

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

TURKEY

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SUMMARY -POLITICAL NEWS

The poll on the Constitutional Reform package was conducted between April 7 and 8 by telephone. The Ankara-based metropolis Strategic and Social Research Center conducted the poll in early April. The results of polls showed that 50.6 percent of respondents would vote in favor of constitutional changes. The 39.2 percent of respondents said they would not lend support for constitutional changes if a referendum were held. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will be meeting later this month with Turkey's top figures from the sports world to talk about the government's democratic initiative in order to get their support. In wake of Kurdish Democratic Initiative, Tunceli University has been offered subjects in Kurdish and Zaza language. These Subjects can only be studied as elective courses list of the 162 military officers has been found Who attended a 2003 military seminar at which they drafted a coup plot against the Justice and Development Party (AK Party). In Germany a 43 years old Turkish Kurd has been charged on allegations that he was the leader of the banned terrorist Kurdistan workers Party and is still actively working for PKK. Biometric Passports will take into effect on June 1. These are electronic Passports that makes authenticate the identity of travelers. Somali pirates hijacked a Turkish vessel with 25 crew onboard.

SUMMARY-GEO-STRATEGIC NEWS

Turkey's foreign minister said that he believed the revival of Iran's nuclear Program deal could be possible still in these days. Under this deal Iran will send her low enriched uranium reactors to Turkey. Speaking at a think tank organization in Washington, D.C., the Foreign Minister of Turkey Davutoğlu said that Turkey had not yet been informed about the sanctions package against Iran.

However Turkey as a neighbor country of Iran have a great concern to this matter. He further added Iran is strategically important for Turkey as Iran provides a land route towards the Central Asia and Iran is Turkey's second biggest supplier of natural gas. Turkey does not want to be dependent on Russia for natural gas. He emphasized that Iran's nuclear issue should be solved through diplomatic channels. The President of Brazil Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and the Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan went to USA to attend 47-nation nuclear security summit particularly to discuss Iran nuclear sanction issue. There both the countries stressed on the diplomatic solution of the issue rather to put sanctions on Iran.

During 47-nation nuclear security summit in Washington US President Barack Obama has urged Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to maintain Turkey's constructive contribution, initiative and efforts to achieve a solution to Iran's nuclear standoff. While talking on Iran's nuclear issue

Turkey Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan said. 'I will call on the international community, which is so sensitive toward Iran, to pay attention to Israel too.' In remarks delivered ahead of a bilateral meeting with US President Barack Obama during which Iran's controversial nuclear program was to be a key issue, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reiterated that his country does not want Iran or any other nation to have nuclear weapons.

Keeping in view the on going situation it is being said that the growing diplomatic tensions between Turkey and Israel are indicating towards a major change in their bilateral relations. Armenian President Serzh Sarkysyan and Erdoğan held a rare bilateral meeting in Washington on Monday on the sidelines of a two-day nuclear security summit hosted by US President Barack Obama. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has asserted 'the resolution of a territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan is naturally linked to this process'.

Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat, has said he and Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias have achieved significant progress in talks to reunite the island, warning that downplaying this progress erodes Turkish Cypriots' hopes for a settlement on the island.

The Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay) has prepared a rescue team, a cargo plane, necessary medical equipment and food packages to help China, which was hit by an earthquake.

Turkish President Abdullah Gül paid a three-day visit to Oman upon the invitation of Omani Sultan Qaboos bin Said al-Said, to improve bilateral relations.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan offered condolences on Saturday to Poland and Russia over the demise of the Polish president in a plane crash in Russia.

Presidents of Turkey and Kazakhstan held Friday a telephone conversation on the recent crisis in Kyrgyzstan. In Kyrgyzstan a temporary government was established after the anti-government riots in the country. At least 75 deaths have been taken place in this incident.

Both presidents have expressed the importance of putting an end to the ongoing crisis in the country and the relevant parties' taking a calm stance regarding the matter. They have also agreed to continue to hold talks and exchange views in upcoming days. Turkish President Gül followed the developments in Kyrgyzstan closely and kept getting regular information from relevant institutions, the statement added.

