established in 1983, it does not recognize diplomas issued by it.

More school guidance counselors needed for adolescents

04 April 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Many young people going through puberty sink deep into depression because of various social, family or mental problems, and a number of Turkish experts believe the country does not have a satisfactory number of school guidance counselors to cope with the teenagers' problems.

Berrin Çelik, a guidance counselor and philosophy teacher at the FEM Dershaneleri (private schools that offer college prep courses) in İstanbul's Avcılar district, explained that school guidance counselors started to appear in Turkey's education system in the 1950s. Speaking to Sunday's Zaman, Çelik said she believes Turkey attaches great importance to education; however, the fact is that there are only one or two guidance counselors in each school. In her view, guidance counseling (rehberlik) is a process in which a school guidance counselor helps students to recognize themselves as individuals living in society, develop their skills, solve their social, mental and family problems and choose the best solutions.

"School guidance counselors play a crucial role in shaping the next generation. However, unfortunately they have not been actively involved in state-run schools despite the fact that private schools are focusing more on these counselors to help students with their problems," Çelik said. Families used to come to school in the past to find out from the teachers how their children were performing, but a growing number of parents no longer attend -- an indication of the growing indifference parents are showing towards their children, Çelik said.

According to Esra Altunsoy Adıgüzel, a psychologist, during puberty, when children rapidly change, not only biologically but also psychologically, many adolescents may face many significant problems on the journey towards becoming adults.

"Young people start to show a lack of appreciation of their parents' attitude and spend time with their close friends when they reach the age of puberty. They need some people around them to consult and share their problems with, so Turkey should have more guidance counselor in its schools to help children through what is the most difficult period for every individual," Adıgüzel noted.

"Turkey should have appointed psychologists to schools as well as more school guidance counselors. School guidance counselors should deal with students' problems regarding their educational lives, while psychologists in schools should tend more towards solving students' mental, social and family problems," said Serra Ağırakça, a psychologist working at a medical center in İstanbul. Ağırakça noted that some institutions will start to train people to become school guidance counselors as a result of a Ministry of Education directive. Ağırakça said the country is aware of its lack in this area but that only training people for a year to become school guidance counselors wasn't the right way to meet this deficiency. People who graduate from four-year psychology department courses should be appointed as school guidance counselors rather than those only receiving one or two years' education on the subject. Ağırakça noted that some students may be drug users and have very serious problems. If there is a satisfactory number of effective school guidance counselors, many students may be able to leave their bad habits behind to become good citizens.

Teenage problems being solved in online chat

Consultancy center Genç Ruh Medical Advice Center was established in 2001 in İstanbul's Şişli district and is a place where many psychologists have given psychological support to young people between the ages of 15 and 21. The center has started a new scheme in which young people chat on the Internet to psychologists to try and solve their various problems. "Ask your questions and consult, you don't need to say your name" is the center's slogan. Twelve psychologists at the center give young children psychological support between 4 a.m. and 12 p.m. on weekdays, and 12 a.m. and 12 p.m. at the weekends on the Internet without charge. Speaking to Sunday's Zaman, Alper Aksoy, one of the psychologists at the center, believes it may contribute to solving young people's problems as many young people are spending their time in front of their computers. Aksoy added that they are continually cooperating with the Ministry of Education to carry out projects regarding young people's problems.

"We did a good job by opening TRT Arabic channel"

05 April 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish State Minister & Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç said that they did a good job by opening Turkish state-run TRT Arabic Channel.

Speaking in İstanbul on Sunday regarding the opening of the TV channel, Arınç said, "we, as the peoples of the same geography, culture, history and belief, will be able to reach each other through TRT's channel."

Arınç said that they had been working on TRT Arabic for the last one year, adding that they would reach more than 300 million people through the channel.

TRT launched "TRT Arabic" on April 4 to meet demands of the Arabic speaking people in Turkey as well as concerns of Middle Eastern countries.

TRT Arabic also intends to reach the Arab world of 350 million people by addressing 22 Arab countries.

The channel will broadcast in Arabic round the clock, and feature women and children's programs, floor shows, documentaries and news.

Most of the programmes will be presented by people from Arabic-speaking countries.

Three different satellites, Turksat 3A, Arapsat and Nilsat, will provide transmissions for the TRT Arabic.

Venice Commission sees no problem in voting on reforms as a package

05 April 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Presenting the constitutional amendments announced last month for public approval as a package may very well be in line with the Venice Commission's criteria for holding referendums, according to accounts given by both the commission and government officials.

At the heart of the referendum debate lies whether the 29 proposed constitutional amendments should be voted on individually or as a package. The package stipulates that after approval by Parliament and the consent of the president, all the changes should be presented for a public vote as a single package. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said putting each article to a vote may very well confuse the voters when they go to the polls.

The Venice Commission, which is the Council of Europe's advisory body on constitutional matters, says it does not see any problem with a referendum on the whole package as long as there is an “intrinsic connection between the various parts of each question put to the vote.” The commission notes, however, that this requirement may be waived if a total or substantial revision of the chapters of the Constitution is being attempted.

In a revised opinion on the Code of Good Practice on Referendums issued by the commission in 2007, it was argued that the unity of content rule applies except in a total revision of the Constitution. “The revision of several chapters of a text at the same time is equivalent to a total revision,” the report stated.

Pierre Garrone, head of the Venice Commission's Division of Elections and Referendums, explained to Today's Zaman that a substantive revision involving a number of chapters may be regarded as equivalent to a total revision, which allows presenting the package to the voters as a whole. Recalling the explanatory report on referendums issued by the commission, Garrone said: “The requirement for unity of content does not apply in total revision of the Constitution.

Substantial revision of a text, involving a number of chapters, may be regarded as being equivalent to total revision.” Footnote 21 in the explanatory report makes it clear that “the option of classifying a revision involving several chapters as a total revision may seem like a means of circumventing the unity of content rule. This overlooks the fact that a total constitutional revision often involves a more complicated process than a partial revision.”

Therefore, if the 29 proposed amendments in the constitutional reform package are considered a substantial revision of the Constitution, which most jurists in Turkey argue is the case, there is no need to look for “unity of content or intrinsic links.” Both the opinions and the explanatory report issued by the Venice Commission make it clear that the amendments can be submitted to a vote as single package.

Government officials argue that the amendments do meet the more stringent requirement for “unity of content or intrinsic links.” Parliamentary Constitutional Commission President Ahmet İyimaya told Today's Zaman that all the proposed changes are closely related to each other.

“They are broadening fundamental human rights in the first place as well as ensuring plurality, transparency, accountability and diversity in high judicial bodies such as the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors [HSYK] and the Constitutional Court,” he said. “In a nutshell, these substantial revisions aim to increase democratic standards in the EU-hopeful country,” he added.

The new package of reforms to the Constitution, which is a legacy of the 1980 military coup, includes measures that increase the standards of democracy and the rule of law and protect individual rights with special emphasis on the expansion of rights for women and children. It allows individual complaints to Turkey's Constitutional Court after all domestic remedies are exhausted while ensuring that civil servants have the right of collective bargaining. It would make disbanding political parties more difficult by requiring consensus within Parliament prior to opening a case against any party.

The reform package also seeks to put anyone accused of crimes against the state, including military officers, on trial in civilian courts rather than in military courts and allow officers fired by the Supreme Military Council (YAŞ) to appeal the decision. Judicial review will also be available for decisions made by the HSYK, a key council that oversees all prosecutors and judges in the country. The size of both the HSYK and the Constitutional Court will be increased to meet the challenge of growing caseloads.

Cemil Çiçek, deputy prime minister and government spokesman, told Today's Zaman that all articles in the constitutional reform package are closely related to the enhancement of democratic

governance in Turkey's institutions. "That is the reason, for example, we did not put 2-B land reform in the package," he said. Two-B land reform, also known as the forestry law, which was rejected by the Constitutional Court many times, seeks to utilize land that no longer had the features of a forest as of Dec. 31, 1981. It would have made this land available for farming or animal husbandry or construction in urban areas.

Constitutional amendment bill re-opened to signature

05 April 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

An executive of the ruling Justice & Development (AK) Party said on Monday that the constitutional amendment bill was re-opened to signature.

AK Party group deputy chairman Suat Kılıç told reporters that several deputies withdrew their signatures from the bill so that the bill was opened to signature again.

Thus, discussions regarding the signatures on the bill would end, added Kılıç.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT BILL

Turkish government's constitutional amendment bill includes 26 articles.

The bill envisages amendments to 23 articles of the Constitution, and abolition of the provisional Article 15 of the Constitution.

It also paves the way for trial of parliament speaker, chief of general staff, and senior commanders by the High Tribunal on charges of crimes they commit regarding their positions.

According to the bill, the Constitutional Court will consist of 17 permanent members. It actually has 11 permanent and four associate members.

Turkish parliament will elect three members in a secret vote, whereas the president will elect ten members from candidates of several state institutions and choose four other himself.

The Constitutional Court will not be comprised of three chambers, which was an amendment foreseen in the previous bill prepared by the AK Party last week.

The bill also limits the term in office of Constitutional Court members. It says members will be elected for 12 years, and no one can be elected to membership twice.

Also, citizens can make individual applications to the Constitutional Court.

The bill will also abolish the ban on right to general strike; paves the way for a citizen to become a member of more than one trade union, and the civil servants and other public officials the right to collective bargaining.

According to the bill, the Court of Accounts will make the financial audit of political parties.

A lawsuit to close a political party can only be filed with the votes of two-thirds of a committee to be set up by five members from each political parties represented at the parliament. The

lawsuit can be filed under a request of the chief prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals.

The Constitutional Court will not decide whether or not to close down a political party, but it can only decide whether to partially or to totally deprive a party of state assistance according to the importance of the act in question.

Under the bill, no one can lose his/her deputyship.

The bill also paves the way for trial of decisions of the Supreme Military Council.

Military courts will only be charged to deal with military crimes committed by military personnel. General courts will deal with crimes against state security and constitutional order, and civilians cannot be tried by military courts except war time.

According to the bill, the structure of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) will change.

The permanent members of the board will climb to 21 from 7, and the number of its associate members will rise to 10 from 5. They will be elected for four years, and can be re-elected after their terms in office end.

The head of the board will continue to be the justice minister. Also, the undersecretary of the justice ministry will take part in the board.

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.

Also, the bill adds three provisional articles to the Constitution, one of which makes the amendments to the structure of Constitutional Court also valid in ongoing cases.

The actual associate members of the Constitutional Court will become permanent members.

If the bill is to be put to referendum, it will be voted as a whole.

The government made public the constitutional amendment bill on March 22. Opposition parties which are sceptical of the government bill, have severely criticized the attempt, and said the move aimed at taking over and politicising the judiciary.

The Supreme Court, the Council of State and the Supreme Court of Judges have also severely criticised the bill and accused the government of attempting to infiltrate into the judiciary.

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

The bill needs to get 367 votes in order to be adopted. If it receives somewhere between 330 and 366 votes the government may carry it to referendum. If it receives less than 330 the bill will be rejected.

AK Party holds 337 seats in the parliament. However the parliament speakers are not allowed to vote in the parliament which reduces potential votes in favour of the bill to 336.

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

Desperate CHP to organize mass protests against reforms

05 April 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Having realized that the government's constitutional reform package, which was submitted to Parliament last week, will likely get enough votes to be referred to a referendum, the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) has decided to launch a campaign calling on the nation to vote against the package, organizing public demonstrations protesting the reforms. Talks in Parliament's Constitutional Commission on the 29-article constitutional reform package are due to start this Wednesday. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) is now certain that the CHP, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) will not support the package.

However, the AK Party believes a significant number of deputies from these parties will vote in favor of the package. Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç has claimed that the package will get yea votes from at least 20 deputies from the CHP and the MHP.

The CHP needs the signatures of 110 deputies to take the package to the Constitutional Court, which does not seem possible at this time. The party needs 13 more signatures than it has

deputies. It has talked to the 11 independent deputies in Parliament and the six Democratic Left Party (DSP) deputies, but the talks have not yielded any results. Instead, the CHP will try to take the package to the streets with rallies and protests in a public campaign against the changes.

Republican rallies again

CHP leader Deniz Baykal last week started touring Anatolian towns and cities. He will spend this coming week talking to civil society organizations. The CHP leader has decided to organize a series of rallies akin to the republican rallies of 2007 against the AK Party government.

However, a lower number of civil society organizations and unions are expected to support the CHP this time since the package also includes improvements to the legal standing of professional unions.

Baykal has also contacted groups and circles that are opposed to the constitutional package. For this first step, the CHP has talked to the honorary president of the Supreme Court of Appeals, Sabih Kanadoğlu, and the former head of the Judges and Prosecutors Association (YARSAV), Ömer Faruk Eminağaoğlu, who have already declared war on the package. Kanadoğlu said in a recent speech at a panel discussion held in Manisa, where nationalist votes have been on the rise, "The Turkish nation will not swallow this pill because the nation is aware of its consequences."

CHP Manisa deputy Şahin Mengü, who has been closely following the trial of Ergenekon -- a clandestine gang charged with plotting to overthrow the government -- has been frequently speaking in defense of the suspects.

Baykal's conditions for supporting the package

The realization that the CHP will not be able to block the package from passing in Parliament has also lead Baykal to announce that his party would be willing to back the AK Party's package if two proposed articles that make changes to the structure of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) and the Constitutional Court and a third one that seeks to make it more difficult to shut down political parties by giving Parliament a say in whether a party can face closure charges at the Constitutional Court facing are dropped. However, these three articles are the core of the package and in and of themselves the reason why the package was prepared by the government.

Observers also note that Baykal's proposal to pass the package together with the AK Party in Parliament is an indirect acceptance of the current Parliament's mandate to make constitutional changes. Earlier, Baykal had claimed that the current Parliament -- the 23rd Parliament -- does not have the authority to make constitutional changes because both the AK Party and the BDP, previously the Democratic Society Party (DTP), had been subjects of Constitutional Court trials seeking to shut them down.

The AK Party, which currently has 337 seats in Parliament, needs 330 votes to get the package referred to a referendum and 367 votes to have it passed in Parliament without the need for a referendum. AK Party deputies Zekai Özcan and Yusuf Ziya Erbeç have announced that they will not vote for the package. The AK Party's Mehmet Ali Şahin cannot vote, since he is parliament speaker. The AK Party believes it will lose only three votes, meaning it will have 334 votes. It has talked to the 11 independent deputies in Parliament to minimize the risk of the package not passing the first round, five of whom said they would vote for the package.

The AK Party has sent a notice to all of its deputies asking all of them to be in Ankara between April 13 and April 30, which is when the package is likely to be voted on. If the process goes as planned by the AK Party, a referendum will be held on the package in late June.

Warnings from President Gül

Meanwhile, the AK Party administration has taken the voters' pulse. Polls conducted by three different companies indicate that the package will get the 50 percent it needs in a referendum. The minimum support registered by these polls was 55 percent. Deputy Prime Minister Arınç has said he believes the package will receive 60 percent of the vote.

In related developments, President Abdullah Gül said last week he was not happy about some of the articles in the package, noting that he had pointed these out to Parliament Speaker Şahin. Although Gül did not specify what changes he would like to see, sources say they concern articles that reorganize the structure of the HSYK and the Constitutional Court. Sources say the government is likely to take Gül's suggestions into consideration.

Constitutional amendment will bring democracy, not crisis'

05 April 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

As the government talks to leading organizations of the business world, seeking support for the constitutional amendment package that was submitted to Parliament last week, top business groups in Turkey, including the Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON), the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (TÜSAİD), the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (MÜSİAD) and the Anatolian Lions Businessmen's Association (ASKON), have stressed the need for a new constitution. TUSKON, in particular, has presented the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) with its own suggestions for constitutional reform. Speaking to Today's Zaman, TUSKON President Rızanur Meral said Turkey urgently needs a new constitution that would bring it closer to the level of developed countries.

He also criticized some business circles that had said their main concern was the economy, not the constitutional package. He said constitutional change would not cause a crisis, adding that it would, to the contrary, serve as a great opportunity that would raise the country's democratic standards. Meral said TUSKON would support to all changes that expand freedoms and democracy. He also stated that he expected the package to be passed in Parliament, but said there would be a public vote on the package if this does not happen.

Meral said TUSKON members overwhelmingly support constitutional change. "TUSKON is Turkey's largest civil society organization. There are seven federations, 150 associations and 15,000 businessmen under our roof. We have contacted all of them and observed that they support the proposed changes to the Constitution. Not only TUSKON, but other business organizations support the change."

Sharing TUSKON's views on the current Constitution, Meral said, "We think that our current Constitution is cut too narrowly for Turkey and that it is too weak to carry Turkey. I am seeing a constitution that was drafted under the extraordinary circumstances of the '80s, at a time when the Cold War was determinedly under way and when a foreign policy based on fear was being pursued in Turkey. All segments of society now agree that the Constitution is not compatible with Turkey's new conditions. The need for a new constitution that is more civilian in nature, that includes more freedoms in it and that can respond to the needs of all segments of society is more evident than ever." He said TUSKON supported the government's package as a positive step in the direction of constitutional change. He also stated that the economy and democracy were inextricably linked to one another. "In developed economies, you always have advanced

democracies. We see that when we look at Europe. We, as the business world, say that a Turkey where the law is supreme in its universal sense and content will be a country where people will make plans for the future and invest.”

Meral said TUSKON attached great importance to changes to political party closure rules. “The fact that party closures are between the lips of a single person poses one of the greatest risks to Turkey and to Turkey’s investment opportunities. We have seen this heavily in the past two years. When a party closure case is being heard, foreign investors prefer to wait until the end of the case. We believe that shutting down political parties must be made much more difficult as in advanced democracies so they will not stall foreign and domestic investors’ plans.”

TUSKON’s proposal regarding party closures is to engage Parliament in the process. “A three-fourths majority of Parliament should vote for a party closure case to be launched by the chief prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals in a confidential vote. Parliament, which represents the nation, should be the only decider of party closures.” In the AK Party’s package, five people from each party represented in Parliament would form a body that would vote on a prosecutor’s request to launch a trial against a political party.

TUSKON, Meral stated, firmly believes that military officials should be tried in civilian courts for all crimes except war crimes and issues that are directly related to military service. “We believe that the proposal in the government’s package in this regard is highly appropriate,” he said.

Meral said the amendment in the package regulating appointments to the Constitutional Court needs to be worked on. “The world is changing all the time. This is why we don’t support the requirement of a minimum age of 45 for Constitutional Court members. Twelve years of service on the court is also a lengthy period. In the private sector, there is this concept we call sectoral blindness. This is why many businesses rotate employees to different positions every few years. We think these agencies should also take on a more dynamic structure. The condition of having served for 20 years [in the constitutional package] is also a very harsh prerequisite. We would like this to be lowered to 15.”

TUSKON’s proposed amendments to the Constitution

- Closure of political parties (Article 69): Political party closure trials can be launched with the vote a three-fourth majority in a secret vote in Parliament following a demand from the chief prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals. Party closure decisions are ultimately made by the Constitutional Court.
 - General Staff (Article 117): The authority and responsibility for securing domestic order in times of war lie with the Interior Ministry, which exercises this duty through security forces under it. Social security rights, promotions and disciplinary affairs regarding the security forces personnel including its administrators are decided by the Interior Ministry.
 - Administrative decisions closed to appeal (Article 125): Acts carried out by the president alone, promotion and transfer decisions of the Supreme Military Council (YAS) and the Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors’ (HSYK) appointment, authority and election decisions are outside judicial review.
 - Disciplinary action against public servants (Article 129): All decisions regarding disciplinary action are open to judicial review with the provisions regarding members of the armed forces and judges and prosecutors.
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Former head of bar association criticizes removal of Sledgehammer prosecutors

06 April 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Former İstanbul Bar Association President Yücel Sayman criticized İstanbul Chief Public Prosecutor Aykut Cengiz Engin's decision to remove the prosecutors from the Sledgehammer investigation.

Sayman said on Tuesday Chief Prosecutor Engin should have had exact and serious reasons for their dismissal.

Sayman stated that Engin's reason for dismissing the prosecutors -- they "did not conform to my instructions" -- is not satisfactory.

Sayman added that the chief prosecutor does not have the power to overturn a decision made by the court.

Sayman stated that the searches and arrests that have occurred so far are not influenced by this decision and that the investigation continues.

"The evidence obtained in searches must be submitted to the court. If people are detained, investigations into the allegations against them should be done," he added.

He also explained an alternate judicial process in the investigation, saying newly appointed prosecutors can ask the court for a different decision, which means that those detained may be released.

Sayman also said a chief public prosecutor cannot give an order to security forces by telling them, "You cannot apply a court decision without my consent."

European Liberal Democrats support constitutional reform

06 April 2010, Tuesday

today's zaman

Backing from European officials for Turkey's proposed constitutional reform package is increasing, as the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe in the European Parliament also lent their support to the constitutional amendments, lauding Turkey's modernization.

Speaking to Today's Zaman, Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, the leader of the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party, said she knows the process is advancing in the right direction.

Noting that the swift reforms may make several groups uncomfortable, Neyts-Uyttebroeck said those who do not wish to lose their power will resist this change. Noting that Parliament will decide on the constitutional reform package, Neyts-Uyttebroeck said she hopes work to democratize Turkey will be successful. Neyts-Uyttebroeck, who has visited Turkey four times since 2000, said she has seen how fast progress is being made and added that conclusions made about Turkey based on what is said about it from outside are unsubstantiated. Neyts-Uyttebroeck said those who want to decide about Turkey need to visit and see the atmosphere of tolerance and peace with their own eyes.

Neyts-Uyttebroeck, who has had meetings with ministers, bureaucrats and local administrators throughout Turkey, said anyone visiting the country must visit İstanbul and Ankara but also other cities to see how industry and trade is improving. Stating that Turkey is far more developed in terms of trade and the social and cultural sphere than has been reported, Neyts-Uyttebroeck said she understood this point after visiting Gaziantep. "There is no pressure facing minorities

and various members of religious groups as perceived in the West. I saw all segments of society living together in peace. I am in touch with various groups from society. Those with whom I spoke said they are pleased with the atmosphere of tolerance,” Neyts-Uyttebroeck noted. The head of the European Liberal Democrats said everyone needs to keep their promise about European Union membership negotiations and added that Turkey has undergone much development over the years.

Meanwhile, Neyts-Uyttebroeck and Irish Minister of European Affairs Dick Roche attended a dinner organized by the Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON), which had invited them to Turkey. TUSKON President Rızanur Meral and members of the board of directors were also present at the dinner. Speaking at the event, Meral said TUSKON fully supports Turkey’s EU membership bid and is engaged in promoting the membership process. He also added that his confederation has hosted many members of European Parliament before.

Judiciary afraid of losing its hegemony, says former military judge

07 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

A retired military judge who voiced support for the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government’s constitutional reform package, which aims to raise judicial and democratic standards in Turkey, has said some members of the judiciary oppose the package out of the fear that it will end their hegemony.

Retired military judge Col. Hasan Tüysüzoğlu joined a group of former Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) members who have lent support to the 29-article reform package.

He said the package will bring the Turkish military and judiciary to the standard of first-class democracies.

Uneasy about the opposition to the package, he said: “It is impossible to understand the reactions to the package. We used to know that the TSK was against such reforms, but now it turns out that the opposition is made through the judiciary.”

Tüysüzoğlu also said the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) was making direct interventions into the investigation into Ergenekon, a shadowy crime network which has alleged links within the state and is suspected of plotting to topple the government, because it was afraid of losing its hegemony.

The HSYK has replaced several judges and prosecutors in various coup probes and has drawn the ire of many circles who say the institution was preventing a fair trial.

Tüysüzoğlu served the TSK for 25 years and worked for martial law courts and the now-closed State Security Court (DGM).

After retiring from the military in 1997, he is now working as a lawyer.

Commenting on the government’s reform package, Tüysüzoğlu said the Turkish judiciary is absolutely in need of reform.

With regard to an amendment that would pave the way for the trial of members of the military in civilian courts in peacetime, he said the military courts function under the chain of command.

“Thanks to this amendment, members of the military will know that the orders of the commanders will not work when cases are seen at civilian courts. So, they will think twice before committing an offense,” he said.

PM Erdoğan says no early elections

07 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN WITH WIRES İSTANBUL

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said on Tuesday that the government had never thought of holding early elections.

Erdoğan, who is currently visiting Bosnia and Herzegovina, delivered a speech at the Sarajevo Business Forum. "No one has the right to cloud the economic atmosphere in Turkey. If some politicians try to do this, they betray their country. We have never thought of holding early general elections," he said. The general elections in Turkey are scheduled to take place in July 2011. After attending the business forum, Erdoğan visited the tomb of Bosnia and Herzegovina's first president, Alija Izetbegovic, who died in 2003. [Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.](#)

New reform package to be reviewed by commission

07 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The government's new constitutional amendment package which includes a few changes is in the Parliament's Constitutional Commission which can begin reviewing it tomorrow

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) which withdrew on Monday the 29-article constitutional amendment package resubmitted it to Parliament to prevent recent debates over a debate about who signed it. The first package which had 216 signatures before now has a few changes and has 265 signatures. Changes have been made to some articles of the previously 29-article constitutional amendment package, with one more article added, making the new package a 30-article amendment proposal.

One change suggested to be made to Article 156 is also suggested for Article 157. An amendment to Article 156 would change the functioning of the Military Supreme Court of Appeals, introducing a provision that states that the court will function based on the principle of judicial independence. A change to Article 157, which is about the functioning of the Military High Administrative Courts, would similarly change the functioning of these courts so they will function based on the principles of judicial independence. Those changes, which stress the judicial role of the military judges rather than their military service, aim at being in concert with the Constitutional Court's decisions.

The change to the last clause of Article 157 states: "The establishment, operation, proceedings, discipline and matters pertaining to personnel issues of the Military High Administrative Courts are governed by laws based on the principles of the independence of the courts and judge's warrant."

Another change in the new package modifies requirements for party closures. The Constitutional Court currently needs to have two-thirds of the votes of all of its members to rule on party closures. The change requires only two-thirds of the votes of the Constitutional Court members who attend the meeting.

Additionally, changes to the structures of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) have been revised. The new package changes the selection of members of the HSYK. Now the Justice Academy of Turkey is also to appoint some HSYK members. Another change asks for the Economic and Social Council to be referred to in the Constitution.

The new package also states that the parliament speaker, the chief of General Staff and the commanders of the navy, air, land and gendarmerie forces should be tried at the Supreme State Council with regard to crimes related to their duties.

The right to collective bargaining provided to civil servants in the first package has now also been extended to retired civil servants. Furthermore, a ban on general strikes has been removed. The opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) had started a debate alleging that Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali Şahin's signature was among the signatures on the package sponsored by the AK Party, which is against parliamentary bylaws since the speaker should be impartial.

Baykal calls on President Gül to remove three articles from reform package

07 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal has called on President Abdullah Gül to remove three articles included in a constitutional reform package regarding judicial reform and submit them to a public referendum.

Speaking at his party's parliamentary group meeting yesterday, Baykal said if the president listens to his suggestion, he will have done a "historic service" to the society. "If the president does so, we, the CHP, would compromise," Baykal said, adding that this would be the way to ease tension. Baykal then said his party would work in Parliament to approve the other suggestions in the constitutional amendment package.

Major threatens to assassinate PM, military chief, recording reveals

08 April 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

A voice recording allegedly featuring the voice of Maj. Uğur Cevizoğlu appalled Turkey as the officer spoke about how he could murder Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ and the importance of destabilizing the country through subversive plots.

The speaker details his desire to assassinate both Erdoğan and Başbuğ, apparently over the ongoing investigations into suspected coup plotters.

"I could down the plane carrying the chief of General Staff. I could do anything at the airport. I could kill the prime minister that day. I would do so even though I know I would go to jail. Just give me one light anti-tank weapon [LAW], a couple of Kanas [sniper] rifles and a few bullets. Give me \$10 million to guarantee my children can live and be educated abroad, and I would wipe them all away," Maj. Cevizoğlu allegedly said in the recording.

The speaker seemed infuriated by the fact that investigations into discovered coup plots were on track and that every day another suspect was being taken into custody by the police. "Had the chief of General Staff resisted [the detentions], he would not have occupied that seat for so long. They are talking like idiots. They should shut up. And when they do talk, they should do it right. Summon the force commanders and other generals to Ankara and tell the government that terrorism is no longer the number one threat. Call up all the tanks from the Southeast to Edirne and İstanbul and see how they react then.

The chief of General Staff should not be afraid of going to jail," the voice on the recording says, adding that if everyone whose doors were knocked on during police searches had opened fire on

them, they would have killed 700 policemen so far. “How many did they take so far? Say 100. A gun carries seven bullets; had they shot the police officers who came to detain them, 700 policemen would be dead. We would then see if they could come again,” he said in the recording.

Maj. Cevizoğlu also allegedly spoke about how important it is to undermine stability and create chaos in Turkey to achieve their goals. “When the prime minister dies, the government dissolves. You should threaten his successor, too. You will tell him that you assassinated the prime minister and that he should be careful so that the same does not happen to him, too. We need chaos in this country. That is, we should frighten people so much that they would be afraid to leave their homes. We should make them all, Turks and Kurds, afraid to leave their homes. Anarchy is necessary. I opposed the idea of bombing mosques in the past, but do it if it’s necessary. You should bomb those dishonored during the Friday prayer,” the voice on the recording said.

Turkish prosecutor says they will detain 25 generals and admirals if necessary

08 April 2010, Thursday

TODAY’S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

İstanbul Deputy Chief Public Prosecutor Turan Çolakkadı signaled on Thursday that they would detain the 25 generals and admirals who were to be detained during Monday's operations which are related with the Sledgehammer (Balyoz) coup plot if necessary.

The suspects were not detained since Monday's operations were suspended by İstanbul Chief Prosecutor Aykut Cengiz Engin, who reassigned the prosecutors covering the Sledgehammer case.

According to the Sledgehammer plot, made public by a newspaper in January, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) had a systematic plan to create chaos in society by bombing mosques and attacking popular museums with Molotov cocktails. The attacks' desired result was to increase pressure on the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government for failing to provide security to its citizens. The attacks were to eventually lead to a military coup. The plan was drawn up in 2003 and discussed at a seminar held at the General Staff's Selimiye barracks in March of that year.

The Sledgehammer plan was included in the third indictment prepared in the investigation into Ergenekon, a clandestine network charged with plotting to overthrow the government. The prosecutors are now questioning the 24 generals who attended the seminar.

Dozens of retired and active duty military officers have been detained in the probe. Twenty-two of them were released last week in a controversial ruling, but the release ruling was rescinded on Sunday by a panel of judges from the İstanbul 12th High Criminal Court.

President Gül praises the activities of Doctors Worldwide

08 April 2010, Thursday

TODAY’S ZAMAN ANKARA

Turkish President Abdullah Gül praised Doctors Worldwide (DWW) for their tireless efforts in 24 countries around the world, and particularly in Africa, during his meeting with DWW officials on Tuesday, a statement from the Presidency reported.

Upon his return from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gül talked about the DWW and said they have contributed 1.5 million pounds sterling to the Congo through the services they

have carried out, including health screenings, establishing mother and child health centers and treating tens of thousands of people. "These are good things," the president said, praising the association.

During his Congo trip, Gül was briefed by DWW Congo representative Jibrill Kasongo about the association's activities in the country. As a follow-up to his meeting, Gül received a group of DWW officials on Tuesday. They informed the president of the projects and programs the association has undertaken thus far and presented a document detailing its activities in the countries it serves.

In the one-hour meeting, Gül asked the DWW officials to continue their work without deviating from their mission. Dr. İhsan Karaman, the head of Doctors Worldwide-Turkey, said that in their seven years of work in Africa, they have treated nearly 2 million people, performed the circumcision of 150,000 children and successfully operated on thousands of people.

DWW was established by a group of volunteers, including Turks, in London in 2000. The Turkish branch of the association was established in 2004. A total of 300 of the 1,300 doctors in the association are Turkish.

In a statement released following their meeting with President Gül, the DWW said they are operating in Sudan, DR Congo, Kenya, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Niger and Guinea Bissau in Africa.

GEO-STRATEGIC NEWS

Erdoğan visits France to end 'Season of Turkey'

05 April 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will attend the closing ceremony of the nine-month-long "Season of Turkey" promoting Turkish culture in France through various activities and will have top-level meetings with French officials during his two-day visit to France tomorrow.

Erdoğan will attend a "Müsenna" concert -- a Turkish-French joint project that combines European baroque and Ottoman court music in the same performance on Tuesday at Versailles, marking the end of the "Season of Turkey" in France, a statement released by the French Embassy reported on Friday.

The "Season of Turkey" in France officially kicked off in October of last year, encompassing more than 600 events in 80 cities promoting Turkish culture and conveying positive messages about Turkey while bolstering its image in France. Noting that French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Turkish President Abdullah Gül inaugurated an exhibition in early October at the Grand Palais titled "From Byzantium to İstanbul," the statement said the season was a "great success." During Gül's visit, he was also greeted with a red-and-white lit Eiffel Tower. Red and white are the colors of the Turkish flag.

"The primary aim of the visit is to improve relations between our countries," the statement said. Pointing to nearly 300 French firms operating in Turkey employing 100,000 people, the statement said the trade balance between the two countries is \$10 billion, a figure Turkey would like to see rise to \$15 billion by 2012.

Highlighting France's decisive stance to remove the presence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorist organization in France, the statement said French officials would discuss joint security activities against terrorism with Erdoğan. The statement noted the visit would also

feature regional and international issues facing both countries, including their joint work in Iran, the Middle East and Afghanistan as members of the UN Security Council.

During the visit Erdoğan will meet with Sarkozy, French Prime Minister François Fillon, Parliament Speaker Bernard Accoyer and Senate President Gérard Larcher.

Erdoğan is expected to attend the Business Forum coordinated by the Movement of French Enterprises (MEDEF) and then address Turkish citizens in France on Wednesday. Nearly 6,000 ethnic Turks are expected to see Erdoğan at the Zenith Arena.

Westerwelle hails Turkey's mediation role

05 April 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN ANKARA

Turkey has an important mediation role in promoting peace, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle has said, while also calling for Turkey to be treated fairly in ongoing negotiations for European Union membership

In an interview published in a Sunday newspaper, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung, Westerwelle, however, also said that neither Turkey nor the EU were ready for the country to join the bloc.

“Turkey is making an important contribution, with numerous initiatives, to peace and stability in its neighboring region,” the German minister said, citing initiatives such as Turkey mediating between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Westerwelle particularly highlighted Turkey's stance on Iran's controversial nuclear program “especially now, as a member of the United Nations Security Council.”

Calling the possibility of EU membership as a strong driving force for the “impressive change and reform processes in Turkey,” Westerwelle added: “Of course, with regards to [EU] accession, nothing is automatic. The negotiations are an open-ended process.” He also said Germany had a fundamental interest in good relations with Turkey, since the two countries were economically interwoven.

Turkey, Russia to lift visa requirements in May

07 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Turkey and Russia are likely to bring in a visa-free arrangement from May following the signing of a bilateral agreement between the two countries, the Turkish prime minister said while speaking at the Bosniak Institute in Sarajevo on Monday.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said both countries are determined to eliminate visa requirements in May, during the visit of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. The number of countries that have reciprocally annulled visa requirements with Turkey in the recent past has reached 25, and a similar process with Russia has also started. Erdoğan said they considered including the elimination of visa requirements between the two countries in a high-level strategic cooperation agreement that they will clinch during a visit by the Russian president in May. Erdoğan said Russian officials are also positive about the move.

A visa-free arrangement with Russia was discussed during Erdoğan's visit to Moscow in January of this year, and they tentatively agreed to make it official during Medvedev's visit. Erdoğan said the decision to remove visa requirements demonstrates “mutual trust” between two countries.

Turkey's southern seaside tourist attractions and İstanbul are the most popular destinations for Russian tourists, who are expected to reach 3 million this year. The number of Russian tourists visiting Turkey has doubled this year compared to the same period of last year.

Turkey opposes sanctions against Iran

06 April 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan has voiced scepticism over the effectiveness of any further sanctions against Iran in the dispute over its nuclear programme, saying he still supported a diplomatic solution.

In an interview with French newspaper Le Figaro published on Tuesday, Erdoğan criticised countries pushing for another round of sanctions in the Security Council, of which Turkey is a non-permanent member.

"We consider that this question should be resolved diplomatically," he said. "Sure, sanctions are an issue at the moment, but I don't think that the ones being discussed can bring results."

Erdoğan is going to meet French President Nicolas Sarkozy on Wednesday as part of a two-day trip to France.

The United States, Britain, France, and Germany expect to meet with Russia and China in New York this week to begin drafting a new round of sanctions.

Once the five permanent, veto-holding Security Council members, plus Germany, agree, they will present the proposal to the other 10 council members. Lebanon, Turkey and Brazil are likely to oppose the idea.

"Those who took the decision to apply (previous sanctions) were the first to violate them," Erdoğan said in the interview. "The French, the Germans, the English, the Americans and the Chinese. They are all involved and still manage to indirectly send their products to Iran."

Iran rejects Western accusations that it is trying to make nuclear weapons and says the programme is aimed at generating electricity for civilian use.

Erdoğan said he had repeatedly told his "dear friend" Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that there should be no nuclear arms in the region.

Iran is the second-biggest supplier of natural gas to Turkey, its neighbour, and Erdoğan said their peaceful relations and trade ties must be taken into consideration in the talks.

Turkey says sanctions against Iran will not work

07 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

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In regards to Sarkozy's firm objection to Turkey's full European Union membership, Erdoğan first of all recalled that German Chancellor Angela Merkel, another opponent of Turkey's full EU entry, has paid two official visits to Turkey since 2006.

Noting that Sarkozy had visited Turkey when he was a young man, Erdoğan said he will urge him to visit Turkey to try to win him over to the prospect of Turkey joining the EU.

"He should come and see today's Turkey," Erdoğan said, suggesting that during this visit Sarkozy would see that Turkey has been more progressive in certain fields than many members of the EU.

Erdoğan: Diplomacy Should Settle Iran Nuclear Question

Tuesday, 6 April 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

The crisis over Iran's nuclear program should be settled through diplomacy, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in an interview published Tuesday by the French newspaper Le Figaro.

"We consider that this affair must be resolved by the diplomatic path," Erdogan, who starts an official two-day visit to France Tuesday, told the newspaper.

Although several countries had been speaking in terms of sanctions, he said he did not think this was the way to get results.

Sanctions had already been voted through twice before, but those who had decided to apply had also been the first to violate them, he said. "There are the French, the Germans, the British, the Americans and the Chinese. They are all implicated and still manage, though indirect means, to get their products into Iran," he said. "We cannot leave out that reality."

In any case, one country in the region already possessed nuclear weapons, he added, referring to Israel. "I don't see why anyone should get bogged down with this case," he said.

Iran has been under mounting global pressure to abandon its nuclear program, with Western powers fearing it wants to build an atomic bomb. Tehran says the program is peaceful and only meant to produce energy.

Tuesday, 6 April 2010

Erdoğan vows Turkey will stand by Bosnia and Herzegovina

07 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN WITH WIRES İSTANBUL

Turkey will never abandon Bosnia and Herzegovina and considers it a moral and historic responsibility to stand by this Balkan nation struggling with political and economic woes, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said.

“It does not matter whether we have a shared border or not, I feel this country is our closest neighbor, and we will never abandon Bosnia because of our historic responsibility,” Erdoğan told a conference at the Bosniak Institute on Monday. He is on a two-day visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, which ended yesterday. He recalled that he had been asked to stand by Bosnia and Herzegovina by the country’s late president, Alija Izetbegovic, days before his death in 2003. “Turkey is aware of this historic duty,” he told the audience. “Without providing peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there can be no peace and stability in the Balkans,” Erdoğan also said.

A peace agreement ended Bosnia’s 1992-95 war but divided it along ethnic lines and left it with a confusing constitution and an entirely devastated infrastructure and economy. Apart from destroyed factories, the ongoing quarrel between the former warring factions -- Christian Orthodox Serbs, Muslim Bosniaks and Christian Catholic Croats -- is hindering the development of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s economy. The country is divided in two mini-states, one for the Serbs, the other shared by Bosniaks and Croats. The two are linked by a common government. Erdoğan, who was one of the foreign dignitaries that attended a major conference for foreign investors on Tuesday, firmly opposed a possible division of Bosnia and Herzegovina. “I even do not want to think about it,” he said on Monday when asked about the suggestions that division of the country could be a way to address its problems.

He also lauded the move by the Serbian Parliament last Wednesday to apologize for the bloody Srebrenica massacre, stating that the resolution is an important step towards reconciliation between the two nations.

Speaking on Tuesday at the investors meeting, Erdoğan said Bosnia was rich in natural resources but emphasized the importance of stability and security. “Money is like mercury. It goes wherever it feels good, and we want it to feel good in Bosnia,” he told the Sarajevo Business Forum.

Even though international donors have sent billions to fix infrastructure, clear mines and repair people’s homes, a sustainable return of the 1.8 million refugees was just partially achieved. Many of those who fled the war to other countries never came back because the unemployment rate remains over 40 percent. The country hopes to join the EU one day, but to do so, it has to change its constitution and reduce its administration. There are over 700 state and regional ministers in a country of 3.5 million.

“We do have some political problems, but we trust that business activity can bring people together,” Haris Silajdzic, a member of the country’s collective Presidency and one of the initiators of the conference, said at the opening of the conference. The Sarajevo Business Forum offers over 600 businessmen from mainly Muslim countries and global organizations investment opportunities in the energy sector, food production industry, tourism and infrastructure. In addition to Erdoğan, Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos and leaders from the region also attended the forum.

During his visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Erdoğan also attended the opening of a new building of International University of Sarajevo, in which 900 out of a total of 1,300 students are Turkish. “It is impossible to erase some moments from our memories. But we cannot build the future on pain. We need to build the future on peace and friendship,” Erdoğan said during the opening ceremony on Monday.

Turkey condemns attacks in Pakistan

07 April 2010, Wednesday

Today's Zaman

Turkey condemned the terrorist attacks which were staged in Pakistan on Monday. Turkish Foreign Ministry stated on Tuesday that Turkey strongly condemned two separate terrorist attacks staged in Pashawar city of Pakistan killing 46 people and injuring many others. The ministry offered condolences to the relatives of victims. The ministry said that Turkey saw terrorism as a crime against humanity, and supported Pakistan's efforts to fight against terrorism.
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Turkish foreign ministry condemns statement of Israeli FM

7 April 2010

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish Foreign Ministry condemned on Tuesday the statements of Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman against Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The ministry's spokesman Burak Özügergin said that the statements of Lieberman --made after the criticisms of Erdoğan against Israel's attacks and attitude about Jerusalem-- were beyond the limits, inappropriate and groundless. Özügergin noted that Turkey's Israeli policy was shaped within the scope of a principle which supported the protection of regional peace and stability. The ministry wanted Israel to rapidly end this meaningless and unacceptable approach, and act with common sense. In an interview, Lieberman criticized Prime Minister Erdoğan's statement during opening of state-run TRT's new channel broadcasting in Arabic, and said that he was "slowly turning into Libyan leader Muammar al-Gaddafi or Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez".

Turkish envoy travels to Armenia

07 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

An official says a top Turkish envoy is in Armenia for talks on the delayed ratification of agreements to improve ties. The Foreign Ministry official says Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu is in Yerevan on Wednesday also to prepare the ground for a meeting between the Turkish and Armenian leaders in the United States next week. Turkey and Armenia signed historic agreements for reconciliation in October, but the deals still need to be approved by their parliaments. The agreements call for the establishment of diplomatic relations and the reopening of their border. Turkey closed the border in 1993 to protest Armenia's war with neighboring Azerbaijan.

French president expected to visit Turkey

07 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

French President Nicolas Sarkozy is expected to pay a visit to Turkey after November, 2010. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who is currently in Paris, held a meeting with Sarkozy on Wednesday.

During the meeting, Erdoğan invited Sarkozy to Turkey, and French president accepted the invitation.

Sarkozy said that he might pay a visit to Turkey after November, 2010.

Erdoğan and Sarkozy also discussed Turkey's EU bid during their meeting.

Later in the day, Erdoğan will meet executives of leading French companies as well as Prime Minister Francois Fillon and French Parliament Speaker Bernard Accoyer.

After addressing Turkish people, Erdoğan will leave France for Turkey.

On Tuesday, Erdoğan attended the closing ceremony of "Season of Turkey" activities in France. Turkish culture was introduced in France with more than 600 activities in 120 cities throughout "Season of Turkey" for nine months.

Resistance to Turkey sign of mistrust in Europe, says Berlusconi

07 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi has reiterated his support for Turkey's bid to join the European Union, saying it is historically and geographically a part of Europe.

In an article published in the latest issue of the Turkey in Europe periodical, the Italian leader detailed the reasons for his strong support for Turkey's accession to the EU. Berlusconi stressed that those opposing Turkey's membership in the 27-country bloc do not fully comprehend what Turkish membership would mean. "This resistance has arisen from the fact that not everyone understands that Turkey's crucial role is not just to make the EU as competitive as other major areas of the planet, but also to ensure a dialogue with the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia and thus counteract any possible fundamentalist influence," he wrote for the journal.

The head of the Italian government also stated that those claiming that Turkey is geographically and historically not in Europe are simply wrong. He underlined that Turkey belongs to the European continent geographically and has always been a major actor in European history.

Noting that Turkey has become a member of all major European and transatlantic institutions including NATO, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Berlusconi also said that Europeans' fear of Turkey's cultural diversity is groundless, too. "Somehow, resistance to Turkish membership is a sign of mistrust toward Europe, a Europe which has, however, already produced ample evidence in the past that it knows how to address the difficulties associated with its growth," he wrote, adding that "Turkey's accession could provide Europe with the opportunity to regain the momentum that characterized its best moments."

Erdoğan turning into Gaddafi, Chavez, says Israel's Lieberman

07 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN ANKARA

Israel's Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman has suggested that Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reflects attitudes similar to those of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

The remarks by Lieberman apparently came in response to Erdoğan's recent criticism of Israel. The prime minister said on Sunday that "as Gaza burns and dark clouds form over Jerusalem, we can't stay [silent]." His remarks were delivered at an opening ceremony for the state-run Turkish Radio and Television Corporation's (TRT) launch of a new Arabic-language channel, "TRT al Turkiye" -- a move that Erdoğan has hailed as a landmark in uniting the Turkish and Arab peoples.

Lieberman said he believes Erdoğan is "slowly turning into Gaddafi or Chavez," Ynetnews, an English-language Israeli news portal who spoke with Lieberman on Monday evening, reported on Tuesday. "It's his choice. The problem is not Turkey, the problem is Erdoğan," Lieberman also said.