Italy disagrees with France and Germany's view that Turkey should have a "privileged partnership" with the European Union rather than membership, Italy's foreign minister said ahead of a French-Italian summit on Friday.

China launched an online culture and tourism portal to improve dialogue and cooperation with Turkey

SUMMARY-ECONOMIC NEWS

Technical delegations from Ankara and Tehran are expected to commence studies for the establishment of a free industrial zone between Turkey and Iran in the eastern province of Iğdır, the city governor announced on Thursday. Technical delegations from Turkey and Iran would shortly come together to discuss the necessary preparations for the zone, which will be situated along the border connecting Turkey, Iran and Nakhchivan.

Leading participation bank Bank Asya has received a \$250 million "murabaha" syndicated loan from international financial institutions, marking the highest ever such loan for a Turkish bank. Turkish exporters have been buoyed by the past few months' noticeable increase in sales to the EU. With relations developing between Turkey and countries in the region, Turkish foreign direct investment (FDI) has recently become more concentrated in Middle Eastern countries, rising by 55.9 percent in the first two months of the year over the same period of 2009 and

accounting for 43.8 percent of all investments made. Turkish Energy Ministry, which unveiled its 5-year strategic energy plan in March, has made a presentation to the media on Thursday to introduce the plan.

In its new plan for 2010-2014, Turkey, an energy import-dependent country, plans to increase power generation using domestic resources, diversify natural gas suppliers, increase the amount of oil pumped to Turkey's oil hub Ceyhan and begin construction of nuclear power plant by the year 2014.

Turkey's national air carrier posted 387 million Euro of profit in 2009. Turkey has lost nearly \$208 million in the past three years due to problems it has faced in the operation of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline (BTC), carrying Caspian Sea crude oil to European markets. The BTC is a crude oil pipeline that covers 1,768 kilometers (1,099 miles) connecting Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia and Ceyhan, a port on the southeastern Mediterranean coast of Turkey. The BTC is the second longest oil pipeline in the world after the Druzhba pipeline. The first oil that was pumped from the Baku end of the pipeline on May 10, 2005 reached Ceyhan on May 28, 2006. In a report submitted to Turkish Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek, the Federation of Turkish Drivers and Automobile Owners (TSOF) said that over 400,000 trucks in Turkey were parked idle due to the ongoing economic crisis and high taxes on gas.

The report said that at least 80 percent of all expenses of truck drivers are born out of the cost of gas. As Asia regains its spot as a production hub in the global economy, Turkey, with its key geographic location, is finding itself at the edge of a new, modernized Silk Road and is looking to reap the fruits of expanded maritime and land trade between the East and the West.

The Turkish Health Tourism Association, or TUHETO, is promoting health tourism to Turkey at a number of events in Ukraine, Dubai, Switzerland, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan during April, May and June. The association aims to attract an income of \$20 billion from health tourism to Turkey in the long-term

SUMMARY-SOCIAL NEWS

Spring has arrived in Turkey. The world's best rally drivers will be gearing up for a four-day competition in and around Istanbul when the Rally of Turkey, the fourth leg of the 2010 FIA World Rally Championship, or WRC, starts Thursday. The event will be organized as a part of the 2010 European Capital of Culture activities. Religiously inclined smokers in Turkey are breathing easier following an announcement Wednesday from the Health Ministry that said there were no traces of pig blood in cigarette filters.

Religious groups had expressed their concern after Dutch research recently identified 185 different industrial uses of a pig – including the use of its hemoglobin in cigarette filters.

The announcement prompted Turkish health authorities to conduct a series of tests on different brands of cigarettes sold in Turkey, concluding that there was no trace of the blood.

POLITICAL NEWS

Survey: Public support grows for referendum on reform package

10 April 2010, Saturday

TODAYS ZAMAN

There is growing public support for the government's new reform package, which would amend 29 articles of the Constitution, according to a newly released opinion poll. The poll showed that 50.6 percent of respondents said they would vote in favor of constitutional changes if a referendum were to be held.