Lieberman didn't elaborate on what kind of similarities he found between Erdoğan and the two leaders, while also apparently avoiding using any adjectives to describe either Gaddafi or Chavez. Yet, some commentators call these two leaders "authoritarian," while calling Libya and Venezuela "rogue states."

Erdoğan, responding to a question on the Israeli foreign minister's remarks during a visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, said he wouldn't engage in a discussion through the media. "In addition, that guy is not my interlocutor," he added.

Lieberman, leader of the far-right Yisrael Beiteinu, was the architect of a diplomatic scandal carried out by Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon and targeting Turkey's outgoing Ambassador to Israel Ahmet Oğuz Çelikkol in January. Over the weekend, President Abdullah Gül approved a decree reshuffling key ambassadorial posts at the Foreign Ministry, which has posted Çelikkol back to Ankara. Çelikkol will be replaced by Kerim Uras, a young diplomat with expertise in Cyprus affairs.

"We will not and we cannot turn a blind eye to the murder of innocent children and people wherever [it takes place] on the world, not only in our region. Just as we united our hearts for Haiti and we sent our prayers for Chile, we cannot remain indifferent when black clouds are hovering over Jerusalem, which is the apple of the eye of our civilization. From now on, we want an end to bloodshed on the earth, most of all in our region; we want no more tears to be shed; and we want peace and welfare to be sovereign on earth. All of our efforts have been aimed at this goal," Erdoğan had said.

Lieberman's remarks were not the sole response to Erdoğan's remarks on Gaza.

His ministry released a written statement on the issue Sunday, on the same day Erdoğan's speech was delivered, according to Israeli media. The Israeli Foreign Ministry suggested that Erdoğan is attempting to integrate with the Muslim world at the expense of his country's ties with Israel.

"Israel is not interested in confrontation with any country, including Turkey. The impression that is being created is that the Turkish prime minister is seeking to integrate with the Muslim world at Israel's expense," said the statement, English-language Israeli daily Haaretz reported.

"We suggest he find a more creative way and to try to integrate with both the Muslim and Western worlds without turning into an extremist leader in the style of Hugo Chavez," the statement continued, echoing Lieberman's remarks.

Referring to remarks by Erdoğan concerning the murder of children in Gaza, the ministry suggested that "he should be equally concerned for the killing of innocent civilians in Pakistan and Iraq at the hands of terrorist groups," Haaretz said.

Ambassador Tan returns to US after 'genocide' row

07 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN ANKARA

Turkey's ambassador to the United States returned to Washington on Tuesday, a month after being recalled to Ankara in protest of a congressional committee vote to endorse Armenian claims of genocide at the hands of the late Ottoman Empire a century ago.

Speaking to reporters at Ankara's Esenboğa Airport before taking a flight to Washington, Ambassador Namık Tan said the government's decision to recall him was a political message, which he said was received by the US administration. Ankara in turn has received satisfactory responses from the US, paving the way for his return to Washington, Tan went on to say. "We have received the responses that satisfied us. It is time for me to return to my post," he told reporters.

Turkey decided to send back its ambassador to Washington last week after US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had a one-hour talk with her Turkish counterpart, Ahmet Davutoğlu, on the phone. Tan's return to Washington came a week before a key nuclear summit in Washington, which Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will also attend. "I will meet the prime minister in Washington at the weekend," Tan said. He hopes the positive atmosphere in Turkish-US ties will continue after the nuclear summit.

Observers say Tan's return is also aimed at lobbying in Washington before April 24, when President Barack Obama will issue an annual message to commemorate the Armenians who perished in eastern Anatolia. He refrained from using the word "genocide" in his message last year, but it is unclear whether he will do the same this year.

Erdoğan says Sarkozy should come to see today's Turkey

06 April 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that France should change its view about Turkey, adding, "French President Nicolas Sarkozy should come and see today's Turkey."

Erdoğan is set make a visit to Paris to end the Season of Turkey events in France. Ahead of his visit, Erdoğan, in an interview with French daily Le Figaro, said that not all of the French people were against Turkey's EU membership.

France and Germany are against Turkey's full membership. They propose a privileged partnership instead.

Erdoğan said that part of the French people had prejudices, however, he added Turkey had to work hard to overcome these prejudices.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel last week paid a visit to Turkey for the first time since 2006, Erdoğan recalled, and said that Sarkozy too, who earlier said he visited Turkey when he was young, should come and see today's Turkey.

"I will invite him to Turkey. And if he comes, he will see how Turkey is ahead of several EU countries in many areas," he said.

On Iran's nuclear program, Erdoğan said that the issue should be resolved by the help of diplomacy. He said sanctions would not be helpful.

Turkish premier says Israeli foreign minister is not his associate

06 April 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reacted to the remarks by Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman who compared him with Libyan leader Muammar al-Gaddafi and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

Erdoğan, who is currently paying a state visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina, told reporters at a news conference, "Lieberman is not my associate".

In an interview, Lieberman criticized Prime Minister Erdoğan's statement during opening of state-run TRT's new channel broadcasting in Arabic, and said that he was "slowly turning into Gaddafi or Hugo Chavez".

Israel main threat to peace in Middle East, says Erdoğan

08 April 2010, Thursday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has continued his criticism of Israel, saying the Jewish state is the main threat to peace in the Middle East.

Speaking to reporters in Paris, where he was on a two-day visit, on Wednesday, Erdoğan said if a country exercises disproportionate force and wields phosphorus bombs in Gaza then Turkey cannot say "bravo" to them and would call them to account. "The main threat to regional peace is Israel," Erdoğan said, adding that nearly 1,500 people died in Gaza during Operation Cast Lead and Israel's justification for the offensive was a total lie. Erdoğan also set forth the UN report by Richard Goldstone as justification for his criticisms of Israel. The Goldstone report accused Israel of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity during its reckless 22-day operation in Gaza last year.

In remarks published on Tuesday, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman accused Erdoğan, a frequent critic of Israeli policies in Palestine, of "slowly turning into [Libya's leader Muammar] Gaddafi and [Venezuelan President] Hugo Chavez." The hard-line politician also said Erdoğan's criticisms are only directed at the killings of Palestinians, noting that there was no protest from Erdoğan when hundreds and thousands of Muslims were killed in explosions in Pakistan or Iraq over the last few days.

Commenting on Lieberman's statement, Erdoğan said his criticism against Israel stemmed from humanitarian concerns, not because he is a Muslim.

Prior to the prime minister's statement, the Turkish Foreign Ministry strongly criticized Lieberman's remarks about Erdoğan. In a statement released late on Tuesday, the Foreign Ministry condemned Lieberman's comments as "presumptuous and inappropriate, which bear no truth." Calling on Israel to act with "common sense," the Foreign Ministry said Turkey's Israel policy and discourse is shaped by the principles of maintaining peace and stability in the region. Lieberman's remarks came in response to Erdoğan's criticism of Israel's policies on Sunday. "As Gaza burns and dark clouds form over Jerusalem, we can't stay [silent]," Erdoğan said.

Ankara said Turkey's criticisms will continue if Israel does not avoid activities which damage peace in the region. "Within this scope, the activities of Israel that do not help the establishment of an environment of trust and the opening of a path that will lead to lasting peace in the region are condemned and will be criticized," the Foreign Ministry statement said. According to the

statement, dubbing the prime minister's comments stressing the importance of peace and the protection of human rights as "extreme" is a grave distortion and an unfair judgment. "We must say to Mr. Erdoğan: If you want to make a name in the Islamic world or to create a new status, this shouldn't be done at our expense," Lieberman said. "Before lecturing us, he should solve his own problems with the Kurds."

Turkey condemns attacks in Baghdad

05 April 2010, Monday
TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey strongly condemned this weekend's attacks in Iraq. Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a statement, expressed its concerns about acts of violence and bomb attacks in Baghdad. "We strongly condemn those heinous attacks in which scores of people lost their lives," it said. The ministry added, "the general election held in Iraq on March 7 constituted a milestone in Iraq's efforts to ensure democracy and stability. We believe that Iraqi people would not allow such acts of terror aiming to drag the country into an atmosphere of chaos once again in a critical period." Suicide attackers detonated three car bombs near foreign embassies in Baghdad on Sunday, killing more than 40 people.

Turkish, Ethiopian defense ministers meet in Ankara

05 April 2010, Monday
ZAMAN TODAY

Turkish National Defense Minister Vecdi Gönül met with Defense Minister Siraj Fegessa of Ethiopia in Ankara on Monday. Gönül said that the relations between Turkey and Ethiopia were in perfect level. He expressed belief that Fegessa's visit would further strengthen the relations. Gönül said that a military cooperation and a defense industry cooperation agreement were signed between the two countries, adding that the agreements would be approved by Turkish Parliament. Gönül said that after the agreements were approved, the relations would further develop. Ethiopian minister said that the relations between Turkey and Ethiopia were rooted, adding that Ethiopia attached a special importance to the relations with Turkey. Noting that Turkey was one of the first countries which opened embassy in Ethiopia, Fegessa said that they hoped the relations would further develop not only in political but also in defense industry area.

Turkish foreign minister meets with Iraqi vice president

05 April 2010, Monday
TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu met with Iraqi Vice President Adil Abdul-Mahdi in Ankara on Monday. They discussed bilateral relations and the recent developments and the elections in Iraq.

Speaking during the meeting, Davutoğlu said they expected political groups in Iraq to form a government with the widest possible representation embracing entire Iraq.

Davutoğlu said Iraq's stability was as important as Turkey's own stability, saying that Turkey would continue to take a close interest in Iraq.

In his part, Abdul-Mahdi said Turkey was one of the important neighbours of Iraq, and the two countries made regular consultations.

He said Iraq was part of the region and was affected by the regional developments, emphasizing the importance of regional consultations.

Commenting on the recent bomb attacks in Baghdad, Abdul-Mahdi said the security issue concerned the entire region and required joint action.

Commenting on the elections, Abdul-Mahdi said political groups made certain progress towards forming a government.

Turkey hopes better Greek ties lower defense costs

Thursday, April 8, 2010

ATHENS — The Associated Press

HURRIYAT

Turkey and Greece say they hope efforts to improve their relations will lead to reduced defense spending in both countries.

The countries have been at odds for years over airspace boundaries and flight procedures over the Aegean Sea that forms the border between them. For decades they have engaged in an arms race and their warplanes often engage in mock dogfights.

Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said Thursday after meeting Greek Deputy Foreign Minister Dimitris Droutsas that there would be no need for arms spending if the neighbors could build a "common future."

He says Turkey's prime minister will visit Greece next month.

Greece is suffering from a severe economic crisis and plans to cut defense spending in 2011 and 2012.

Turkey, Greece accept new confidence building measures

Thursday, 08 April 2010 14:40

World Bulletin

Turkey and Greece have reached an agreement on five new Confidence Building Measures on Thursday.

Turkey and Greece have reached an agreement on five new Confidence Building Measures during the visit of Greek Deputy Foreign Minister Dimitris Droutsas to Ankara on Thursday.

The new measures were announced during the joint press conference of Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and Droutsas on Thursday.

Below is a list of the new Confidence Building Measures:

- 1- Turkey and Greece will jointly host educational programs at centers of Partnership for Peace with the contributions of other countries involved in the partnership.
- 2- Students of War Academies will receive seminars from commanders of the two countries.
- 3- A Greek military division/brigade will be assigned to the 3rd Army Corps and a Turkish military division/brigade will be assigned to the Greek NATO Army Corps for educational

purposes.

4- Mutual visits will take between the War Academies of the two countries.

5- War Academies will conduct joint scientific events. They will hold joint academic programs, seminars, symposiums and publish articles for the military magazines/newspapers.

Turkey and Greece declared on Thursday that the new Confidence Building Measures will strengthen bilateral relations.

The two countries formerly adopted 24 Confidence Building Measures.

Relations between Turkey and Greece are fundamentally based on the 1923 Lausanne Treaty and the balance of mutual rights and interests is set up by this Treaty.

Over the years, the scope of Turkish-Greek relations was defined by lack of dialogue between the two countries. The potential risks inherent in such a relationship became most evident in March 1987 during the continental shelf crisis and in 1996 during the Kardak dispute.

After a long-lasting period of tension and mistrust between the two countries, Turkish-Greek relations entered a totally new era in July 1999.

Turkey, in May 1999, in the wake of the exposure of Greece's involvement with Ocalan, the leader of the PKK, proposed Greece to conclude an agreement on cooperation against terrorism. In response to this constructive step, Greece suggested to set up cooperation in a wider range of fields (tourism, environment, culture, trade and regional development) including combating against terrorism.

Thus, Turkish and Greek Ministries initiated a process of consultation and joint work on bilateral issues. In July 1999, Turkish-Greek joint committees started to hold talks in a spirit of cooperation, which yielded positive results.

Rapprochement between the Turkish and Greek peoples after the devastating earthquakes each suffered in 1999 provided another stimulus to the intense diplomatic efforts for the improvement of bilateral relations. If the tragedy that the two countries survived had one positive aspect, it was the reaffirmation of human solidarity by Turkish and Greek peoples.

Following the earthquakes, Turkey and Greece also co-sponsored a joint resolution for the very first time in the history of the UN, on the establishment of a "Joint Standby Disaster Response Unit" for which works are still going on.

The endorsement of Turkey's candidacy to the EU at the Helsinki European Council on 10 December 1999 was another positive step for further progress in Turkish-Greek bilateral relations.

Bilateral meetings and exchanges of views between the respective Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers of the two countries laid down the political ground for promoting and reinforcing ongoing cooperation and dialogue process. High level contacts and visits have also been instrumental in keeping the momentum of this process. For example, the visit of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey, Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, to Greece on 6-8 May 2004 constituted the first visit of a Turkish Prime Minister to Greece after sixteen years.

The following mechanisms have been established in this new era:

Exchange of regular visits between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs; exploratory contacts regarding the Aegean issues; regular political consultations; proceedings of the working groups under the auspices of Steering Committee; and talks on Confidence Building Measures (CBM).

As for the other recent high level visits; Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Abdullah Gul visited Athens on 21-22 October 2003. This visit enabled both sides to review all aspects of the Turkish-Greek relations and in particular the process of dialogue and cooperation between Turkey and Greece, which has led to mutual understanding

and concrete results in various fields. The visit of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, Mr. Petros Moliviatis, on 12-13 April 2005 and the visit of Mrs. Dora Bakoyanni, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, on 8-10 June 2006 offered good occasions to exchange views on all aspects of the bilateral relations between Turkey and Greece.

Mr. Ali Babacan, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, paid an official visit to Greece on 3-5 December 2007. The visit was quite useful and provided opportunity to take up all the relevant bilateral and regional issues with a view to improving the relations between the two countries. Mr. Babacan also visited Komotini where the Turkish Muslim Minority lives.

Mr. Kostas Karamanlis, the Prime Minister of Greece, paid an official visit to Turkey on 23-25 January 2008. The visit carried symbolic significance as it was the first visit of a Greek Prime Minister to Turkey in the last 49 years. During the visit, the leaders of the two countries reiterated their commitments to the further improvement of the Turkish-Greek bilateral relations in all areas.

Lastly, Mrs. Dora Bakoyannis, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, paid a working visit to Turkey on 7-8 March 2008.

The exploratory contacts, launched in March 2002, paved the way for the first time after so many years, to exchange views on the whole range of Aegean issues and on possible means of their peaceful settlement.

Political consultations enable Turkey and Greece to explore out each other's views and positions on various regional and international issues.

Due to the exhaustive efforts of the working groups, 33 agreements (including the protocols and memorandums of understanding) were signed between Turkey and Greece so far. Thus, the legal framework of the bilateral relations between Turkey and Greece has been completed.

Within the framework of the Confidence Building Measures (CBM) Process, which is instrumental in reinforcing the mutual trust required to settle security related issues between the two countries, 24 CBMs have been adopted.

The Agreement Between The Government of the Republic of Turkey And The Government of the Hellenic Republic for the construction of a second border crossing road bridge between the two countries in the area of the Kipi-Ipsala border crossing? was signed during the visit of Mrs. Bakoyanni in June 2006.

The prevailing constructive atmosphere has also positive implications on the development of closer ties and achievement of concrete results in various fields such as trade, energy and transportation.

The inauguration of Karacabey-Komotini Natural Gas Pipeline on 18 November 2007 constitutes a milestone in the energy cooperation between Turkey and Greece and proves the potential of the two countries to contribute to the diversification of EU's energy routes.

The scope of cooperation in the field of culture has also been expanding. Especially non-governmental organizations took the lead in the intensification of the people to people ties and cultural exchanges between the two countries.

The friendly relations between Turkey and Greece based upon mutual respect, understanding and trust have importance not only for the economic welfare and political stability of the two countries but also for the enhancement of the peace, stability and security in the region.

Opposition says it leads Kyrgyzstan after uprising

Thursday, April 8, 2010

BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan – The Associated Press

HURRIYAT

The opposition seized Kyrgyzstan's government headquarters Thursday following clashes between protesters and security forces that have left 68 people dead nationwide, and appeared to control this Central Asian country that houses a key U.S. air base.

stood outside, including some who had climbed up on an armored personnel carrier. Others were walking freely through the building known as the White House.

Scars of Wednesday's fighting, though, were everywhere in the capital, Bishkek, and the Health Ministry said the death toll rose overnight to 68, with 400 people still hospitalized. The numbers included those killed or wounded in clashes elsewhere in the country as protesters drove out local governments.

President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who came to power in a similar popular uprising five years ago, was said to have fled to the southern city of Osh, and it was difficult to gauge how much of the impoverished, mountainous country the opposition controlled. Opposition leader Rosa Otunbayeva, a former foreign minister who has declared herself head of an interim government, was to address parliament Thursday morning.

The opposition has called for the closure of the U.S. air base in Manas outside the capital, which is an essential transit point for supplies essential to the war in nearby Afghanistan. U.S. military officials said Kyrgyzstan officials halted flights for 12 hours on Wednesday at the Manas air base, but the suspension was not expected to impact military operations because fewer flights were scheduled during overnight hours.

Some semblance of order returned to Bishkek, where until the early hours of the morning gunfire could be heard as marauding, looting mobs rampaged through the city. Almost no government building was left untouched. Some were set on fire or had windows smashed. A three-story Chinese trading house was ablaze Thursday. The state TV channel was overrun and looted.

On Wednesday, protesters who were called into the streets by opposition parties stormed government buildings in Bishkek and battled with police amid volleys of tear gas. Groups of elite officers then fired with live ammunition. After nightfall, the opposition and its supporters appeared to gain the upper hand. An AP reporter saw opposition leader Keneshbek Duishebayev sitting in the office of the chief of the National Security Agency, Kyrgyzstan's successor to the Soviet KGB. Duishebayev issued orders on the phone to people he said were security agents, and he also gave orders to a uniformed special forces commando.

Duishebayev, the former interior minister, told the AP that "we have created units to restore order" on the streets. Many of the opposition leaders were once allies of Bakiyev, in some cases former ministers or diplomats.

Tulip Revolution

Since coming to power in 2005 amid street protests known as the Tulip Revolution, Bakiyev had ensured a measure of stability in the country of 5 million people, but the opposition says he has done so at the expense of democratic standards while enriching himself and his family. He gave his relatives, including his son, top government and economic posts and faced the same accusations of corruption and cronyism that led to the ouster of his predecessor, Askar Akayev.

In the past two years, authorities have clamped down on the media, and opposition activists say they have routinely been subjected to physical intimidation and targeted by politically motivated criminal investigations.

Like its neighbors Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan has remained impoverished since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union and has a history of stifling democratic institutions and human rights. Kyrgyzstan is a predominantly Muslim country, but just as in Soviet times, it has remained secular. There has been little fear of the spread of Islamic fundamentalism as in other mostly Muslim regions of the former Soviet Union.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin denied any involvement in the uprising. "Russian officials have absolutely nothing to do with this," he said in Smolensk in response to a journalist's question. "Personally, these events caught me completely by surprise." He also criticized Bakiyev's government for repeating Akayev's mistakes. "When President Bakiyev came to power, he was very harshly critical of the fact that the relatives of the deposed President Akayev had taken positions throughout Kyrgyzstan's economy. I have the impression that Mr. Bakiyev is stepping on these same rakes."

A senior U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the uncertainty and delicacy of the situation, said the U.S. was in touch with government officials and the opposition. "We want to see the situation resolved peacefully, consistent with the rule of law," the official said. "Our conversation with the opposition at this stage is about finding out what is happening and encouraging a peaceful resolution."

The anti-government forces were in disarray until recent widespread anger over the 200 percent increase in electric and heating bills unified them and galvanized support. Many of Wednesday's protesters were men from poor villages, including some who had come to the capital to live and work on construction sites. Already struggling, they were outraged by the high cost of energy and were easily stirred up by opposition claims of official corruption.

In Washington, State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said the U.S. deplored the violence and urged all to respect the rule of law. "We identify with the concerns that the people of Kyrgyzstan have about their future," but those concerns should be dealt with peacefully, Crowley said, adding that the Manas base was operating normally.

Opposition leaders have said they want the base closed because it could put their country at risk if the United States becomes involved in a military conflict with Iran. Closing it would also please Russia, which has opposed the basing of U.S. troops on former Soviet turf. The United States began using Manas in 2001, two months after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, and the base has become essential for transportation, refueling and supply for U.S.-led military operations in Afghanistan.

In 2009, Kyrgyzstan said U.S. forces would have to leave Manas, citing improving security conditions in Afghanistan and dissatisfaction over commercial terms for the base. That eviction announcement came shortly after Russia agreed to grant Kyrgyzstan more than \$2 billion in aid and loans, and U.S. officials suggested the eviction decision hinged on Moscow's aid.

The government later reversed its stance and agreed to a revised one-year deal giving U.S. troops rights to use the facility. Under the new lease, the rent increased to \$60 million a year, from \$17 million.

US-Kyrgyz ties

In addition to the annual rent, the U.S. also will allocate \$37 million to build new aircraft parking slots and storage areas, plus \$30 million for new navigation systems. Washington has also

committed to giving Kyrgyzstan \$51.5 million to combat drug trafficking and terrorism and promote economic development.

The unrest began Tuesday in the western city of Talas, where demonstrators stormed a government office and held a governor hostage. The opposition called nationwide protests for the next day and police in Bishkek at first used rubber bullets, tear gas, water cannons and concussion grenades to try to control crowds of young men in black.

Police often appeared outnumbered and overwhelmed, sometimes retreating when faced with protesters - including many armed with rocks and others who appeared to be carrying automatic weapons as they marched. The youths beat up police and seized their arms, trucks and armored personnel carriers.

Some protesters then tried to use an APC to ram the gates of the government headquarters, known as the White House. About a half-dozen young protesters shot automatic weapons into the air from the square in front of the building. "We don't want this rotten power!" protester MakhSAT Talbadyev said, as he and others waved opposition party flags and chanted: "Bakiyev out!"

Some 200 elite police then began firing, pushing the crowd back. Protesters set fire to the prosecutor general's office and a giant plume of black smoke billowed into the sky. At one point, police fled across the square from a large group of stone-throwing demonstrators. In another street, some police took refuge behind their shields as one of their colleagues lay unconscious at their feet, his face smeared with blood.

In another area, two policemen, their faces stained with blood, tried to escape as a protester aimed kicks in their direction. Groups of protesters then set out across Bishkek, attacking more government buildings.

An AP reporter saw dozens of wounded demonstrators lining the corridors of one of Bishkek's main hospitals, a block away from the main square, where doctors were overwhelmed with the flood of patients. Weeping nurses slumped over the dead, doctors shouted at each other and the floors were covered in blood.

Opposition activist Shamil Murat told the AP that Interior Minister Moldomusa Kongatiyev had been beaten to death by a mob in Talas. Later, the Fergana.ru Web site reported that Kongatiyev was badly beaten but had not died, saying its own reporter had witnessed the beating.

Unrest also broke out for a second day in Talas and spread to the southern city of Naryn. Another 10,000 protesters stormed police headquarters in Talas. The protesters beat up Kongatiyev and forced him to telephone his subordinates in Bishkek and call off the crackdown on protesters, a correspondent for the local affiliate of U.S.-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty said.

Some 5,000 protesters seized Naryn's regional administration building and installed a new governor, opposition activist Adilet Eshenov said. At least four people were wounded in clashes, including the regional police chief, he said. In the eastern region of Issyk-Kul, protesters seized the regional administration building and declared they installed their governor, the Ata-Meken opposition party said on its Web site.

Work on Turkish logistics center in Russia speeds up

Wednesday, April 7, 2010

SELME ŞİMŞEK BEKTAŞ

ISTANBUL - Referans

HURRIYAT

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Turkey in May is quite important for Turkey's exporters. That is because they have long been waiting for some concrete developments to take effect in a Turkish logistics center project. The deputy undersecretariat currently is working on finding the most effective location to build the center, which is expected to help increase trade between Turkey and Russia significantly

Exporters in Turkey are anxiously waiting for the arrival of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in May because they expect his visit will push for some serious steps to be taken regarding the launch of a Turkish logistics center planned to be constructed in Russia.

"Years ago we demanded the development of such a center. Finally, years later, this project is taking shape. We believe the project will be official following Medvedev's visit," said Ahmet Hamdi Gürdoğan, head of the Eastern Black Sea exporters' association. The center will focus on improving and extending the volume of trade implemented between Turkey and Russia.

"The project is quite new. Only so much has been done. We are working on selecting where to build the center as well as some technical details," said Celalettin Damlacı, the deputy undersecretary who is tracking developments in projects on behalf of the Foreign Trade Undersecretariat.

The center, which is expected to cost about \$100 million, will help gather all products arriving to Russia from Turkey under one roof. Despite the customs process, this center will also be responsible of keeping track of warehousing and marketing activities.

This Turkish logistics center would especially come in handy when Russia closes down its two Black Sea ports, one in Sochi, the other in Novorossiysk, said Gürdoğan. The project can really help prevent mishaps that can be experienced following the closure of these two ports, he added.

"What we really aim to do is develop this center in such way that it has free zone characteristics. That could help us enter our products to the Russian market without having to deal with customs," said Gürdoğan.

The location of the center is very important, he said. Most Turkish exporters point to Gelendzhik, but the Russian government has so far offered 10 alternative locations, said Gürdoğan. "The most suitable location for this project is Gelendzhik. Other port locations offered are not so easily accessible. Gelendzhik is on the coast of the Black Sea, and transportation-wise it is easily accessible," he added.

The final location has to include at least 50 hectares of land, said Gürdoğan. "Technical details of the projects are still not clear. However, we know it will include cold air warehouses and containers. We will also invest in the harbor."

Mehmet Büyükekşi, chairman of the Turkish Exporters' Assembly, or TİM, said the project could be quite beneficial for exporters. "These types of investments contribute significantly to the industry. Especially in countries where exporters cannot institutionalize," said Büyükekşi. "We are anxious for this project to become alive."

Turkish diplomat visits Yerevan, Baku ahead of Washington talks

Thursday, April 8, 2010

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

As Turkish and Armenian leaders prepare to meet with U.S. President Barack Obama in Washington, Turkish Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu is making the rounds in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan sent Sinirlioğlu as a special envoy to Baku on Friday to convey a letter to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. The Turkish diplomat previously held high-level talks in Yerevan on Wednesday.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu confirmed that Turkey would continue its efforts to secure “fair memory” in bilateral relations as well as peace and stability for the Southern Caucasus in the light of the normalization protocols signed between Turkey and Armenia in October.

“We need to overcome the existing difficulties together in accordance with this vision,” Davutoğlu said Friday during a press conference with Greek Deputy Foreign Minister Dimitris Droutsas.

Sinirlioğlu was received by Armenian President Serge Sarkisian and Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian this week after Sarkisian and Davutoğlu agreed to review the process during an earlier meeting in Kiev.

Davutoğlu described the talks as “positive and constructive” and announced the next stop for the Turkish diplomat would be Baku. He also rebuffed the idea of any outside influence or involvement, saying, “It [the normalizing process] should continue in its nature.”

“We sincerely believe our relations with Armenia will be normalized in accordance with the protocols’ letter and spirit,” the Turkish foreign minister said.

“We gave a clear message of our loyalty to the normalization process during the talks in Armenia,” said a diplomatic source, speaking on condition of anonymity. “Now, we need to share our impression with the Azerbaijani side.”

Ramiz Mehdiyev, the head of the Azerbaijani President’s Executive Office, held talks last week in Ankara, just days before Erdoğan, Sarkisian and Obama are set to meet in Washington on the sidelines of a nuclear-security summit.

Obama invited the Turkish and Armenian leaders to the summit and has been planning to host a pull-aside meeting to speed up normalization talks between the two neighbors.

“It is quite natural to talk with the Azerbaijani side, too. One more time, we will affirm that Turkey is sharing Azerbaijani concerns over the Karabakh conflict,” the diplomatic source added. “As you know, there are speculative reports saying Obama may convince Erdoğan to step back during the upcoming meeting with Sarkisian in Washington.”

Sinirlioğlu will be received by Azerbaijani President Aliyev and Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov on Friday.

Pakistan and Turkey vow to cooperate in trade, condemn terrorism

02 April 2010, Friday

TODAY’S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Pakistan and Turkey agreed to enhance their strategic partnership through boosting their political and economic cooperation by signing several accords on investment, agriculture and planning on Wednesday during President Abdullah Gül’s visit to Pakistan.

During the visit, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari conferred the Nishan-e-Pakistan award on President Gül for playing a key role in furthering the ever-growing bilateral relations between Pakistan and Turkey.

Speaking after the award ceremony during a dinner hosted by the Pakistani president in honor of Gül, Zardari said Pakistan values its ties with Turkey and the relations between the countries in

the fields of education, defense, agriculture, education and energy and said trade would be strengthened.

Zardari said Pakistan had struck agreements with Turkey in areas of economic cooperation, agriculture and investment. They will also cooperate in the security sphere to fight against terrorism; both countries have strongly condemned terrorism and extremism and decided to cooperate with each other to “eliminate the menace of terrorism.” “Pakistan and Turkey can defeat terrorism together,” Zardari noted.

Gül emphasized the importance of Pakistan for Turkey and its people and said Turks have never forgotten and will never forget the help of the Pakistani people to their Turkish brothers during the Turkish War of Independence. Gül said Pakistan is a very close friend of Turkey and is an important country in the region whose importance cannot be neglected at any cost.

Speaking during the dinner hosted by Zardari, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gillani said there was a complete consensus among the nation, the political forces and state institutions in the war against terrorism and extremism. “Pakistan and Turkey have common agendas, and we are facing a common set of challenges,” he said, adding that they have a common responsibility to demonstrate this to the world.

Gül also watched a performance from Pak-Turk Turkish schools and a presentation about the activities of Turkish schools in Pakistan. Following the show, Gül gave awards to businessmen who had contributed to the establishment and work of the schools. Expressing satisfaction at the success of the schools, Gül also thanked the Pakistani authorities for hosting Turkish schools. “The depth of friendship between Pakistan and Turkey is beyond words. These services and activities are very valuable. Historically good relations between the two countries will be carried forward through this kind of cooperation,” Gül said.

Speaking during the Pakistan-Turkish Business Forum in Lahore, Gül said Turkish contractors are always ready to cooperate and invest in Pakistan. Emphasizing the to-be-built railway between Islamabad and İstanbul through Tehran, Gül said the two countries could soon boost their current \$2 billion trade to \$5 billion. Zardari said the 6,500-kilometer-long rail link would open up and connect vast the European and Asian markets for the benefit of not only Pakistan and Turkey but also of all the people in the region.

During Gül’s visit, the Turkish and Pakistani delegation also signed three memorandums of understanding on planning, agriculture and commercial cooperation. The agreement on planning seeks to strengthen mutual cooperation by means of the exchange of information, research and planning studies and institutional capacity-building between the two countries. Both countries will also cooperate in agriculture to achieve higher levels of efficiency in production, processing and marketing.

Turkey sets stage for Serbian apology over Srebrenica

02 April 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey has welcomed an apology offered by Serbia for a bloody massacre of Bosnian Muslims in 1995 and said Turkish diplomats have worked silently yet intensively to draw global attention to the problems of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We have carried developments related to Bosnia and Herzegovina to the center of our policy for the Balkans,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Burak Özügergin told reporters at a web chat session yesterday. “We have brought Bosnia and Herzegovina to the attention of the world.”

Serbia's Parliament approved a resolution on Wednesday, apologizing for the 1995 killing of thousands of Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica. It expressed sympathy to victims and apologized for not doing enough to prevent the massacre but stopped short of calling the killings "genocide." Serbian officials hope to win EU and investor favor with the measure, which was adopted after a debate that took nearly 13 hours and which was broadcast on live television ending after midnight.

Bosnian Serb forces led by Gen. Ratko Mladic killed about 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys after taking over the eastern enclave that was put under UN protection. The massacre is Europe's worst atrocity since World War II.

Özügergin said the resolution was a major step taken in the direction of reconciliation between the peoples of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. He said improvement in ties between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia was an indispensable condition to create an atmosphere of reconciliation and tolerance in the Balkans, which went through a period of turmoil in the past decade.

The foreign ministers of Turkey, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have met several times in the past several months to help reconciliation between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in an initiative spearheaded by Turkey. Turkish officials say the credit goes to Serbia for agreeing to offer a formal apology over the Srebrenica massacre, underlining that it is Serbia's own decision because pressure from a foreign country simply would not work.

But a Serbian official speaking to Today's Zaman on condition of anonymity said Bosnia and Herzegovina's recent decision to appoint an ambassador to Serbia, which is a major step for reconciliation, would not have happened had Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu not shuttled between the two countries trying to broker a deal. "There was an atmosphere of chaos before. We thank Mr. Davutoğlu for resolving the deadlock," the official said.

Ankara has also closely followed the process that eventually resulted in the Serbian apology. Turkish officials have carefully remained low key while trying to help the two sides reach an understanding over the content of the apology. But sources say Davutoğlu had seen the text of the resolution approved in the Serbian Parliament long before the vote.

Davutoğlu discusses Caucasus with senior Azerbaijani official

02 April 2010, Friday

TODAY'S ZAMAN ANKARA

Efforts for maintaining stability and peace in the Caucasus region were at the center of talks held between Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and Ramiz Mehdiyev, the head of the Azerbaijani presidential administration, on Thursday, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Burak Özügergin said. Mehdiyev arrived in the Turkish capital earlier this week at the invitation of the Turkish Foreign Ministry. He had talks with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali Şahin later on Thursday, after being hosted by Davutoğlu at the ministry residence at a breakfast meeting that was also joined by the Foreign Ministry undersecretary, Ambassador Feridun Sinirlioğlu.

Özügergin, speaking with reporters during an online press conference held by the ministry on Thursday, noted that the talks between Davutoğlu and Mehdiyev focused on the course of affairs regarding the Caucasus region.

Mehdiyev informed the Turkish side of details if the ongoing efforts by the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Özügergin said. The Minsk Group

has striven to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, a territorial dispute between Baku and Yerevan, for more than 17 years.

“And we have stated that we continue giving full support to Azerbaijan. We said that Azerbaijan's being an independent and powerful country strengthens us as well,” Özügergin said, emphasizing the importance Ankara attaches to Azerbaijan's unity.

Erdoğan to announce today final call on attending nuclear summit

02 April 2010, Friday

TODAY'S ZAMAN ANKARA

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on Thursday said that he is likely to announce his final decision on whether to accept an invitation from the White House today, noting that he would return the Turkish ambassador, who was recalled last month, back to Washington if he decides to attend the nuclear energy summit.

“At the moment, I'm making the assessment with my advisors,” Erdoğan said when asked whether he would participate at the summit on nuclear security on April 13.

Following the adoption of a nonbinding resolution by the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs on March 4 recognizing the World War I-era killings of Ottoman Armenians as genocide, Turkey recalled its ambassador in Washington, Namık Tan, to Ankara for consultations while Erdoğan put his visit to the United States April 13-14, during which he is to attend the nuclear energy summit in the US capital at the invitation of US President Barack Obama, on hold.

“I think that I will announce my decision on this issue tomorrow [today]. In the case that I decide to go, then I will soon send our ambassador back,” Erdoğan added.

During a telephone conversation between US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu on Sunday, which was initiated by the US side, the former reiterated that the Obama administration stands opposed to the resolution on Armenian genocide and is also against a full House vote on the measure.

During the same conversation, Clinton told Davutoğlu that US officials hope Erdoğan will attend the nuclear summit in Washington, D.C., Foreign Ministry spokesperson Burak Özügergin said in a statement released on Monday. In response, Davutoğlu said Erdoğan would decide in the coming days whether to attend the meeting or not. More than 40 world leaders are expected at the summit.

Speaking with reporters earlier on Thursday before Erdoğan's brief remarks on his Washington visit, Özügergin highlighted that Ankara considers the telephone conversation between Clinton and Davutoğlu as “useful” in regards to its ongoing assessment on the timing of Tan's return to Washington. He also noted that there was no exact decision yet on Tan's return or Erdoğan's participation in the nuclear summit, unlike what Turkish newspapers claimed in their Thursday editions.

Later on Thursday afternoon, Davutoğlu was scheduled to host a US delegation at the ministry led by Republican Congressman Edward Whitfield (Kentucky), the co-chairman of the Congressional Caucus on US-Turkish Relations, who is among the critics of the resolution. Özügergin, speaking with reporters during an online press conference held by the ministry, was also reminded of recent Turkish news reports quoting a senior Armenian official as suggesting that Yerevan was planning to propose putting the normalization protocols signed by the two capitals on hold and asked whether Turkey has received such a proposal.

“No official request by Armenia for the annulment or suspension of the signed protocols has arrived. Beyond this, even putting forward such a discourse is not appropriate,” Özügergin said. “On the other hand, claiming that Turkey is not interested in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue would not be true. Instead of discussing whether this element was within the protocols or not, it is necessary to get used to seeing the Nagorno-Karabakh issue as part of the integrated whole in regards to peace and stability in the Caucasus. In other words, it will not be possible to resolve problems in the region without having the Nagorno-Karabakh issue resolved,” he added, referring to a territorial dispute between Baku and Yerevan. Recent Turkish news reports also quoted the same senior Armenian official as voicing disappointment over the fact that Turkey has turned the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue into a precondition, although this was not the case when the protocols were negotiated and eventually signed.

Washington’s atomic weapons on Turkish soil to come to the agenda

04 April 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

An agreement reached between US President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on March 26 on the terms of a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) is expected to bring to the agenda US Cold War-era atomic weapons located at Turkey’s İncirlik Air Base as well as in some other European countries.

START was first signed in 1991 and has been renewed by Russia and the United States with increasingly stringent limitations on several occasions since. The treaty will reduce arms by only half as much as the 2002 Treaty of Moscow signed by former President George W. Bush and then-Russian President Vladimir Putin. The new START agreement is scheduled to be signed by the two countries in Prague on April 8. Both sides will be required within seven years to reduce their arsenals of long-range nuclear warheads to 1,550, about one-third below current levels and nearly three-quarters below the level agreed in the first START that was signed in 1991.

The White House said on March 26 that the deal contained “no constraints” on the construction of a missile defense shield, which had been a key sticking point between the two powers. NATO member Turkey, bordering Iran, is expected to be a site for the US’s missile defense program. Withdrawal or reduction of US atomic weapons on Turkish soil together with some other European countries will come to the agenda once the US and Russia sign the new START, recalled Western diplomatic sources.

“But it is not expected that the US will take any action concerning the withdrawal of those weapons from Turkish soil without consulting Turkey,” said the same sources.

On the other hand, the US would not like to withdraw its weapons from Turkish soil due to this NATO ally’s proximity to Iran, engaged in a bitter row with the West over its nuclear program. The Times, meanwhile, reported on Friday that “in reviewing its nuclear arsenal, the US is considering withdrawing from Europe its last tactical nuclear weapons -- 200 B61 gravity bombs -- which are based in Belgium, Turkey, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, all members of NATO. Under a longstanding agreement, the air forces of these countries would be expected to fly their own bombers carrying the American B61 bombs in the event of a conflict in which the US had approved the use of nuclear weapons.

“A decision on this is not expected to be included in the revised nuclear posture, however, as it is a matter for discussion within NATO, which is developing an updated strategic concept,” the Times stated.

The 2,000 or so US weapons that were based in Europe at the end of the Cold War had been reduced to around 200 by last year. The existence of the nuclear arsenal on Turkish soil has neither been debated by the Turkish Parliament nor has there been much public awareness of the topic.

But several European countries say they want the nuclear gravity bombs to be withdrawn because there is no longer any justification for keeping them in Europe. Those European NATO allies urge President Obama to remove all remaining US nuclear weapons from European soil as domestic pressure grows to rid the region of outdated Cold War-era aerial bombs.

Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Norway will call “in the coming weeks” for more than 200 American warheads, mostly stocked in Italy and Turkey, to be taken back, a spokesman for Belgian Prime Minister Yves Leterme told the Agence France-Presse news agency on Feb. 19.

Only the United States has nuclear arms stored in other NATO member states in Europe, he added. The proposal does not refer to the distinct and more modern British and French nuclear arsenals.

Leterme said an initiative would be launched under a NATO Strategic Concept due to be adopted by leaders of NATO countries in Lisbon in November.

Spokesman Dominique Dehaene said plans include addressing what to do about some 220 aerial atomic bombs held on military bases in Belgium, Germany, Italy and Turkey.

According to experts, Italy and Turkey house about 90 of these nuclear warheads each, said AFP. There are about 20 each in Germany, where 130 atomic bombs were withdrawn in 2004, and Belgium.

Germany triggers debate

It was agreed at the end of last year after Germany sought the withdrawal of the warheads there that all calls for the removal of these weapons be done on a NATO-wide basis and not unilaterally.

George Robertson, former secretary-general of NATO, revealed in a report released in February of this year that there has been around 180 atomic weapons on the soil of some European countries. Turkey is estimated to have been hosting about 40 to 90 atomic weapons at its İncirlik base.

As a matter of fact, Robertson in February criticized the German government’s effort to remove the remaining American nuclear weapons, saying the move was driven more by populist sentiment than any long-term strategic goal.

In a report published on Feb. 15 by the Center for European Reform in London, Robertson said Germany cannot remove the missiles and still expect to enjoy the protection of US nuclear forces.

“For Germany to want to remain under the nuclear umbrella while exporting to others the obligation of maintaining it, is irresponsible,” the report said.

Turkish public and Iran

Unlike some European countries hosting US weapons, Turkish official sources are of the opinion that maintaining an unidentified number of US nuclear weapons at İncirlik Air Base will definitely continue to serve as a deterrent for Ankara against nuclear arms possessed elsewhere.

The Turkish public, on the contrary, is expected not to share the Turkish official stance on maintaining those weapons. But the possibility of Iran developing nuclear arms may change the Turkish public view, perceiving Cold War-era US atomic weapons as a savior from Iran's possible threat.

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

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

Barzani praises Turkish stance amid Iraq coalition debates

02 April 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

According to a senior Iraqi Kurdish official, Turkey is not favoring any particular Iraqi politician at the expense of another as Iraq embarks on what is likely to be a grueling coalition-building process in the aftermath of the March 7 national parliamentary elections.

Nechirvan Barzani, the former prime minister of the Kurdish regional government in northern Iraq, had a lengthy meeting with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Ankara on Wednesday evening. Barzani, who in late January was appointed deputy head of Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), also met with Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in İstanbul on Tuesday.

Barzani, speaking to a group of journalists in Ankara on Wednesday following his meeting with Erdoğan, was reminded of Turkish news reports suggesting that Ankara has supported Ayad Allawi, who won the general elections by a narrow margin, since before the elections. Allawi is now looking for partners to form a coalition government to rule the country.

"What I noticed during my meeting with Mr. Prime Minister is that he is not supporting one side at the expense of the other side," responded Barzani, whose remarks made in Kurdish were translated into Turkish through an interpreter.

"He [Erdoğan] is displaying a position which supports all Iraqis. According to what I understood, he hopes that an agreement is reached through the participation of all groups," Barzani added. He was tightlipped when asked whether Iraqi Kurds are considering participating in a coalition ruled by Allawi or forming an alliance with incumbent Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

Nonetheless, Barzani has indicated that the Kurds, who are widely assumed to be the kingmaker in the elections, will firmly demand real concessions on contentious issues during the bargaining period before the formation of a coalition.

"We will work as a partner of the central government and we will make demands for the sake of our region," Barzani said. He also reiterated the Kurds' demand for the implementation of Article 140 -- the clause in the constitution that lays out a plan to determine who will control Kirkuk. The plan includes holding a census and a referendum. The deadline for such steps has long passed, and Turkmens and Arabs, who accuse Arbil of sending hundreds of thousands of Kurds to Kirkuk to tip the ethnic balance, say the plan's blueprints are now obsolete. Kurds deny those charges.

The Iraqi Kurdish leader, meanwhile, praised Erdoğan's courage in dealing with the Kurdish issue. Last summer, the Turkish government launched a democratization initiative which in part

envisions expanding the rights of the country's Kurdish people, thus eradicating the grounds for support and sympathy for the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

"Important steps have been taken by Mr. Prime Minister, and they deserve the support of all parties. We should also support [these steps]. This is a great change. I hope we will succeed."

Azerbaijan may bring up military intervention in Nagorno Karabakh issue, executive

02 April 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

An Azerbaijani presidential executive said on Friday that Azerbaijan might bring a military intervention on the table regarding Nagorno Karabakh dispute if peaceful means failed.

Ramiz Mehdiyev, the head of the Azerbaijani Presidential Administration, said that Azerbaijan preferred to solve Nagorno Karabakh dispute peacefully.

"However, we may bring other means, and military intervention, onto table in the future if necessary and if these peaceful means failed," Mehdiyev told editors-in-chief of newspapers and TV channels in İstanbul.

Mehdiyev said Azerbaijan was losing its patience, and said Armenia was Russia's support in the Balkans and Russia had to be more sincere in solving this problem.

The United States was also supporting Armenia," Mehdiyev said.

"If there had been no one behind Armenia, it would have withdrawn from Nagorno Karabakh," Mehdiyev said.

Also, Mehdiyev said signature of protocols between Turkey and Armenia would not harm Turkish-Azerbaijani relations because the two were sister countries.

Mehdiyev said Azerbaijan and Turkey would discuss lifting visa procedures, and come to a conclusion soon.

Armenia made territorial claims against Azerbaijan in 1988.

In 1992 and 1993, Armenia occupied Azerbaijani territories in Nagorno Karabakh. Azerbaijan and Armenia signed a ceasefire in 1994.

The co-chairs of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) Minsk Group -- Russia, France, and the US -- are currently holding the peace negotiations.