The poll was conducted by the Ankara-based MetroPOLL Strategic and Social Research Center in early April. The poll showed a nearly 2 percent increase in public support for an expected referendum when compared to a separate MetroPOLL survey conducted in late March.

According to the poll, 39.2 percent of respondents said they would not lend support for constitutional changes if a referendum were held. The strongest support came from Justice and Development Party (AK Party) voters while the weakest support came from Republican People's Party (CHP) voters. Almost 80 percent of AK Party voters said they would lend support to the reform package in a referendum, while only 15.9 percent of CHP voters said the same. Nearly 31 percent of Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) voters said they would vote in favor of the package if a referendum were held. This figure is rather high when compared with the party's staunch opposition to government efforts for constitutional change. More than 58 percent of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Development Party (BDP) said they would say "yes" if a referendum were held on the package.

The constitutional reform package, announced on Monday, includes 29 amendments. The most contentious changes proposed are reforms to the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) and to the structure of the Constitutional Court.

The government, which has been conferring with various NGOs and political parties, says it is open to suggestions on the package. However, the main opposition CHP has refused to raise any concrete objections. Instead, it has dismissed the package out of hand, calling it a government attempt to take over the judiciary despite the fact that the European Union has urged Turkey to reform its judicial system. As for the MHP, it does not oppose the spirit of the package, but the party demands that the changes be delayed until a new Parliament is formed after next year's elections and that a compromise commission be formed to discuss the changes.

The poll, however, showed that more than 40 percent of respondents do not know what “referendum” means. While 14.4 percent said it means “parliamentary voting,” 7 percent said it is “parliamentary session.” More than 5 percent said it is the Latin equivalent of “Constitutional Court” and 1.1 percent said it is the Latin equivalent of “censure motion.”

Participants were also questioned about their reaction to the recent release of many members of the military who were jailed on charges of plotting to carry out an alleged coup plan, titled Sledgehammer. The plan allegedly sought to undermine the government to prepare the groundwork for a military takeover. 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. Most of them were re-arrested, but some are still out of jail.

Nearly 47 percent of respondents said the release and later re-arrest of military officers shook their confidence in the judiciary. Slightly more than 28 percent said they did not see a change in their confidence level, while 13.1 percent said the releases and re-arrests boosted their confidence in the judiciary.

The Sledgehammer plan was drafted shortly after the AK Party came to power. The mastermind of the plan was apparently retired Gen. Çetin Doğan. According to the plan, the military intended to systematically cause chaos in society through violent events that would lead to a military takeover. Among the planned incidents were bombings at the Fatih and Beyazit mosques in İstanbul and downing a Turkish jet after a dogfight with Greek jets.

Another question directed at respondents concerned recent tension between Turkey and Israel. Asked whether close ties between the two countries are of any importance, 17 percent said they were very important. Slightly more than 19 percent said close ties between Turkey and Israel were rather important, while 21.8 percent said they were not of much importance. Another 36.6 percent said such ties were not important at all.

Ties between Turkey and Israel have been tense since an Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip in 2009. Turkey’s leaders have been critical of Israeli policies in the Middle East since then and suggested that bilateral relations might have to be reviewed in light of Israel’s hawkish stance against the Palestinians.

The poll also questioned participants about their voting behavior. Asked which political party they would vote for if parliamentary elections were held today, 38.3 percent said they would vote for the AK Party. More than 23 percent said they would vote for the CHP, while 16 percent said they would cast their vote for the MHP. Nearly 6 percent voiced support for the BDP. All these numbers are likely to increase at the ballot box due to the distribution of ballots cast by undecided voters, which the survey shows to be more than 20 percent.

The poll was conducted between April 7 and 8 by telephone on a random national sampling of 1,004 adults residing in cities, towns and villages. The margin of error for the poll was 2.5 percentage points, with a confidence level of 95 percent.

PM Erdoğan to ask athletes to support reform drive

10 April 2010, Saturday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will be meeting later this month with Turkey’s top figures from the sports world to talk about the government’s democratic initiative, which is intended to end separatist terror by extending Kurds more cultural rights.