Saudi Arabia to build 25 schools in quake-stricken Elazığ province

03 April 2010, Saturday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek on Friday said that Saudi Arabia will build 25 school buildings in the eastern province of Elazığ, which was hit by a magnitude 6.0 earthquake nearly three weeks ago.

Şimşek met with Saudi Arabian Finance Minister Ibrahim Abd al-Aziz al-Assaf at his office in Ankara on Thursday separately, followed by a meeting of the two countries' delegations. Şimşek noted that a Saudi development fund would allocate funds to build 25 schools in Elazığ as part of that country's earthquake relief efforts for the province.

According to news reports, officials from Saudi Arabia have begun to survey the area to determine the most appropriate areas in which to build the schools. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Finance Minister Şimşek met with Amr Dabbagh, chairman of the board of directors of the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority (SAGIA), last week.

Turkey worries Muslims at risk following Moscow bombings

04 April 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

As Russia mourns its terror victims following Monday's bombing of the Moscow metro, conspiracy theories swiftly blamed Chechen Muslim separatists, and Muslims living in Russia in general, of orchestrating the reckless attacks.

Turkish and American experts, however, are increasingly alarmed about the growing amount of danger on the fault lines between Muslims and Russians.

Two female suicide bombers killed 39 people and injured 63 on packed Moscow metro trains on Monday. Suspected suicide bombers killed at least 12 people in Russia's North Caucasus on Wednesday, two days after the deadly attacks in Moscow that authorities linked to insurgents from the region. The day following the attacks in Dagestan, terrorists also detonated a bomb killing two and injuring dozens in the same region's Khasavyurt district.

Prominent Turkish Islamic scholar Fethullah Gülen immediately posted a message of condolence through Today's Zaman and stressed that terrorism can by no means be associated with any religion or belief. In his message of condolence and condemnation of terrorism, Gülen said no matter what the reason or aim, terrorism can never be justified. Terrorism, which threatens something as sacred as human life and which eliminates security in society, Gülen noted, is an action so degenerate that it cannot be sanctioned by any religion, understanding or viewpoint. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev declared that Russia would act "without compromise" to root out terrorists. Some Russian lawmakers on Tuesday called for the return of capital punishment for convicted terrorists, and President Medvedev in televised remarks called on judges to consider amending terrorism laws. Analysts are deeply concerned that the government's rhetoric might lead to sharp cleavages in society, further polarizing and discriminating against innocent Muslims who have no connection with any organization advocating violence.

Russia is home to nearly 23 million Muslims and has observer status in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). "Russia is the most reliable partner of the Islamic world and the most faithful defender of its interests," Then-Russian President Vladimir Putin said in 2005 in Chechnya's capital of Grozny, clearly indicating Russia's interest in building good relations with the Muslim world.

Chechnya was initially the scene where most of the violent clashes between Russian security forces and Chechen militants took place, but with the passage of time, violent conflicts spread to other autonomous Russian republics with Muslim populations which then sought independence and thus started their own fight against Moscow. As a result, violent conflicts spread to Dagestan and Ingushetia, two small entities now marked by chronic insecurity, with tumultuous internal politics and fraught relations with Moscow.

On March 2, Russian Special Forces took 16 militants -- five of them dead -- while they were lurking in ambush in the Ingush village of Ekazhevo. "The Moscow bombing could be in retaliation for the killed militants a month ago," Sinan Oğan, the president of the Turkish Center for International and Strategic Analysis (TÜRKSAM), told Sunday's Zaman.

Meanwhile, Muslim scholars from a dozen countries made a statement on Thursday condemning the suicide bombings by terrorists in Moscow and Dagestan as "criminal terrorist attacks" that violated their faith.

A report called "Violence in the North Caucasus" released by the Center for Strategic and International Relations (CSIS) on Jan. 14 stated that 2009 was especially violent in the North Caucasus. In those 12 months, CSIS tracked more than 1,100 incidents of violence -- compared to 795 in 2008 -- many of which were deadly. The report said the most alarming was the number of suicide bombings in the North Caucasus, which nearly quadrupled from 2008, with the majority occurring in Chechnya. On Monday, Azerbaijani police officers detained seven suspects, of whom three were women and one Chechen, who entered the country illegally from neighboring Georgia and accused them of planting explosives on the roof of a kindergarten and a school. "I do not think there is a direct link between each and every terror attack or investigative success that occurs in the context of the North Caucasus," Ilgar Mammadov, the co-founder of the Republican Alternative (REAL) civic union, said.

"Given the current near-hysterical political climate in Russia, including the immediate -- if probably correct -- assumption that so-called 'black widow' women from Chechnya or at least the Muslim North Caucasus are to blame for the Moscow subway attacks, I think one can anticipate a general 'anti-Muslim' atmosphere to descend over the Russian Federation as a whole, possibly involving the sort of random violence seen in the United States following the attack of Sept. 11," Professor Thomas Goltz of Montana State University and author of "Chechnya Diary" said.

Forecasting this concern, well-known religious scholars from across the Muslim world gathered in Mardin last week to review a 14th century legal verdict sometimes used to justify acts of extremist violence. Scholars at the summit contended that the religious verdict calling jihad justified warfare issued by Ibn Taymiyyah could not be interpreted -- as some extremists have -- to condone violence or terrorism, saying that it rather emphasized that non-Muslims needed to be taken care of as opposed to attacked. Furthermore, Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs President Ali Bardakoğlu said terrorism in Baghdad "affects us as deeply as terrorism in the metros of Moscow, Tokyo, London and Spain."

Pointing to the danger with respect to the Muslim population in Russia, Kamer Kasım, an expert at the International Strategic and Research Organization (USAK), said if the hatred boils over into the streets, then Russia's relations with Muslim countries may worsen. "It will also be heavily criticized until Russia gets a good mark on its human rights record in Chechnya," the expert said.

"There is certainly a growing danger among the Muslim population in Russia," Mithat Çelikpala, an expert on the Caucasus, said. Noting that Russians are lumping all Muslims together without distinguishing al-Qaeda members, for instance, from other urban Muslims, the expert said as spring arrives the Russian army will prepare for large operations in the North Caucasus.

Oğan said he doubts there will be an increasing trend of racism on the state level. "But there could be a more dangerous development: Discrimination against innocent Muslims may increase among the public," he said. Noting that already there is racism against one segment of the society, particularly those from the Caucasus and non-Slavs, Oğan said there is now a danger of discrimination spilling over and including all Muslims.

On the day of the Moscow bombings, two Muslim women with headscarves were reportedly beaten while riding the metro. "I hope these are individual incidents and will not spread. These kinds of things may halt Russia's recent initiative to normalize ties with Muslims. Terrorist attacks in Moscow will also make the lives of members of Muslim communities living in Russia miserable," Oğan said.

Merkel in Turkey: A courteous visit without any substantial outcome

04 April 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Ankara may have to wait for a long time before being able to make sure that Berlin will remain committed to the principle of *pacta sunt servanda* (a principle of international law which means in Latin that agreements must be kept) vis-a-vis Turkey's ongoing membership negotiations with the European Union, the final goal being full membership.

Because, particularly recently, whenever they are reminded of remarks by German Chancellor Angela Merkel -- who has attempted to re-market her brainchild "privileged partnership" concept, a formula that falls short of full EU membership for Turkey and which is rejected by Ankara, Turkish leaders or officials make a reference to the fact that three negotiation chapters between Turkey and Brussels were opened when Germany held the presidency of the EU, from January through June 2007.

Yet, according to a 2007 list of future presiding countries prepared by the EU Council, Germany will not take over the rotating presidency again at least until the end of the first half of 2020.

Turkish officials assume that the facts concerning the period from January to June 2007 show that Germany hasn't created any obstacles to the course of affairs regarding the membership process so far. The same officials add, however, that Ankara expects Germany to continue its present commitment to the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elie Wiesel once observed that "words can sometimes, in moments of grace, attain the quality of deeds."

The same officials are very well aware that not only deeds but words also matter, and that must be the reason why they firmly and swiftly expressed their objection to the idea of a privileged partnership when Merkel, only days before her visit to the Turkish capital earlier this week, invited a small group of senior Turkish journalists and provided details of her privileged partnership concept.

Making a scene and being classy

Merkel, in a way, upped the ante before the visit on contentious issues such as her unyielding opposition to Ankara's bid to join the EU, the integration of Germany's Turkish community and Ankara's calls for visa exemptions for Turks traveling to Europe.

"If you have noticed, we answered all of her comments on those contentious issues one by one before Chancellor Merkel came here," a senior Turkish diplomat, who asked to remain anonymous, told Sunday's Zaman following the visit.

The same diplomat referred to remarks by Foreign Ministry spokesperson Burak Özügergin, who had responded to Merkel's reported remarks before the visit.

"Our position on whether such an offer like 'privileged partnership' is acceptable or not is obvious. And our goal of full EU membership is very well known at least as much as Madame Chancellor's view regarding Turkey's EU bid is known. There is no option other than full membership," Özügergin had said.

The same diplomat said Ankara acted with the conviction that "there was no need to make a scene in front of the public" when disagreements between the two parties were so clear.

"Moreover, both sides' chances of persuading each other on those issues were rather low. In my opinion, she performed decently while here and for our part, we didn't push her. Through remarks exchanged between the leaders, the potential tension was overcome beforehand, and that has been very classy," the diplomat said.

‘The promise was filled long ago’

As a matter of fact, the senior Turkish diplomat’s careful remarks didn’t clarify what Turkish officials felt when Merkel, at a press conference with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, suggested that deepening ties among members of the EU makes it more difficult for Turkey to meet conditions for joining the 27-nation bloc.

“I now understand that the term ‘privileged partnership’ doesn’t have a good connotation in Turkey,” she said.

“Merkel doesn’t believe that Germany today should be held to agreements reached during the leadership of former German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. Merkel said that when Germany promised membership to Turkey in the 1960s, it was a far more casual European Community. Today the EU has a ‘much greater intensity’ than it did back then. She added that current ties between Europe and Turkey far surpass what was discussed at the time,” Der Spiegel wrote of the conference, summarizing the message of Merkel’s remarks as “the promise was filled long ago and there is no longer one to keep.”

When asked by Sunday’s Zaman whether Merkel’s remarks properly summarized by Der Spiegel reflected a commitment to the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*, Turkish officials were tightlipped.

A majority of the Turkish media, meanwhile, suggested that Merkel’s discourse while in Turkey was softer and warmer when compared to her harsh rhetoric in remarks delivered just ahead of the visit.

According to Associate Professor Mensur Akgün, the director of the foreign policy program at the İstanbul-based Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV), both Merkel’s harsh rhetoric ahead of the visit and the seemingly softened stance while in Turkey was part of a public relations strategy.

“That was sort of a ‘rigged game.’ Ahead of the visit, both Germany and Turkey escalated the tension, and when she came here she, so to speak, made concessions by using the term ‘open-ended’ process,” Akgün told Sunday’s Zaman.

He was referring to the press conference with Erdoğan during which Merkel reiterated her government’s position that accession negotiations should be an “open-ended process.”

A dove in a rosy picture

Nilgün Arısan Eralp, an expert on Turkey-EU affairs, believes that the visit hasn’t led to any positive change in contentious issues between Germany and Turkey, particularly regarding the latter’s EU membership bid.

“I reckon that Merkel reiterated her privileged partnership offer also during talks behind closed doors. Yet, the way the visit was reported in the Turkish media painted a rosy picture,” Eralp told Sunday’s Zaman. “Ankara is still firmly rejecting the idea, and there is no change in the EU’s official position that the final goal for Turkey’s accession is full membership. What Merkel did was basically test the waters once again,” Eralp added, noting that Merkel’s stance led to domestic debates in her own country as well.

In Germany, criticism is directed against Merkel saying that such an exclusive approach towards Turkey would not be helpful for having positive democratic changes in the EU candidate country, Eralp said.

Der Spiegel also reported this week that commentators say Germany must finally provide an honest answer to Ankara: Yes or no.

Photographs taken when Merkel presented Erdoğan with a small statue of a dove and a message of peace sent by a 9-year-old German student named Lara were touching, and they also helped save the front pages of Turkish newspapers.

Nonetheless, Akgün believes that “consequently, this visit has been considered a successful one by a wide range of society. As a matter of fact, substantial results are not a sine qua non for making a visit ‘successful’.”

Talat: Election loss would kill Cyprus peace talks

05 April 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat has warned that talks to reunify ethnically divided Cyprus would collapse if he loses to a hard-liner in elections this month.

Talat said a failure of the talks would scuttle Turkey’s bid to join the European Union, harm relations between Greece and Turkey, fan instability and undermine economic growth in the eastern Mediterranean.

“This will be a disaster not only for Turkish Cypriots, but also for Turkey and for the Turkish-European Union progress. It will be, in total, a big retreat for the Turkish side,” Talat told The Associated Press in an interview Friday aboard his campaign bus as it toured remote villages in northern Cyprus.

Talat said he’s confident of a win because of a growing awareness among Turkish Cypriot voters that his rival Derviş Eroğlu’s long-held policy of a two-state peace deal will drive them back into international isolation.

Talat, who has led the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (KKTC) since his 2005 election on a pro-peace platform, has been engaged in slow-moving negotiations with Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias.

Talat obliquely referred to Turkey’s backing of his candidacy but refrained from overtly saying he has Ankara’s support. “My interpretation is that Turkey supports the pro-solution policies,” he said. “My interpretation is that he [Eroğlu] is negative to a solution.”

Turkish charity drills 115 wells in Asia, Africa

06 April 2010, Tuesday

TODAY’S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

The Cansuyu Solidarity and Charity Foundation, a Turkish charitable organization known for its international efforts, has so far drilled 115 wells in Asian and African countries.

The foundation has recently sunk 10 wells in Pakistan, where potable water is far from adequate for the country’s large population.

Muhammed Polat, the general-secretary of the Cansuyu Solidarity and Charity Foundation, said they have constructed the wells to provide more people with clean water. “Thanks to the financial support of many philanthropists, we are trying to aid people throughout the world without discrimination based on gender, race, color, language, religion, belief, ethnicity, origin or sexual identity. People around the world face many problems that make it difficult to live. Pakistanis exist without potable water because of geographical conditions, a long-lasting drought, poor infrastructure and other reasons. We are determined to continue our aid to people

throughout the world as long as benefactors help us by giving us not only financial but also moral support,” Polat stated.

The foundation has sunk 115 wells in foreign countries such as Niger, Pakistan, Chad, Ghana and Togo. Digging a well by hand takes three months, while drilling a well that uses an electric submersible pump, a vertical turbine pump, a hand pump or a mechanical pump takes two or three days. The foundation’s work to open new wells around the world is ongoing.

Turkey attempts to breathe life into Armenia reconciliation process

08 April 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

A senior Turkish diplomat arrived in Yerevan yesterday to deliver a letter from Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan as a process of rapprochement aimed to restore relations between the two estranged neighbors has come to a stalemate.

Erdoğan, speaking to journalists during a visit to France, said Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu visited Armenia as his special envoy. “We have sent Mr. Sinirlioğlu there. We have sent my letter with him,” Erdoğan said, without elaborating on the contents of the letter. Sources told Today’s Zaman that the letter contained a message that an agreement would better serve the interests of the two countries, especially when compared to the cost of a failure to make peace.

Erdoğan is expected to meet with Sargsyan on the sidelines of a nuclear summit in Washington next week. In Paris he was cautious, saying that whether the meeting will take place or not depends on the response to his letter. Erdoğan will attend the summit on April 12-13, along with the leaders of 46 other countries. US President Barack Obama, a staunch supporter of Turkish-Armenian efforts to normalize their relations, will have bilateral talks with Sargsyan but no meeting is currently scheduled with Erdoğan, the White House has announced. Turkish officials said meetings with Obama or other world leaders could be scheduled in the coming days if necessary.

Turkey and Armenia signed two protocols on normalizing their ties in October but the ratification of the documents in both national parliaments -- necessary for them to go into effect - - has been stalled as both sides accuse each other of modifying the protocols. Sinirlioğlu discussed measures that could be taken to overcome the deadlock in Yerevan, according to Turkish sources. The private NTV television, meanwhile, reported that the Armenian parliament will soon begin discussing the protocols. The parliamentary debate on the protocols will increase the pressure on Turkey to do the same, NTV said.

Sinirlioğlu’s visit to Yerevan also follows tensions between Turkey and the United States over a congressional committee vote on March 4 to pass a resolution acknowledging Armenian claims of genocide at the hands of the late Ottoman Empire. Ankara is now waiting to see if Obama will use the word “genocide” in an annual message due to be released on April 24, which Armenians claim mark the beginning of the genocide campaign in Anatolia a century ago.

Sinirlioğlu was to tell the Armenian leadership that the diaspora’s efforts to win international recognition for genocide claims had damaged the Turkish-Armenian reconciliation process, diplomatic sources speaking to Today’s Zaman said. The senior diplomat’s visit underlines that Turkey is still committed to the reconciliation process, disregarding the obstacles.

When reminded of the lack of progress in Armenia’s Nagorno-Karabakh dispute with Azerbaijan, the same sources said Sinirlioğlu was not in Yerevan to discuss the Nagorno-

Karabakh issue, but that this does not mean it will not come up in the talks. Turkey, a close ally of Azerbaijan, closed its border with Armenia in 1993 in protest of Armenia's occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and the adjacent territory. The dispute is not formally linked with the Turkish-Armenian reconciliation process but Turkish leaders have repeatedly assured Azerbaijan that the border with Armenia will not be opened unless the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute is resolved.

Response to the EU

Meanwhile, Ankara criticized the European Union, which has linked Turkish-Armenian relations with Ankara's bid to join the 27-nation bloc. In a statement on Wednesday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Burak Özügergin said Turkey was committed to the normalization of its ties with Armenia as part of its vision for regional peace and stability. "Turkey does not need to be reminded of this mission that it has [willingly] undertaken," he said.

"Good relations with neighbors are very important in the framework of any country's entry to the European Union," EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Füle was quoted as saying by Armenian media on Tuesday during a visit to Yerevan.

Turkey hopes better Greek ties lower defense costs

08 April 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey and Greece say they hope efforts to improve their relations will lead to reduced defense spending in both countries.

The countries have been at odds for years over airspace boundaries and flight procedures over the Aegean Sea that forms the border between them. For decades they have engaged in an arms race and their warplanes often engage in mock dogfights.

Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said Thursday after meeting Greek Deputy Foreign Minister Dimitris Droutsas that there would be no need for arms spending if the neighbors could build a "common future."

He says Turkey's prime minister will visit Greece next month.

Greece is suffering from a severe economic crisis and plans to cut defense spending in 2011 and 2012.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Economist says inflation figures in line with expectations

05 April 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's annual inflation figures, announced as 8.58 percent for March 2010, are in line with expectations, an economist said on Monday.

Nurhan Toğuç, chief economist at Ata Yatirim (Investment), said that economists expected high growth figures for the first quarter of 2010 following a 6 percent growth announced recently for the last quarter of 2009.

Turkey grew 6 percent in the fourth quarter despite a year-on-year shrinkage of 4.7 percent. Markets are likely to continue upward movement after these positive figures, she said, adding that balance sheets of banks are also expected better than ever before.

"Nobody had set expectations according to 11 percent growth (in banking industry). So, everybody will revise upward expectations after these figures," Toğuç said.

"When we look at growth for last quarter of last year and first quarter of this year, we can see a V shaped recovery. It has an effect on inflation. About inflation, Central Bank should not increase interest rates shortly. Otherwise it can crunch the economy. We expect the bank to make technical interest rate cuts," she said.

Turkish Central Bank continued to cut overnight interest rates during the whole year in 2009. However, the last time the bank lowered interest rates quarter base points --to 6.5 percent in overnight borrowing and to 9 percent in lending rates-- was November 2009. Since then it has kept rates unchanged.

Toğuç said Central Bank was likely to start rate hikes in June, also adding that she expects positive course of the stock exchange would continue and push new highs --above 60,000 points-- , until first quarter balance sheets are made public.

She said Turkish lira would probably gain strength against U.S. dollar, estimating a level below 1.50 --down to 1.44-- in the short term.

Turkey's February industrial output surpasses forecast

Thursday, April 8, 2010

ISTANBUL – Daily News with wires

HURRIYAT

Turkey's industrial production rose in February compared to a month earlier, strengthening expectations indicating that the country's economy grew more than 10 percent in the first quarter of 2010.

Seasonally adjusted output rose 1.6 percent from January, the government statistics agency in Ankara said on its Web site on Thursday. Output was up 18.2 percent from February 2009 when adjusted for the number of working days, the biggest increase in at least five years, the statistics agency said. Without adjustment, the annual figure gained 18.1 percent, surpassing the 15.8 percent forecast in a Bloomberg survey of 11 economists.

The production in the manufacturing industry was up 20.5 percent, whereas the rise in the mining industry was 12.2 percent and 5 percent in the electricity, gas and water industry in February 2010 over February 2009, according to the Anatolia news agency.

"We expect year-on-year industrial production growth to accelerate further in March and exceed 20 percent, which would be consistent with the double-digit gross domestic product growth rate in the first quarter of the year," Finansbank said in a research note, according to Agence France-Presse.

Fortisbank said the recent data was increasing upside risks on inflation and growth that could force the Central Bank to hike its benchmark interest rate earlier than expected.

The bank has slashed rates by 10.25 percentage points since November 2008 to a record low of 6.5 percent to bolster the economy. It has held rates steady since December but said recently that it might be coming to the end of a loose monetary policy.

Gross domestic product expanded an annual 6 percent in the last three months of 2009 as the economy pulled itself out of recession. Growth of 10 percent or more in the first quarter of this year would not be a surprise, Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan said on April 2.

“First-quarter real GDP growth will reach double digits,” Tevfik Aksoy, a London-based economist for Morgan Stanley & Co., wrote in an e-mailed comment. “The main reason behind the strong growth is the weak base” in 2009 when the economy shrank 4.7 percent. Industrial output increased 16.3 percent from a year earlier in January on an adjusted basis. In the first quarter of last year it contracted by an average of more than 20 percent.

Turkish defense industry survives global crisis

Thursday, April 8, 2010

ÜMIT ENGİNSOY

ANKARA – Hürriyet Daily News

Turkish defense industry has managed to cope with the global economic crisis quite well. Although the Defense Industry Manufacturers Association has not yet released Turkish defense industry's 2009 performance figures, the industry is expected to have experienced a slight decline only

Although the Turkish defense industry saw a decrease in revenue in 2009, the industry managed to increase exports amid the economic crisis, according to an organization that oversees defense spending.

The Turkish defense industry's 2008 revenue was nearly \$2.32 billion, according to the Defense Industry Manufacturer's Association, or SaSaD. A report from SaSaD on the Turkish defense industries 2009 performance figures is expected in the upcoming weeks.

"Based on preliminary and incomplete data, the defense industry's total revenue may have decreased slightly in 2009, but this certainly is less than the overall contraction in the Turkish economy last year," SaSaD Secretary General Kaya Yazgan told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review on Thursday. As the global economic crisis is over now, the Turkish defense industry is expected to grow this year," he said.

Overall, the Turkish economy contracted by 4.7 percent in 2009, though it grew by 6 percent in last year's fourth quarter. This growth is continuing into the first quarter of this year, government officials and analysts said.

"The defense industry is a robust sector in Turkey at this point in time. The 2008-2009 global financial crisis did not force Turkey to curb defense programs in a major way. So the Turkish defense industry's possible losses were small compared to the rest of the economy," said one Ankara-based defense analyst. "In other words, the local defense industry survived the global crisis."

Exports continue to rise

Yazgan said Turkey's defense industry exports continued to grow last year. According to SaSaD figures, the Turkish defense industry's exports totaled \$576 million in 2008, up from \$420 million a year ago. "Again based on early and incomplete data, this trend of increase in exports continued in 2009. We expect this to continue also this year," Yazgan said.

SaSaD was established 20 years ago by 12 defense companies. Now it has 118 members and associate members. According to its mission statement, SaSaD provides a two-way flow of information between the military and the SSM on one side, and the Turkish defense industry, as the designer and producer, on the other. It also represents the Turkish defense industry in the national and international arenas.

Members of SaSaD's board of directors are managers of top Turkish defense companies. SaSaD members include government-owned companies, such as the Machinery and Chemicals Industry,

or MKEK, and the military's Naval Shipyards; firms owned by the Turkish Armed Forces Foundation include Aselsan, Turkish Aerospace Industries, or TAI, and Havelsan and Roketsan; and various private companies. "Each group has about one-third of total turnover of the Turkish defense industry," Yazgan said. Aselsan and TAI are Turkey's two largest defense companies. SaSaD groups its members in 11 primary fields of defense technology: land platforms; naval platforms; aviation and space; weapons, ammunition, rockets and missiles; electronics and electro-optics; software and information technologies; electrical systems; research, development and engineering; parts, components and materials; uniforms and accessories; and utilities, medical and training.

According to SaSaD, out of the defense industry's total revenue of \$2.32 billion in 2008, 28 percent went to the electronics and electro-optics sector. Another 20 percent went to weapons, ammunition, rockets and missiles; 19 percent went to land platforms; 12 percent went to space and aviation; 5 percent went to software and information technologies; and 16 percent went to other defense related costs.

Self-reliance on land vehicles

From the 2008 export figure of \$576 million, 33 percent went to space and aviation; 29 percent to land platforms; 13 percent to electronics and electro-optics; 9 percent to weapons, ammunition, rockets and missiles; 9 percent to software and information technologies; and 7 percent to the rest.

Turkey's aviation exports mainly rely on offset arrangements stemming from contracts with large Western companies, including Lockheed Martin, Boeing and the Airbus Consortium. In defense deals, an offset is an industrial compensation, in which the purchasing countries' companies manufacture defense equipment for the selling country's firms.

Land platforms are likely the Turkish defense industry's strongest sector. Several companies, most notably Otokar and FNSS, have sold various types of armored vehicles, with both tracks and wheels, to more than 15 countries. These countries range from those in the Balkans to those in the Middle East and Asia over the past 10 years. "We are very self-reliant on armored vehicles," Yazgan said.

He said the greatest threats to the Turkish defense industry are very large-scale economic crises and potential key policy changes that may curb the country's defense spending. "The defense industry is a long-term sector and needs to know the foreseeable future," he said. Turkey presently spends slightly more than \$4 billion a year for procurement.

"The 2001 economic crisis, which had a devastating effect on Turkey as a whole, also badly hit the defense industry, as scores of top defense programs, such as the tank, frigate and corvette projects, were canceled altogether," Yazgan said. "It then took several years to revive those programs. But at this point we don't see any symptoms of such sweeping financial crises or sudden strategic policy changes that would affect our defense industry."

A Turkish media boss broke a record, paying the highest tax in 2009.

Thursday, 08 April 2010 11:49

World Bulletin

A Turkish media boss broke a record, paying the highest tax in 2009.

Aydin Dogan, owner of Dogan Media including Hurriyet and Milliyet, paid 19.1 million Turkish liras (TL) (12.7 billion USD) of tax in 2009 and topped other Turkish citizens paying the highest taxes.

According to figures of Tax Income Administration, 86 of 100 top tax payers are from Istanbul, eight are from Ankara, three from Izmir, and one each from Bursa, Isparta and Kocaeli. Aydin Dogan was the second citizen who paid the highest tax in 2008 with 12.1 million TL (8.06 million USD).

The second Turkish citizen who paid the highest taxes in 2009 was Salvo Taragano, the chairman of the Executive Board of Kurtulus Factoring. He paid 15.6 million TL (10.4 million USD).

Last year's tax record holder, Rahmi Koc was this year's third tax payer with 11.1 million TL (7.4 million USD).

Below are the top 50 tax payers in 2009. One USD is equal to 1.506 TL:

NAME/SURNAME TAX PAID (TL) PROVINCE

- 1 Aydin Dogan 19.161.631,50 Istanbul
- 2 Salvo Taragano 15.614.144,46 Istanbul
- 3 Mustafa Rahmi Koc 11,160,788,98 Ankara
- 4 Semahat Sevim Arsel 9.587.634,98 Istanbul
- 5 Wants to remain unanimous 7.986.148,99 Istanbul
- 6 Mustafa Vehbi Koc 7.312.597,03 Istanbul
- 7 Hamit Cankut Bagana 7.312.597,03 Istanbul
- 8 Suna Kirac 6.841.142,78 Istanbul
- 9 Nezh Barut 6.658.948,44 Istanbul
- 10 Husnu Mustafa Ozyegin 6.488.220,27 Istanbul
- 11 Nesrin Esirtgen 5.950.806,50 Istanbul
- 12 Mehmet Oguz Gursel 5.950.806,50 Ankara
- 13 Mehmet Omer Koc 5.733.688,53 Istanbul
- 14 Guner Zeynep Yuceer 5.616.881,31 Istanbul
- 15 Yildirim Ali Koc 5.603.005,43 Istanbul
- 16 Turgay Ciner 5.287.421,07 Istanbul
- 17 wants to stay unanimous 5.225.161,35 Istanbul
- 18 Murat Ulker 4.027.010,85 Istanbul
- 19 declined to be identified 4.013.433,81 Kocaeli
- 20 Ahmed Pekin 4.010.684,06 Istanbul
- 21 Sarik Tara 3.944.858,94 Istanbul
- 22 Arzuhan Yalcindag 3.910.556,85 Istanbul
- 23 declined to be identified 3.718.681,80 Istanbul
- 24 Izzet Bayraktar 3.613.364,75 Istanbul
- 25 Hanzade Vasfiye Dogan 3.552.656,65 Istanbul
- 26 declined to be identified 3.545.797,76 Istanbul
- 27 Begumhan Dogan Faralyali 3.537.090,05 Istanbul
- 28 Vuslat Sabanci 3.495.378,80 Istanbul
- 29 declined to be identified 3.460.088,44 Istanbul
- 30 Ahsen Ozokur 3.433.542,06 Istanbul
- 31 Isil Dogan 3.387.825,90 Istanbul
- 32 declined to be identified 3.269.894,72 Istanbul
- 33 declined to be identified 3.214.035,65 Istanbul
- 34 declined to be identified 3.210.359,27 Istanbul
- 35 Mehmet Fatih Karamanci 3.202.392,52 Istanbul

36 Ali Ibrahimagaoglu 3.201.981,64 Istanbul
37 Bulent Bulgurlu 3.183.881,78 Istanbul
38 declined to be identified 3.160.298,37 Istanbul
39 Sait Koc 3.073.647,05 Ankara
40 declined to be identified 3.018.054,83 Istanbul
41 Hatice Bayraktar 2.999.267,49 Istanbul
42 declined to be identified 2.872.513,18 Istanbul
43 Serra Sabanci 2.865.273,80 Istanbul
44 declined to be identified 2.770.260,93 Istanbul
45 Ali Acun Ilicali 2.668.432,33 Istanbul
46 Suzan Sabanci Dincer 2.647.096,97 Istanbul
47 declined to be identified 2.628.232,49 Istanbul
48 Ahmet Sedid Kurutluoglu 2.602.349,61 Istanbul
49 Recep Gencer 2.592.767,12 Istanbul
50 declined to be identified 2.568.791,17 Istanbul
Below is the list of tax record holders of the last ten years:

YEAR TAX RECORD HOLDER

2009 Aydin Dogan-Istanbul
2008 Rahmi Koc-Ankara
2007 Aydin Dogan-Istanbul
2006 Demir Sabanci-Istanbul
2005 Aydin Dogan-Istanbul
2004 Talip Kahraman-Ankara
2003 Talip Kahraman-Ankara
2002 Cemil Ozgur-Ankara
2001 Aydin Dogan-Istanbul
2000 Demir Sabanci-Istanbul
AA

Greek debt concern shakes global markets

Thursday, April 8, 2010
LONDON - Bloomberg
TIDAYS ZAMAN

Greek bonds dropped, sending the yield premium over German debt to the widest since the euro's inception, and stocks tumbled on speculation that the bailout of Europe's most indebted nation will unravel. The yen rallied.

The Greek 10-year spread to benchmark German bunds widened to 4.4 percentage points at 11:52 a.m. on Thursday in London. Greece's ASE Index of stocks slid as much as 5 percent, the most in four months, and the cost of insuring against a default by the nation climbed to a record. The Stoxx Europe 600 Index fell 1 percent and futures on the Standard & Poor's 500 Index slipped 0.3 percent.

The euro weakened for a fifth day against the dollar, and the yen advanced versus all of its 16 most-traded counterparts.

“There is now increasing uncertainty surrounding Greece's ability to raise the required amount of funding without recourse to the emergency lending facility provided by euro member states

and the IMF,” Steven Mansell, a strategist at Citigroup in London, wrote in a report. “This raises the question of whether or not tensions will also rise in other peripheral markets. We think that some form of contagion is inevitable.”

Finance Minister George Papaconstantinou said Greece does not need additional austerity measures, after the European Union and the International Monetary Fund agreed terms for an emergency support package last month. Europe’s economy unexpectedly stagnated in the fourth quarter, and Japanese machinery orders and U.S. consumer credit slumped, adding to investor concern that the economic rebound may falter.

Confidence evaporates:

Declines in Greek bonds pushed the yield on the government’s two-year note up by as much as 136 basis points, driving the cost of funds to 8.3 percent from 5.2 percent at the end of last week, while the 10-year yield added 32 basis points. Credit-default swaps on Greece’s government debt increased 32 basis points to a record 445.5, according to CMA DataVision prices.

Concern other indebted nations may struggle to meet their funding needs pushed Portugal’s 10-year yield 9 basis points higher to 4.35 percent.

The MSCI World Index of 23 developed nations’ stocks fell 0.4 percent while the MSCI Emerging Markets Index fell for the first time in 10 days, sliding 0.8 percent. In Europe, 18 of 19 industry groups in the Stoxx 600 declined, led by basic resources shares and banks.

The euro weakened 0.7 percent compared with the yen and 0.2 percent versus the dollar. The yen advanced 1.1 percent against both the rand and the New Zealand dollar as investors sought the relative safety of the Japanese currency at the expense of higher-yielding assets.

German government bonds gained, with the yield on the two-year bund dropping 5 basis points to 0.91 percent. Bunds are Europe’s benchmark debt securities because Germany is Europe’s biggest economy.

U.S. 30-year bond yields rose 1 basis point to 4.75 percent before the government sold \$13 billion of the securities on Thursday. Ten-year notes were little changed after surging on Wednesday following an auction that drew the strongest demand in at least 16 years. The yield was at 3.87 percent.

Copper fell for a second day, declining 1.2 percent to \$7,848 a metric ton on the London Metal Exchange. Aluminum, nickel and zinc also retreated. Gold fell 0.4 percent to \$1,144 an ounce as the dollar strengthened, and crude oil dropped 0.6 percent to \$85.40 a barrel in New York.

Turkey eyes share in \$400 bln Saudi plans

02 April 2010, Friday

TODAY’S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek said on Thursday the government is seeking ways to “take a favorable share” of Saudi investments, projected to reach \$400 billion in the next four years.

Speaking to reporters following a meeting with his Saudi counterpart, Ibrahim al-Assaf, in Ankara, the minister said Turkey is keen to engage in new investment projects in the entire Gulf region and that Saudi Arabia is one of the most attractive investment markets there.

Recalling that Turkish contracting firms have completed projects worth \$7 billion in Saudi Arabia thus far, Şimşek stated that the government sees much more potential in this regard and that companies should be encouraged to take part in new projects. The minister said he suggested to al-Assaf that Saudi Arabia ease tourist and work visa processes for Turkish businessmen.

Along with participating in huge joint projects, attracting cash from the Gulf region was another major goal that Şimşek cited for Turkey. Underlining that the Gulf countries post large current account surpluses, Şimşek stated that the Treasury is working on possibilities to draw cash inflow to Turkey, a country with a large savings gap. Emphasizing the importance of healthy and sustainable regional cooperation, the minister said better relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia will also contribute to stability in the Middle East.

Regarding a projected free trade agreement between Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Şimşek said the government expects this deal will be realized shortly and asked the visiting minister for his country's help to this end. Şimşek asserted that such cooperation is the only way to regain past figures in mutual trade. Turkey and Saudi Arabia saw \$5 billion in mutual trade in 2008; however, this dropped to \$3 billion following the global financial crisis last year. He said the communication and construction industries are two promising sectors in which both countries could work together.

Also speaking at the meeting, al-Assaf stated that both countries have much economic and commercial potential. In order to enhance their relations, governments should support the private sector, he said. "Mr. Erdoğan previously noted that the trade volume between Turkey and Saudi Arabia should be raised to \$10 billion. To achieve this goal, we will be providing necessary support to the private sector," stated al-Assaf, adding that a forum is planned to boost investments in the two countries.

Turkish and Greek labor unions join hands against armament in Aegean

08 April 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Unions on both sides of the Aegean will get united to slow down armament so that funds allocated to armament can be spent on creating new jobs, education, health and social security. Sources told the Anatolia news agency on Thursday that the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) took a decision against arms race between Turkey and Greece in its 34th General Assembly held between March 18 and 21.

In its decision, the GSEE said that the arms race between Turkey and Greece brought heavy burden on the workers and economies of both countries.

The GSEE made a call on both Turkey and Greece to end the armament immediately.

Responding to GSEE's call, Turkish Confederation of Labor (Türk-İş), the Confederation of Turkish Real Trade Unions (Hak-İş) and several other Turkish unions indicated that they will work with the GSEE to end the arms race between Turkey and Greece.

Our cooperation with the GSEE will be a role model to the whole world and contribute to global peace, said Turkish unions officials.

Markets condition strong comeback on political stability

04 April 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times ..." This is how Dickens starts off his famous novel "A Tale of Two Cities."

One can hardly find an economy that has not gone through certain difficulties in the course of history, but 2009 will be remembered as a year of financial troubles for Turkey as well as for the

rest of the world, accompanied by political instability to some extent. When Sunday's Zaman decided to speak with representatives of Turkey's leading sectors last week, the Turkish economy was, all to the good, in slightly better shape.

Amid tireless efforts to beat out the dust following the global financial crisis that had crushed the markets like a bulldozer, markets were buoyed by a Turkish Statistics Institute (TurkStat) report that revealed a strong comeback in the economy with an unexpected 6 percent spike in the final quarter of 2009 over the same period of 2008. Despite a 4.7 percent contraction in 2009 over 2008, observers interpreted the Q4 data as Turkey's bounce back from the bottom. Reports heralding a strong comeback came in different forms this time, with surging export figures and skyrocketing markets. The İstanbul Stock Exchange (İMKB) closed the week with a 0.6 percent rise in shares on Friday at 58.059,86 points, hitting a 29-month record high. The figures arrived hot on the heels of March's export data, which announced a 34 percent rise over the same month of 2009.

Representatives from the construction, textile, automotive and retail industries, major driving forces behind Turkey's economy, have told Sunday's Zaman that they are persisting in hope for a sustainable recovery in the Turkish economy; however, they had certain concerns over political stability being maintained in the long run. The Turkish economy has proven resilient against the destructive waves of the crisis, but problems in the economy still linger, accompanied by a prevailing threat to a sustainable political stability.

Emphasizing that they have accelerated investments regardless of the credit crunch and that now they are able to see the future after months of uncertainty, businessmen said they do not want such an atmosphere to be dispelled by any political clash. "We would be discussing the future of Turkish markets in vain if there was no political stability in the country," Turkish Retailers Federation President Şeref Songör argued in a phone interview with Sunday's Zaman. "We have to stick to a healthy democracy and political life for a strong economy. Turkey should not waste time on unnecessary clashes," he explained. Underlining that the latest indices have injected vigor into the markets and encouraged investors, Songör said Turkey should make use of such a positive atmosphere while it can. "We have suffered from volatility in the past, but now things are back on track," he continued, adding that the retail industry anticipates between 15 and 20 percent growth this year over 2009. The sector sustained a 10.4 plunge in 2009 from 2008 figures. "There is a transformation towards more organized retailing in the market, and this will fuel growth. Domestic demand and production are on the rise. Also, recent regulations introduced by the government will bring stability to the market," he noted.

İstanbul Chamber of Commerce (İTO) board member Fatih Oruç joined Songör in his reservations concerning sustainable political stability in Turkey. "Political stability is of the utmost importance; the economy's future lies here. ... We are encouraged by the recent rejuvenation in the markets but should first concentrate on avoiding any such clash," he explained. As he cited one encouraging figure after another, Oruç was reiterating his faith in the future of the economy.

Two-digit growth: Why not?

"Current figures show we will see a boom this year. Production in the auto supply sector jumped by a dramatic 90 percent in the first two months of this year over the same period of 2009," Oruç said, adding that two-digit growth in the auto supply industry is not a dream. "We believe a strong recovery is on the way. Exports also surged by around 40 percent in the first two months compared to same months of the year before. Both domestic and foreign demand is increasing, as are new orders." Concerning new incentives from the government, he said the use of local

automotive supplies and spare parts should be encouraged. “Local producers could provide some 80 to 90 percent of these spare parts and automotive supplies,” he said.

As he asserted that there is no need for pessimism, Housing Development Administration of Turkey (TOKİ) İstanbul Manager Niyazi Özdemir said that despite a 16.3 percent shrinkage last year, he would not be surprised by two-digit growth in the sector this year. “The housing industry is one of the major driving forces behind the economy and employment. Demand is currently rising, and we can see this in an increase in raw materials prices. A ton of iron is now TL 1,340; it was TL 900 two months ago,” he argued. Adding that the private construction industry is also increasing investments, albeit slowly, he said the sector would help to minimize unemployment.

“We believe that we have left the crisis behind, and you will see the results more easily in the first quarter,” he continued.

According to Soyak CEO Emre Çamlıbel, the growth in the construction sector could even approach 20 percent in 2010, an impressive performance if realized. “In parallel with sustainable growth in gross domestic product [GDP], we could enjoy two-digit growth in the construction industry,” he said. Noting that they follow in particular the number of home sales contracts finalized in a year, he said they expect 2010 will see 50,000 more than 2009. “Of course, this alone may not point to sustainable growth, but we see that both capacity utilization and customer confidence rose in the final quarter of last year. We are planning to double the number of apartments sold in 2010,” he said, adding that a serious boom for the sector could come in 2011. According to Turkish Construction Equipment Distributors and Producers Union (İMDER) President Cüneyt Divriş, an approximately 35 percent contraction in the sector last year could be followed by 10 percent growth this year. “Despite two contractions in a row, in 2008 and 2009, our sector has maintained its position as the fifth largest in Europe and the 12th in world,” he noted.

Underlining that they expect capacity utilization will increase this year, he said it is too early yet to say whether new production facilities will be opened this year. “We are looking at long-term plans and will be more active in international fairs. Bauma 2010 in Munich this month will be a stage where our industry can promote itself,” he said. Noting that banks are still reluctant to lend to companies, he said they expect such problems to be solved and that the government will introduce tax incentives for the sector.

In the textile and ready-wear industry, another prominent sector, things are just as optimistic. İstanbul Ready-Wear and Apparel Exporters Association (İHKİB) President Hikmet Tanrıverdi said the textile industry shrank by 22 percent in 2009 but that they are hopeful of compensating for this loss in 2010. “A two-digit growth will be realistic in the sector this year. We could at least maintain the growth rate of 2008, which was 9 percent.” He stressed that there has been a notable increase in orders and that manufacturers are finding difficulty meeting demand from the markets.

İstanbul Textile and Apparel Exporters’ Union (İTKİB) President İsmail Gülle was relatively more optimistic. “There is an increase in capacity utilization and energy consumption; we saw 10 percent growth in our sector in the first quarter. There is the need for new investments, there is potential in the market,” he explained. As regards the sector’s contribution to employment, it has provided jobs for 20,000 people in the past three months. “We expect a 15 percent growth in the textile industry this year,” he said.

Milk producers start strike over price disagreement

05 April 2010, Monday
TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Milk providers that are members of the Turkey Milk Producers Union (TSÜMB) started a strike yesterday over a disagreement on milk prices, the union has announced.

In a written statement released on Sunday, the TSÜMB said members of the union will not supply milk to companies unless a compromise over the minimum sales price is reached. The union accused industrialists of unilaterally reducing milk prices from the previously agreed level of Kr 85 to Kr 72.5 per liter in March.

Manyas Milk Producers Union President Mehmet Karaman, speaking to the Anatolia news agency, stated that in an agreement signed between milk providers and industrialists in the beginning of the year, the price of one liter of milk was set at Kr 85 for the first three months of the year but that this deal was violated unilaterally by companies last month and that payment was made at a price of Kr 72.5 per liter. "We tried to find a compromise with companies, suggesting that the price be Kr 75. But even this demand was rejected since we learnt they are working to reduce it further to Kr 60 in April. This is an unacceptable price," he said.

Meanwhile, the Independent Milk Platform also announced on Monday that its members across Turkey would commence a 15-day strike unless milk providers reach a compromise over the minimum sales price with companies following a meeting in the western province of Balıkesir.

Withholding tax to be equal for foreign and local investors

05 April 2010, Monday
TODAYS ZAMAN

The Finance Ministry announced on Saturday that it plans to impose equal withholding taxes on foreigners and Turkish nationals for bonds and investment funds.

Under the new withholding tax bill, which is expected to be presented to the government this week, zero withholding tax will be imposed on profits from government debt securities for both foreign and Turkish corporations, including mutual funds, while a 10 percent tax will be collected from both local and foreign individuals. The current taxation system allowing both foreign and domestic investors to pay zero withholding tax on shares will remain unchanged, the ministry said in a written statement.

The bill is expected to be put on the agenda of Parliament after discussions on a constitutional reform package, which is scheduled to start today, are completed. Turkey's Constitutional Court ruled last year in favor of making the tax on bonds, shares and mutual funds equal for domestic and foreign investors after the government removed the tax for foreigners in 2006 in a bid to attract capital.

Turkish travel agency expects good year for tourism

07 April 2010, Wednesday
TODAY'S ZAMAN WITH WIRES İSTANBUL

Turkey is likely to have a good tourism season this year if Spain and Greece do not reduce prices, a travel agency official said on Tuesday

The possibility of reduced prices in Spain and Greece, major destinations for European tourists, especially for German tourists, would create a risk for Turkey," said Ayhan Bektaş, chairman of

Turkish travel agency Odeon Tourism International (OTI). Despite the recent global economic downturn, Turkey has been the only country to see increasing tourist numbers among the top 10 tourist destinations in 2009. Nearly 27 million tourists visited Turkey last year, a 2.5 percent rise over 2008, although global tourism contracted 4 percent and European tourism plunged 6 percent. "There is a 53 percent rise in total reservations when compared to last year," Bektaş said. "We expect to host 30 million tourists in Turkey," he added.

All labor unions determined to celebrate May Day at Taksim Square

07 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN ANKARA

Six labor confederations made a joint decision on Monday to celebrate this year's May Day at Taksim Square.

Also known as Workers' Day, the holiday sees clashes between protesters and police forces in Turkey each year over whether celebrations will take place in İstanbul's Taksim Square. Turkish Confederation of Labor Unions (Türk-İş) President Mustafa Kumlu said a group of six labor confederations including Türk-İş has decided to have a mass gathering at Taksim Square this year, as they tried to do in 2009. Last year, protesters fought with police and eventually gained access to the square.

Türk-İş was joined by the Confederation of Turkish Real Trade Unions (Hak-İş), Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Unions (DİSK), Civil Servants' Trade Union (Memur-Sen), Turkish Public Workers' Labor Union (Kamu-Sen) and Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions (KESK) to announce the decision at Türk-İş headquarters in Ankara. Kumlu said they would make the necessary applications to the responsible bodies to gather in Taksim. The İstanbul Governor's Office did not approve celebrations at Taksim Square in 2009 but advised unions to gather at another place over concerns relating to general public order and security. In 1977, unknown assailants attacked during May Day celebrations in Taksim, firing shots from buildings around the square, leaving 34 dead and 136 injured.

SOCIAL ISSUES

More suspects detained in Turkey match-fixing probe

Thursday, April 8, 2010

ISTANBUL - Daily News with wires

HURRIYAT

Turkish police have rounded up nine more suspects, including a former international footballer, in connection with a match-fixing probe, the Anatolia news agency reported.

The second wave of arrests in several cities came as part of an investigation launched by an Istanbul prosecutor based on a complaint from the Turkish Football Federation that has already seen more than two dozen people charged, Agence France-Presse reported.

Among those reportedly detained Thursday was Celil Sağır, a player from second-division club Çaykur Rizespor.

The 35-year-old previously played for Istanbul giant Fenerbahçe and made a few international appearances between 1996 and 1997.

Other figures detained were the former president of fourth-division club Hatayspor and a former football referee, Anatolia reported, adding that all the suspects will be brought to Istanbul for questioning.

The investigation hit the headlines last month when police detained 46 suspects across Turkey, including players from the country's top league and lower divisions, managers and club administrators.

Twenty-seven of those suspects were subsequently charged. Arif Erdem, a former Galatasaray international and assistant coach at Turkcell Super League team Istanbul Municipality, was released after being questioned by the prosecutor.

The most high-profile figure to be accused in the case thus far is former international Fatih Akyel, who played for Istanbul giants Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe in his heyday and is now a defender at third-division Tepecikspor. He is in jail pending trial.

The federation has said the investigation was launched in August 2009 by the Sarıyer Prosecutor's Office based on a TFF complaint and is related to three separate match-fixing cases last year, and not to a Europe-wide match-fixing scandal involving Turkey that broke out in 2009.

"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 a 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 [Union of European Football Associations] have been shared with the Sarıyer Prosecutor's Office."

Match-fixing allegations as part of the investigation launched in Bochum, Germany, are being investigated separately, the federation said.

In November, German prosecutors announced an investigation into a Europe-wide crime gang accused of trying to manipulate more than 200 matches in at least 11 countries, including Turkey, to maximize betting profits.

The 200 suspect matches include 29 games in Turkey from the first division downwards.

National soccer team allegedly involved in match fixing

03 April 2010, Saturday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

The Turkish Soccer Federation (TFF) was allegedly involved in match fixing in an attempt to enable Turkey to take part in the 1996 UEFA European Football Championship, Euro 96, the Vatan daily reported yesterday.

Federation officials allegedly gave \$25,000 to Hungarian goalkeeper Zsolt Petry, who was playing for Gençlerbirliği at the time, to allow the Turkish national soccer team to score and help ensure the team would go to a European soccer championship for the first time.

The daily claimed that Gençlerbirliği Chairman İlhan Cavcav told a parliamentary commission about the incident and asked the commission to look into match-fixing activities in 2005. Cavcav also said when he found out that a goalkeeper on his team was involved in match fixing, he fired the goalkeeper.

Struggling for the second place in its Euro 96 qualification group, the Turkish national team defeated Hungary 2-0 and secured its first European soccer championship berth.

Turkish police initiated a mass match-fixing investigation last week, and about 30 people, including former soccer players and administrators, have been arrested while around 50 others have been detained.

Experts strongly oppose highway speed limit hike in Turkey

07 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

A massive overhaul of the country's road system led Parliament to increase the speed limit on highways from 90 kilometers per hour to 110 kilometers per hour last week, but many experts believe this will only lead to more traffic accidents because the capacity and quality of the country's roads cannot facilitate travel at higher speeds.

Speaking at the general assembly of the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (MÜSİAD) on Saturday, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan thanked all Turks for contributing to Turkey's development. "A total of 6,010 kilometers of double-lane highways were built in Turkey over the course of 79 years. However, we, the Justice and Development Party [AK Party], built 11,373 kilometers of double-lane highways over seven-and-a-half years. Thanks to our comprehensive highway projects, the number of traffic accidents has decreased considerably," Erdoğan said.

Hitay Güner, president of the Association of Traffic Accident Prevention in Turkey, said increasing the speed limit on divided highways has been on Parliament's agenda for a while. According to Güner, speeding is a leading cause of traffic accidents. "It is not a good idea to change Turkey's speed limit to match that of many European countries at the moment. The quality of the roads and driver awareness is far better in European countries than here, not to mention that most Europeans abide by traffic rules. Turkey is not where it should be when it comes to increasing the speed limit," Güner said.

İhsan Memiş, the head of the Turkish Highway Traffic and Road Safety Research Institute, said Turkey's highways are built in accordance with a 90 kilometer per hour speed limit. "Truck drivers always break the [speed] limit, especially on their way home, to reach their destination in five hours rather than 10 hours. The most disastrous accidents are those in which trucks are involved," Memiş says. Furthermore, Memiş says, young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 generally violate the speed limit, adding that increasing the speed limit will lead this age group to drive even faster.

Bahçeşehir University Transportation Enforcement Research Center Director Dr. Mustafa Ilıcalı, who lost five family members and his parents in a speeding accident, also opposes increasing the speed limit. According to Ilıcalı, the fact that most deaths in car accidents involve speeding is supported by more than mere statistics. Ilıcalı notes that Turkish drivers have a particular propensity toward speeding when it comes to traffic violations and strongly opposes increasing the speed limit.

Data from the National Police Department show that 19 percent of drivers in Turkey violated the speed limit last year and that the main cause of traffic accidents was speeding.

Famous ex-soccer player detained with 23 others for wiretapping

07 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Police detained 24 suspects, including famous former soccer player Rıdvan Dilmen, in a raid on Tuesday for wiretapping businessmen and celebrities.

Dilmen was taken into custody by the organized crime unit, which staged raids in four provinces, including İstanbul. Though not officially confirmed, Cengiz Pınarbaşı, a deputy director of the İstanbul Police Department, was reportedly among the detained.

One of the victims of the alleged wiretapping was Tanju Çolak, also a renowned ex-soccer player. While leaving the İstanbul Police Department, where he was called to testify following the detentions, Çolak said he had lodged a complaint against the detainees but was not aware that Dilmen was among them.

“They called me, and I came and testified as a victim. My phone had been tapped. But Rıdvan is my friend. When I found out he had been taken in by the police, I called my lawyer and told him to help Rıdvan out,” Çolak said.

He added that the detentions had nothing to do with a recent investigation into alleged match fixing. Çolak did not elaborate on the issue, saying the probe into the matter is still under way. The detentions came as a result of a two-year-long police investigation. Several of the other victims also testified to police.

Dilmen played for various clubs, including Fenerbahçe, becoming famous as the “demon.” He was a key player of the Turkish national soccer team between 1982 and 1992. After reaching the peak of his career, he trained several clubs but failed to achieve any considerable amount of success as a coach. Dilmen worked as a TV host at a private station before his detention on Tuesday.

High taxes don't result in cigarette smuggling, say experts at Turkish forum

Wednesday, April 7, 2010

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

The National Committee on Cigarettes and Health, or SSUK, organizes a conference in Istanbul that brings together academics and experts from Turkey, Hong Kong and India. Using facts and figures, they argue that Turkey's smoking ban has not led to more cigarette smuggling and call for further cigarette tax hikes in the country

The theory that high taxes on cigarettes increase smuggling was criticized by experts from Turkey, India and Hong Kong who gathered in Istanbul on Wednesday.

The experts met to discuss the effect of smoking bans and raising taxes on cigarette smuggling. Along with the National Committee on Cigarettes and Health, or SSUK, in Turkey, they presented facts and figures to show that high cigarette prices will deter smoking and will not lead to significantly more cigarette smuggling.

There have been reports in the Turkish media that cigarette smuggling has increased 20 percent because of the smoking ban, which is believed to reduce government tax revenue.

Experts, however, disagree; SSUK President and professor Elif Dağlı said cigarette smuggling is not likely to be individual work but the result of organized crime.

In order to increase smuggling by 20 per cent in Turkey, one would need a staff of approximately 20,000 people to work in distribution and sales, she said.

“Smuggling has nothing to do with cigarette prices, this is a method employed by the industry to scare the government,” said the professor. “If you keep the cigarette prices high, you increase tax income, reduce tobacco consumption and preserve health.”

However, she said she expected the tobacco industry would attempt to reduce the price to lower government tax income in the coming months and lobby the government into loosening the smoking ban.

She further offered statistics on how cigarette smuggling is high in countries with lower taxes and lower in the ones with higher taxes.

“The most important factor in reducing tobacco consumption is having high taxes applied on cigarettes. As doctors, we say high cigarette prices are good for [national] health,” she said.

1 billion to die from smoking by 2100

Dr. Lam Tai-Hing, director of the school of Public Health from the University of Hong Kong, said the most important method for fighting against smuggling is to give resources to customs, as smuggling will go on even without raising taxes.

Dr. Prakash C. Gupta, meanwhile, director of the Healis-Sekhsaria Institute of Public Health in Mumbai also said smuggling happens to countries with low access control and is not a function of price.

To further emphasize the fact that smoking kills, Lam estimated that two-thirds of smokers will be killed by related diseases if they start smoking at a young age, with a quarter dying between the ages of 35 to 69.

He said by 2030, 8 million people could be killed per year, with 80 per cent of them in low-and-middle income countries.

In the last century, smoking killed 100 million people, but is expected to kill 1 billion people in this century. Moreover one-third of adults are also exposed to second hand smoking, which also kills about 600,000 people per year.

Lam said raising tax is the most effective way to reduce tobacco consumption, adding that cigarette taxes should be at least 75 per cent of the price.

“Politicians may become unpopular if they impose high taxes but tobacco is one product that the consumers want to give up,” Gupta said.

Details of the smoking ban in Turkey

Turkey’s smoking ban took effect on July 19, 2009, outlawing smoking in all enclosed public places, such as bars, cafes, restaurants and places where nargile is smoked. Smoking is also not allowed in taxis, trains, outdoor stadiums as well as private and public schools.

Hotels are also required to set up rooms with ventilation systems that meet established standards for guests who smoke. These rooms must be on the same floor or corridor of each other.

Under the legislation, special sections made for smokers cannot exceed 10 percent of the overall space, and must be isolated from other enclosed areas. Similar-sized areas can also be created on the decks of sea-transport vehicles for smokers on intercity and international routes.

People under the age of 18, meanwhile, will not be allowed to enter these sections. Businesses are additionally required to make arrangements that protect nonsmokers from fumes if smoking is allowed in open-air parts of their premises.

Individuals who do not obey the ban are fined 70 Turkish Liras, while those who let people smoke in enclosed areas are fined between 572 and 5,723 liras.

Despite strong industry opposition and the belief by some that the ban is too strict, Turkey’s smoking ban was highly praised by other countries at this year’s Asian-Pacific Organization for Cancer Prevention congress, according to Dr. Nejat Özgül, deputy president for the anti-cancer department at the Health Ministry.

“If we want to win the war against cancer, we have to win the war against tobacco,” he said.

Turkey shaken by increase in youth suicides

02 April 2010, Friday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Three students attempted to commit suicide over the past three days as a result of poor performance in school in the provinces of İstanbul, Erzurum and İzmir. Two of them died after being hospitalized. Fifteen-year-old Nurtem İrem İnan, a 10th grader from İstanbul's Ataköy Cumhuriyet Anatolian High School, tried to end her life on Wednesday by jumping from the window of her classroom, located on the fourth story of the school.

The incident took place during her English class. İnan was severely injured after falling on concrete below. She was immediately rushed to Bakırköy Dr. Sadi Konuk Training and Research Hospital. İnan, who is in critical condition, was later taken to the Haydarpaşa Gülhane Military Academy of Medicine (GATA) thanks to the efforts of her father, Kaan İnan, who is a member of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK).

İnan reportedly wanted to end her life because she received a low grade on her English test. İnan's friends said she attempted to commit suicide one week ago but gave up after they convinced her not to do it.

Sadık Cucun, an eighth grader from the eastern province of Erzurum, committed suicide on Monday when his mother asked him to study for a test instead of letting him meet up with his girlfriend. When Cucun asked his mother for permission to go outside, his mother reportedly reminded him that he will soon be taking the Level Determination Examination (SBS) and should therefore study. "First study, and then you can go out. You are neglecting your lessons," Cucun's mother told him.

Following a quarrel, Cucun's mother locked him inside the house and went to a neighbor's house. This is when Cucun reportedly cut his wrists and hanged himself in the bathroom. He left a note for his mother in which he said, "Mom, I'm sorry."

The third incident came on Tuesday, when 17-year-old Şahin Yutmaz, a high school student in the western province of İzmir, quarreled with his history teacher. He criticized the teacher's instructional methods after receiving a low grade on a history test. Yutmaz's father was invited to the school to discuss the issue with school officials. While his father was at the parent-teacher conference, Yutmaz jumped off the balcony of his family's house and died at the hospital where he was subsequently taken.

100,000 balloons released on street

02 April 2010, Friday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

About 100,000 pink balloons cascaded down on people walking on İstiklal Street yesterday for April Fool's Day. The balloons had smiley faces on them and read "Smile İstanbul." The balloons were released from the roofs of four buildings along the street. Seeing the pink balloons fall from the rooftops, people played with them, popped them and kicked them around.

While minor accidents occurred as hundreds of people were playing with the balloons, children tried to catch them, and musicians played instruments while onlookers danced. Officials from Simurg Tourism and Lush Hotel, the organizers of the event, said they wanted to put a smile on the faces of people walking down İstiklal on April 1. Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.

Turkey Becomes Role Model to World with Its Ban on Smoking

Tuesday, 6 April 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

Honorary Chairman of the Foundation for Fight Against Cigarettes, Prof. Dr. Orhan Kural, said Tuesday Turkey had become a role model to the whole world with its ban on smoking in indoor areas.

In an exclusive interview with the AA, Dr. Kural said that "I defended a ban on smoking in indoor areas for the past three decades".

Before a law on the smoking ban in those areas was adopted, I conducted a research via a research company and found out that 80 percent of the Turkish population supported such a ban, Dr. Kural said.

I visited 81 provinces to give conferences. I visited coffee houses and barbers. Aside from several 'spoiled' night clubs, all coffee houses have welcomed the smoking ban. Those customers willing to smoke go out of the coffee houses and do so, Dr. Kural said.

In the past, I was taken out of buses and restaurants after requesting from individuals not to smoke. Now, it is time for smokers to think twice, Dr. Kural said.

According to Dr. Kural, Turks spend 9.5 billion Turkish liras (6.25 billion USD) on cigarettes every year.

The first phase of the law had gone into effect in May 2008 and made it illegal to smoke on public transportation and in workplaces and malls.

Restaurants, bars and cafes had been given an extra year to bring themselves into compliance with the law. The second phase of the law came into force as of July 19, 2009.

Tuesday, 6 April 2010

COMMENTARY

Iran's nuclear aspirations and different voices in Ankara

Wednesday, April 7, 2010

SEDAT ERGİN

HURRIYAT

We are putting under the spotlight Iran's nuclear aspirations and problems they have caused in relations with the Western world as Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has decided to attend the nuclear security summit to be held in Washington next week. U.S. President Barack Obama will host the meeting.

Erdoğan's trip to Washington coincides with critical U.S. efforts to reach a consensus for a United Nations Security Council resolution against Iran.

Britain makes an open call to Erdoğan

After Russia, the Peoples Republic of China, as one of the permanent members of the Security Council, has come to a point to support the U.S. for a possible resolution. This is an incredible gain for Obama, who is working very hard to raise sanctions against Iran.

At this point, all eyes are on Turkey and how the Turkish government will vote in the council.

British Foreign Minister David Miliband made a strong call for Turkey in an article in the International Herald Tribune on March 27 that was quite suggestive of how the international community keeps an eye on Ankara in the subject matter. Miliband stressed that the time has arrived to unite and pressure Iran. "The U.N. Security Council needs to take seriously its

responsibilities, not just countries such as Britain and China but non-permanent members such as Brazil and Turkey,” he wrote. Erdoğan will possibly hear similar messages from Obama next week in Washington.

Nothing but rumors

At this point, I should stress double standards among key actors in Ankara regarding Iran’s nuclear aspirations. Let me start with Erdoğan.

Erdoğan in his recent interview to BBC on March 16 said Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmédinajad expressed the Iranians’ desire to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes only. Therefore, it is not right to interpret the situation as Iran wants to have nuclear arms. As the BBC correspondent reminded Erdoğan that the International Atomic Energy Agency, or IAEA, has no faith in Iran, Mr. Prime Minister responded that there is no certain IAEA and intelligence report on Iran, so all are nothing but rumors. Since this is the case, there is nothing to talk about, Erdoğan added.

Gül disapproves of Iran’s intentions

On the other hand, President Abdullah Gül adopts a different line and speaks with a different tone of voice. “I am against nuclear weapons in my region. For my neighbor, especially, I am against it without doubt...,” Gül said at the beginning of November 2009 while we were on our way to Slovakia. “Iran is an IAEA member and benefits from the agency on nuclear energy issues. In return, Iran should accept to be under the agency’s control and be transparent.

Benefiting is reciprocal to responsibility. Iran should do better at meeting its responsibilities. They are in contact with the agency. But Iran should be more transparent to remove doubts.”

Gül’s statement to Forbes Magazine on March 26 also supports this line. Mr. President received Claudia Rosett of Forbes on March 22 among a group of American journalists and writers. Although the Presidential Office in Çankaya issued a statement later to announce that “Gül did not give an interview,” no statement of denial has been released afterwards that he did not utter any of these words.

Gül says he has no doubts Iran wants the nuclear bomb: "This is an Iranian aspiration dating back to the previous regime, the days of the Shah." For Iran's current regime, says Gül, "I do believe it is their final aspiration to have a nuclear weapon in the end," as a matter of “national pride."

He says Turkey is against an Iranian bomb. He believes it would trigger a nuclear arms race in the Middle East: "A major competition will start in the region." You are welcome to make a comparison between the views of Erdoğan and Gül. But, which line should Turkey follow in order to protect its national interests and fulfill security needs?

* Mr. Sedat Ergin is a columnist for the daily Hürriyet in which this piece appeared Wednesday. It was translated into English by the Daily News staff.

Which one?

Wednesday, April 7, 2010

CENGİZ ÇANDAR

HURRIYAT

Many mayor and hundreds of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, members are in prison as a result of the “KCK operations.” They are waiting for the day to be put before judges. A Kurdish-Turkish singer Rojda is sentenced for “making propaganda of a terrorist organization.” The outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK, members who came through the

Habur border gate in October 2009 are now the target of investigations that could put them behind bars for years.

Eight PKK members coming from Kandil and 22 from the Makhmour Camp in northern Iraq could face charges up to 20 and 15 years in prison respectively. If they hadn't move out from Kandil and Makhmour and entered Turkey, they couldn't have faced imprisonment. Those who invited the PKK militants naturally think that they made a mistake.

In the meantime, we hear that in some certain regions military concentration continues as preparations are underway for an "operation." In fact, the BDP leader Selahattin Demirtaş speaking at a parliamentary group meeting on Tuesday said that troop and munitions deployment has already started in the Cudi Mountain region. Demirtaş added that if the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, orchestrates a military operation in such a critical period all BDP deputies will go to the region and stand against tanks in order to not stop young people killing each other.

Can you imagine the image of a country where deputies stand as a "human shield" against the armed forces?

I wouldn't know if the BDP deputies can or cannot do it. But as the weather gets warm, political atmosphere is quite heated due to the "Balyoz" (Sledgehammer) Operation, the Ergenekon crime-gang trials and the constitutional change package as well as the referendum debate. If a political party has an urge to make such a statement, we should stop for a second and think: "What if the AKP launches an operation in such critical time."

The question perhaps can be asked as "What if operations are held for taking over the control of the country from the political authority?"

If arms speak in the southeast and number of funeral ceremonies for soldiers killed increases and if the political atmosphere in Turkey is completely poisoned, who could benefit from this, those who want changes in the Constitution and a popular vote or the pro-coup and anti-AKP groups? Which one?

This is a question that the AKP top officials and primarily Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan should answer.

However, we haven't heard any statement from Erdoğan's close circles that will allow us to be optimistic for the future. (See: Oral Çalışlar's article dated April 6) And we don't know either if Mr. Prime Minister is thinking similarly with his close friends.

The BDP leader, reminding that they presented the AKP an "urgent democracy package" said, "After we represented it, an AKP official said 'None of the political parties has made any suggestion.' They ignore what we suggested. Is this not frivolity?" Demirtaş asserted that Erdoğan said "We will not bargain with anyone."

Demirtaş underlined that there has been and will be no bargaining between the BDP and the AKP, stressing they will give fight for their demands.

This is somewhat annoying for me because I wrote a piece titled the "BDP-AKP bargaining" on last Sat. Erdoğan said "We will not bargain with anyone." Demirtaş is not satisfied to say the same but he announces this out loud. But, why? What's wrong with bargaining? Bargaining is part of politics. If you say "We will not bargain," it means declaration of "We will not make politics."

If you leave natural and legitimate side of "making politics" and "bargaining" you contribute to "military operations and "environment of violence".

Neither the AKP nor the BDP can handle such a development.

In early August 2009, we had an optimistic political atmosphere in favor of a solution to the Kurdish question. We didn't dream of a rosy-route but the point we have reached today is quite different.

If the entry of the PKK militants at the Habur border gate had been conducted successfully, this could be a perfect opportunity for both sides to accomplish disarmament of the PKK and elimination of violence. But the process has gone wasted.

Which is a more preferable development? Is it the PKK members in the Kandil Mountain to lay down arms and come back to Turkey, to evacuate the Makhmour Camp, release of hundreds of political prisoners, if not thousands, possibility of "going back home" for some Kurdish citizens living in Europe? Or is it imprisonment of mayors, increase in the number of political detentions, people changing their opinion to lay down arms and return to the country; no more hope of return for those who live in Europe, and beginning to talk about "military operations?"

Which is it?

Which "political climate" is more preferable?

Is it to discuss the "initiative" at Dolmabahçe Palace breakfasts with artists and singers, or is it to have "dialogue" and cooperation between the AKP and the BDP for constitutional changes and for the solution of the Kurdish conflict?

Which one?

* Mr. Cengiz Candar is a columnist for the daily Referans in which this piece appeared Wednesday. It was translated into English by the Daily News staff.

AKP on a one-way road

Tuesday, April 6, 2010

YUSUF KANLI

HURRIYAT

On recent trips to Bosnia and Herzegovina and to Paris, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made some revelations on two important issues.

On the one hand, he redeclared his old thesis that going to early elections would be "treacherous" to the economic stability of the country, thus ruling out once again the probability of early polls. On the other hand, Erdoğan reiterated his determination not to budge in response to criticisms from the opposition, which says that the constitutional-amendments package his party has submitted to Parliament violates the separation-of-powers principle, and thus the current Constitution. The prime minister vowed to take the amendments to a referendum early this summer if needed.

There are still people who believe that Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party, or AKP, will act in their accustomed "as if doing" style and, at a certain stage, allow the drive for a constitutional amendment to collapse, putting the blame on "powers that are against change and development," saying, "We wanted to achieve some serious reforms enhancing democracy, but we were not allowed by the powers of the status quo." People holding this view believe that Erdoğan's aim was not to undertake the reforms but to show the pro-change elements in the country, as well as the reform-seeking European Union, that he is committed to reform but has been unable to overcome the "conservative Kemalists."

Why? Because Erdoğan wants to be the first-ever popularly elected president of the country, excluding, of course, the election of 1980 coup leader Kenan Evren in a 1982 plebiscite that approved the current Constitution as well.

Though I cannot rule out such a strong aspiration on the part of the prime minister, I disagree with such evaluations as I believe Erdoğan and his AKP have entered this “one-way road” after calculating all the risks, apparent and non-apparent. These include a probable closure case against the ruling party on grounds of attempting to replace the “separation of powers” principle enshrined in the Constitution with a “unity of powers” dictatorial move in violation of Article 2 of the Constitution, which cannot be amended.

Erdoğan and the top executives of the AKP administration were so determined in their one-way constitutional-amendment drive that they even dared to propose the original amendment package with forged signatures. When the main opposition Republican People’s Party, or CHP, discovered that forgery, the AKP – after initially refuting the claim – conceded the mistake, dropped the package from Parliament’s agenda by withdrawing some signatures, then made some slight changes in the text, collected the required amount of signatures and resubmitted the draft.

The parliamentary Constitutional Commission will start debating the draft Thursday. The AKP wants the commission to finish the debate by this weekend while the opposition deputies will undertake whatever obstruction allowed by the parliamentary bylaws to delay the process. Including the time required to record the reasoning of the objections the opposition would want to register, the amendment package will probably go to the parliamentary floor by the middle or third week of April. The parliamentary debate and two rounds of voting on each and every article, as well as on the overall package, will naturally take some time. Probably by the beginning of May, the issue might be referred to presidential approval.

Of course, there is also the possibility that the package may fail to receive the required minimum 330 votes comprising a three-fifths parliamentary majority and thus die out, as well as the possibility – although rather farfetched – that, with the help of some defections among the opposition, the AKP could get more than 367, or a three-fourths majority, and thus the amendments would enter into force without a referendum.

Then the country would start awaiting the outcome of a CHP appeal to the Constitutional Court for the annulment of the amendment package for some reason, possibly on the grounds of violating Article 2, which safeguards the separation of powers and describes Turkey as a secular, democratic, social state adhering to the principle of the rule of law. What if the court says the CHP complaint is correct and annuls the package as a whole, or some of its articles?

In the meantime, the chief prosecutor of the Court of Appeals may knock on the door of the high court with a complaint that the AKP has attempted to change Article 2, which cannot be changed, and demand the closure of the ruling party.

The AKP’s one-way road is apparently passing through a minefield.

From the Bosphorus: Straight - A compelling reason to open Armenia border

Monday, April 5, 2010

HURRIYAT

If ever there was a powerful argument for the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia, it is not to be found in arguments over history, debates on the Treaty of Sevres, linkage to issues in third countries or the implications for the price of energy imports. Certainly, these

must be tackled in the fullness of time. But the most powerful argument is the case of 21-year-old Arthur Manukyan.

As readers of the Hürriyet Daily News are aware, we have strongly supported the initiative between the governments of Turkey and Armenia to begin a “normalization” process that includes opening of the land border and re-establishment of diplomatic relations. We see this as a step in a sure-to-be-long process. But it should not be prey to nationalist machinations from either side, the politics of U.S. ethnic lobbies or the designs of diaspora lobbies – Turkey’s or Armenia’s.

The ratification of negotiated protocols by the two countries’ parliaments are imperative for reasons far closer to home, reasons such as that of Manukyan.

For Manukyan suffers from a deadly disease know as “Moyamoya syndrome,” a rare disease that restricts the blood flow to the brain, leading to seizures, stroke and death if untreated. The treatment, essentially a set of miniature bypasses administered through a series of surgeries that take up to a year, is often successful. And the treatment is not available in Armenia.

It is available in Turkey. Manukyan is now receiving treatment at the Yedikule Surp Pırgıç Foundation Hospital, a facility established by Turkey’s Armenian community. Doctors there are working with their colleagues at Istanbul University’s Cerrahpaşa Medical Facility to save young Manukyan’s life.

“If we were in Armenia, my son would have already died,” the patient’s mother, Hasmig Manukyan told us in the report we published yesterday. But techically, Manukyan is in Turkey illegally. We are certain that no one will seek to deport him, despite the recent controversy of recent threats to expel undocumented workers. But he should not be in this legal twilight zone. Today it is Manukyan. Tomorrow, it may be someone in Turkey’s medically under-served province of Kars who needs medical treatment of a kind only available in Yerevan, less than two hours away by car. Good fences may make good neighbors, but closed borders do not. And Manukyan’s case powerfully illustrates why this is so.

Immediately, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan should act upon a request made by Turkey’s Archbishop Aram Ateşyan to facilitate whatever legal steps are necessary to clarify and assure Manukyan’s status to be legally treated for the duration of his therapy. This should be followed as soon as possible by completion of the faltering process to open the borders between our two countries.

Good news from Brussels on Cyprus

Tuesday, April 6, 2010

HURRIYAT

With the upcoming presidential elections in Cyprus on April 18, all attention from now on will probably focus on the repercussions of the results at the ballot box. What will happen when Prime Minister Derviş Eroğlu, wins? He is known for his opposition to a federal solution that is championed by Mehmet Ali Talat, the incumbent president, the Greek Cypriots and, not unimportantly, by the Turkish government. Will Eroğlu put an end, slowly but determinedly, to the ongoing negotiations between the two communities? And will Ankara try to stop him from doing so, realizing that a continuation of the status quo on the island presents an enormous road block on Turkey’s path to the European Union?

In the meantime, there is a very interesting development in Brussels that could directly impact this whole process. A few months ago, the Lisbon Treaty entered into force. It contains the new

rules of the game inside the EU. One of the important changes compared to the previous norms, is that, from now on, all trade agreements will be decided together by the EU member states and the European Parliament, or EP. Until now EU countries could take these kind of decisions without the approval of the EP. Even more importantly, when the EU concluded trade agreements with third countries, all member states had to agree on it, meaning that each country had a veto. So what, you may wonder? How do these internal EU rules influence the situation on Cyprus?

Do you remember the promise made by the EU in 2004 to end the isolation of northern Cyprus by allowing direct trade between the Turkish part of the island and the member states of the EU? It was meant as a reward for the Yes-vote to the Annan-plan by the Turkish Cypriots.

Unfortunately, the EU was not able to deliver on that promise because the Greek Cypriots used their presence at the EU table to block the adoption of the trade agreement. The proposal is still there, it was never withdrawn but politically it was dead because of the Cypriot determination to use their veto.

But that is no longer possible under the new rules of the Lisbon Treaty. Trade agreements have to receive the approval of the majority in the EP and of a so-called qualified majority (that means, roughly speaking, a two-third majority) among the EU member states. All pending trade agreements have automatically been transferred to this new decision mechanism. Including the free trade proposal with northern Cyprus.

Soon, the EP will have to give its opinion on the plan. In a parallel process, the EU member states will have to discuss the pros and cons. The Cypriot authorities have gone ballistic. They blame the new commissioner, Stephan Füle, for pushing this. He is clearly happy with this development but it is not something he initiated. It simply follows from the implementation of the new treaty. I am sure the Cypriot government and the Cypriot members of the EP will, again, do everything to stop this process. They realize that they cannot hide behind procedures any longer and that the time has come for the EP and the EU member states to make up their mind on the merits of the proposal.

When it comes to a vote, Cyprus, even with the support of countries like France and Austria, cannot prevent the adoption of this agreement that would allow northern Cypriot companies to export directly, without interference from the Greek Cypriots, to the rest of Europe. When adopted, the Turkish government, that always made the link, could open its harbors and ports to Cypriot planes and vessels. If that happens, the EU-Turkey negotiations, that run the risk of getting stuck soon, will get a new boost.

Let's see what happens on April 18. But let's keep our eyes on Brussels as well.

State changes but Kurds not

Tuesday, April 6, 2010

ORAL ÇALIŞLAR

HURRIYAT

Associate Professor Yalçın Akdoğan is a figure very close to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Akdoğan, as an academic, is particularly known for his studies on democratization and social changes, so I carefully read his piece on where the Kurdish question stands on today. Akdoğan's article was published in the daily Star's supplement, Açık Görüş (Open View) on Sunday.

The title of his piece was, in a way, summarizing the basics inside: “The state is changing but the Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, is not.”

Akdoğan made the following critical point:

“The masses that were politicized by the BDP are now acting on a nationalistic awareness, trying to generate a nation. The psychological distance between Turkish society and them is getting bigger. Agendas, attitudes, expectations and demands are differing.”

The differing demands between two communities have been observed for a long time by those who are familiar with the Southeast. After nearly every trip to the region, I stress this change and differentiation and try to explain that society at large should face the fact.

Following his assessments Akdoğan offers the following for solution:

“It is a must to make cold-blooded analyses and evaluations on the Kurdish question. To give importance to the viewpoints of our Kurdish citizens is necessary to find a solution. For the state, the act of reviewing its perspectives, changing its main policies and making noteworthy progress for democracy should offer change for the Kurdish politicians and people who are influenced by the Kurdish movement.”

The thesis of “the state changes but the Kurdish movement not” is something to be discussed in detail.

If the thought mechanisms of such a thesis are analyzed properly, we may reach quite different results ideologically. The national awareness rising among Kurds is artificially formed by the Kurdish movement and, therefore, a suggestion that says “there is an attempt to build a nation up” could be some of many criticisms or assessments in the end.

The Kurdish movement and the Kurdish national awareness are not restricted solely to Kurds living in Turkey. In northern Iraq, which the world recognizes as “Kurdistan,” the official language is Kurdish, even in many universities. Some of the Kurdish youth in Turkey are getting an education in their own language there.

The “Kurdish national awareness” is a notion beyond Kurds in Turkey. In this perspective, Kurds have gone through a radical change in the last two decades. Kurdish identity is, for them, an irreversible fact now. As we visited the region, this has become one of the most striking facts. And the real reason is neither the BDP nor the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK. This is an “objective” issue. Both the BDP and the PKK have adapted a clearer attitude when it comes to Kurdish identity. I am of the opinion that it is wrong and problematic to think that such awareness is artificially generated by the BDP.

Because it is pointless to arrest so many Kurdish mayors, have operations against the Kurdistan Peoples’ Community, or KCK, and pressurize the Kurdish movement in order to stop the rise of Kurdish awareness. These could deepen “psychological estrangement”.

As for the thesis that “the state is changing but the BDP not,” it doesn’t seem realistic to me. For instance, the daily Taraf the other day published an interview by Neşe Düzel with Zübeyir Aybar, one of the important names behind the Kurdish movement. Aydar spoke in contrast to Akdoğan, saying that Kurds have changed but not the state. “Turkey still doesn’t accept the Kurdish reality. It hasn’t reached the point in which it can say, ‘There are Kurdish people living in this country and they do have rights.’ Turkey still perceives Kurds as a folkloric element (...) we sent peace groups. But they were outraged after a bit of happiness on Kurds’ side. Turkey doesn’t want a solution. More operations are being conducted now.”

It is a fact that, the Kurdish movement has changed as well as the state’s attitude; not enough, however, to create a solution. For instance, the dominant understanding in the state doesn’t accept the fact that the Kurdish language needs to be supported as a “mother tongue.” The state

still resists the idea. As for bringing the PKK militants back from the mountain, it is impossible to talk about a road map prepared by the state. Therefore, Kurds cannot take courageous steps in order to stop this although they see that the armed struggle is not a solution.

And the Kurdish perception in Turks' mind still is not rational enough.

* Mr. Oral Çalışlar is a columnist for the daily Radikal in which this piece appeared Tuesday. It was translated into English by the Daily News staff

A wise formula needed to end the deadlock

Monday, April 5, 2010

SERKAN DEMİRTAŞ

HURRIYAT

After weeks of deliberations over the government-led constitutional amendments package, the Parliament will officially begin to discuss the proposals at the Constitution Commission this week. As is predicted by many, the talks at the commission will be tough and can ignite more political tension between the government and the opposition and the judiciary.

The discussions occupying the country's agenda for more than a month over amending a number of articles of the not-well-liked current Constitution are multidimensional and have complications coming from inside and outside the country.

Among a number of impediments before reaching a long-desired consensus for the constitutional amendments, the most important one is the methodology. It has two folds: the process of drafting the blueprint was not inclusive to other political parties and civil society and the process took such a short time that the government itself could not even consider on its own draft.

(Yesterday's news shows that the ruling party was as careless as one can imagine in even introducing the reform package to Parliament as they had to renew their application.)

At this point, it's it worth to remember the enlargement commissioner of the European Commission Stefan Füle's statement right on the same day the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, government submitted its amendment proposals to Parliament. "Given the crucial importance of these reforms for the future of the country, it is equally important that the broadest of possible consultation takes place, involving all political parties and civil society, in a spirit of dialogue and compromise. In this way all views and sensitivities can be expressed and all of Turkey can contribute to the much-needed consensus behind this major reform," Füle rightly stated. The very concepts he underlined include: the broadest of possible consultations, the spirit of dialogue, compromise and much-needed consensus. That stands as clear evidence that the European Union is not only focusing on what the candidate countries are doing but "how" they are doing it, as well.

Thus, as the methodology matters a lot, the best formula to solve the problem could be found within. But before going into the methodological aspect, let's stress the content-wise problems of the initiative.

The delicate content

The composition of the amendments package is an equally important source of controversy for the political parties. Out of 29, more than 10 articles are about improving the state human rights and level of democracy in Turkey. Granting more rights to children, elderly people and women are among this group alongside of providing the right of collective bargaining for public employees. Making the closure of political parties more difficult can also be counted in this group of amendments.

In the second group of amendments, there are seven proposals that would reset civil-military relations. Curbing some rights of the military courts, paving the way to appealing the decisions of the Supreme Military Council, or YAŞ, and the removal of the status of the top military brass could be placed here.

In the last group, there are five amendments that change the composition of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors, or HSYK.

No need to further scrutinize the government’s objectives in putting these different articles into the same basket. It was long seeking such an opportunity to restructure the judiciary, a strongly secular institution that has been accused of undermining the government’s actions over the years. And the AKP’s plan is to ask a “yes” or “no” question to the Turkish people for the entire package, as described by the prime minister “as the necessity of the logic of the referendum.”

How to save the least controversial articles

For the government, the first thing to do would be to give up of “its logic of referendum.” As a party that touches on the “will of people” more than anyone else, the AKP should rely on the real will of the people. Announcing that people will vote for each article separately would surely remove this tension.

Or President Abdullah Gül could declare from now on he would only take the amendments approved with less than 367 votes to referendum.

Or the Constitutional Court should make clear that it would only review the conformity of the approved amendments to the Constitution that are taken to its attention by the opposition parties. It’s high time for the country and necessitates a more responsible approach from all related parties. The first thing to do is to clear the minds from unanswered questions to alleviate the concerns of the people, which at the end will likely decide on the amended constitution.

Was Rumi an Islamist?

HSAN YILMAZ

TODAYS ZAMAN

04 April 2010, Sunday

Recently there has been an increase in the number of newspaper and academic journal articles about the Ergenekon terrorist organization case in Turkey.

Several of these pieces were authored by pro-Israelis, Likudniks and neocons or appeared in the publications of these people. Their message is simple: This case is not about facts but about a Justice and Development Party (AK Party) campaign to silence its opponents. And all this so that the AK Party can establish an Islamist dictatorship. Let alone the fact that annual EU progress reports never mention this “tremendous” news, it is also a fact that the AK Party’s ultranationalist and ultra-secularist opponents gave it a victory of 47 percent in the last general elections because of their silly mistakes.

The AK Party needs these opponents and needs them talking. Pro-Israeli, Likudnik and neocon pieces also constantly claim that the AK Party is helped in this mission by the “Islamist” Gülen movement. The writers of these pieces are all academics and must know that the word Islamism applies to politically minded Muslims who make Islam an ideology and instrumentally use it in politics. The Gülen movement is none of these. If they call any socially active Muslim an Islamist, all observant Muslims should be called Islamists and Rumi must be the chief architect of Islamism as he lived a socially active life and was regularly in contact with the rulers.

In many studies, the distinction between Islam, Islamic and Islamism is blurred and difficult to discern as they are used interchangeably. Some scholars label even socially active observant Muslims as Islamists. Such a usage of the term blurs the differences between individuals who take Islam as an ideology and individuals who simply see life as a divine test and try to follow the religion's basic tenets that demand social activism. A good case in point is Rumi, who lived in the 13th century. His life and activities show that today's habit of defining socially active Muslims who do not espouse anti-West rhetoric and stay away from daily politics as Islamists is applicable to Rumi as well, showing that a more refined and fine-tuned definition of Islamism is needed, and its arbitrary use to label every observant and socially active Muslim to somehow imply that a good Muslim is a non-practicing and socially inactive Muslim should be avoided. If the term Islamist continues to be used to cover observant Muslims as well, then we need to coin a specific term that would only denote Muslims who ideologize Islam and see it as a political project. As indicated above, sometimes the term is used to label socially active Muslims. But in this case we need to call all observant Muslims Islamists, starting from the Prophet and his companions, which would raise the issue of anachronism, and the term Islamism would cease to have its meaning and original use defining something modern, anti-imperialist West and so on.

The reason the Prophet, his companions and all observant Muslims would fall within the ambit of the definition of Islamist -- if we continue to stick to loosely using the term to mean socially active Muslims -- is simple: Islam by its very nature is a social religion, or, to put it differently, demands a socially active individual. Countless examples could be given, but let us only look at the fundamentals: the five pillars of Islam. 1. Witnessing that God is one and that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is His messenger (shahadah). 2. Praying the daily prayers (salah). 3. Fasting (sawm). 4. Paying alms (zakah). 5. Performing the pilgrimage (hajj). All of these pillars have something to do with other people, socializing, being socially active and so on. Moreover, the Quran is unequivocal that the essential duty of a Muslim in society is to encourage good and discourage evil ('amr bil ma'ruf wa nahy 'anil munkar).

Other than fulfilling all the required pillars, during his period, Rumi emerged as a powerful activist character and scholar. Moreover, not only did he talk about but also actively produced an atmosphere of dialogue and tolerance through his lyrics, poetry, the Mesnevi and, of course, his followers. Rumi's activism included his spiritual guidance to rulers, including the invading Mongols. Rumi gained much love and respect from the sultans, viziers and kings. These men in high positions were very eager to see him. He had disciples who were sultans and viziers but also a lot of disciples from amongst the poor and the common folk. He was part of the urban elite in the cosmopolitan capital city of Konya. He was also involved in the political struggles of his time in one way or another. Rumi was not a politician but a spiritual guide who was perfectly aware of the realities of the mundane world, essential to being a proper spiritual guide. Even though he did not deal with daily politics, he faced and is still facing political accusations, such as seeking political power or being a traitor.

In short, Rumi was not an Islamist even though he was a socially active and observant Muslim scholar. In a similar vein, many Muslims are similar to Rumi and contribute to social and educational projects but are arbitrarily labeled Islamists even though they do not have any political discourse and do not even espouse anti-Western rhetoric. Saying this does not mean that they do not care about politics. Many of them do, and as active citizens they participate in elections, but vote for any center-right or left party and in most cases avoid voting for Islamist parties.

Israeli mismanagement of the crisis in Turkish-Israeli relations

KERİM BALCI

TODAYS ZAMAN

08 April 2010, Thursday

Israeli mismanagement of the crisis in Turkish-Israeli relations

Just as the Turkish prime minister has the right to be a politician and avoid diplomatic language in his criticism of Israeli policies, the Israeli foreign minister also has the right to play to his own constituency

But while doing so he has to keep in mind that the Turkish prime minister does not maintain a wall of silence: he replies. The Israelis are masters of conflict management, and they should be managing the current pseudo-crisis in Turkish-Israeli relations not by the lower-chair treatment of the Turkish ambassador to Tel Aviv but by appealing to the souls and hearts of the Turkish public.

There is a certain level of Israeli misinterpretation of what is going on in Turkey. The Israeli Foreign Ministry suggested recently that an impression is being created that “the Turkish prime minister is seeking to integrate with the Muslim world at Israel’s expense.” That impression is a paranoid hallucination on the part of the Israeli analysts. It is paranoid because it prioritizes a dichotomous Israeli understanding of world politics: Israel versus the Muslim world.

Contemporary Turkish foreign policy disregards these dichotomies and binary oppositions. With a certain level of optimism, I do claim that Israel is a part of the Muslim world. Geography and demography impose this. About 20 percent of the Israeli population is Muslim. Apart from 20th century European history, Muslim and Jewish histories are at least parallel histories. The Biblical past of Israel is a Muslim history also. With a monotheistic religion playing quite a strong role in determining the culture and language of the nation, the Israeli nation is strikingly similar to most Muslim nations. Turkish “integration” with the Muslim world needs not to be exclusive of Israel. But, true! Turkish interest in the grievances of the Muslims of Jerusalem and of Gaza does not go together with a military alliance with a country that imposes those grievances on “our brethren” there.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry suggested that the Turkish prime minister should “find a more creative way, and to try to integrate with both the Muslim and Western worlds without turning into an extremist leader in the style of Hugo Chavez.” I suggest that Israeli diplomats should find a more creative way to criticize the Turkish prime minister without also demonizing the leaders of other countries. The Turkish prime minister spoke recently at the opening of the Arabic language channel on Turkish state TV and said that Turkey “cannot watch the murder of children in Gaza with indifference,” and he added that “our hearts are also with the children of Haiti and Chile.” Now, the Israeli Foreign Ministry advises Erdoğan that he should be equally concerned for the killing of innocent civilians in Pakistan and Iraq at the hands of terrorist groups. Well, in fact, he should be and to the best of my knowledge he is. Turkey is the most dynamic country working to integrate the Sunni Arabs to Iraqi politics and to help the normalization of Afghan and Pakistani politics. The Israeli critique is even more absurd than the Turkish folk tradition of reminding the Americans of the atrocities against the Indians whenever the Americans criticize a certain Turkish policy. So what? Would the Israeli Foreign Ministry be satisfied if Erdoğan had condemned the Israeli occupation and the terrorist activities in Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan as

one package? Wouldn't this hint at a kind of sameness between Israel and the terrorist organizations?

Israel is failing in its "hasbara" -- public diplomacy -- activities in and about Turkey. Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman's reference to Pharaoh and the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and his optimism that Israel will get out of the current straits also is understandable taking into consideration that he was speaking within the sensual atmosphere of Passover, but who would know that in Turkey? To a Turkish ear that has not heard of Passover and its relation to the Exodus at a