The package also envisions an improvement in the cultural rights of other minorities.

Hüseyin Çelik, deputy chairman of the Justice and Development Party's (AK Party), said athletes are popular in society and that his party seeks to share its ideas on the initiative with them. "We believe in participatory democracy. Up to five pages of newspapers are allocated to sports news in Turkey. Would it be possible to ignore athletes? We will share our ideas with them," he noted.

Among the expected participants of the meeting are former soccer players Rıdvan Dilmen, Tanju Çolak, Hakan Şükür and Feyyaz Uçar, Fenerbahçe Chairman Aziz Yıldırım, Galatasaray Chairman Adnan Polat, Trabzonspor Chairman Sadri Şener, Gençlerbirliği Chairman İlhan Cavcav and the coaches of Turkey's prominent soccer teams.

Constitutional amendment package will result in changes to 107 laws

11 April 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The 29-article constitutional amendment package prepared by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) with an eye on reform will mean a marathon of work for Parliament if it is passed -- the constitutional changes contained therein would require changes to at least 107 standing laws in Turkey.

AK Party jurists who prepared the constitutional reform package have also determined which laws would need to be changed in the event that the package is accepted and passes at the end of the referendum process. According to the jurists, the text of at least 107 laws will need to be modified to bring them into alignment with the 29-point package. In addition, the draft amendment package itself will undergo a period of maturation after its passage in the referendum. It is expected that the final preparation of the amendment package, negotiations over it in Parliament and the referendum period will all be completed by the end of June -- and it seems certain that Turkey will see some serious constitutional debate between now and then. If the package is passed, however, Turkey will be discussing the implementation of the reforms for some time to come. According to the AK Party administration's plan, Parliament will be required to harmonize current legislation with the package by the beginning of the new legislative year on Oct. 1, 2010; however, it is expected that it will take at least six months for Parliament to complete that process.

If the package passes, the government will give the order for all institutions affected by the change to make the necessary legal preparations to complete the harmonization process. The harmonization recommendations to come from those establishments directly affected by the legal change will be evaluated and adjusted by the Justice Ministry and then forwarded for approval to the Prime Ministry and then Parliament. If this process goes smoothly, all preparatory work for the harmonization process will be completed in the summer months -- and Turkey will have completed its most comprehensive legal reform toward democratization since the Sept. 12, 1980 military coup d'état.

Which laws will be changed?

An addition to Article 10 of the Constitution, to read "Precautions to be taken to protect special groups such as children, the elderly and persons with disabilities, shall not be considered in contradiction with the principle of equality," will necessitate multiple changes to the Law on the Establishment and Trial Procedures of Juvenile Courts, the Population Law, the Green Card Law, the Social Security Institution (SGK) Organization Law and the Turkish Citizenship Law.

A foreseen change to Article 41 of the Constitution will also make changes having to do with protection of the family and children's rights. This will require a review of the Civil Code, the Social Services and Child Protection Agency (SHÇEK) Law, the Law on Disabled Persons and the Education Ministry Organization Law.

A change to Article 20 of the Constitution will bring personal data under protection, requiring changes to the Turkish Penal Code (TCK), the Law on Acquisition of Information and the Law on the Protection of Personal Data.

Economic laws to be combed through

A change to be made to Article 23 of the Constitution will put an end to the arbitrary restriction of foreign travel on Turkish citizens -- meaning that nothing short of a court order can bar a person from leaving the country. In order to accomplish this, however, changes will need to be made to a slew of existing legislation: the Law on Debts, the Turkish Commercial Law, the Customs Law, the Passport Law, the Banks Law, the Checking Law, the State Tender Law, the Real Estate Tax Law, the Income Tax Law, the Establishment Tax Law, the Inheritance and Devolution Law, the Bankruptcy and Enforcement Law, the Law on Foundations, the Tax Methodology Law, the Capital Markets Law, laws on the organization of the police forces and many more laws related to the economy.

The working world

Changes to Article 53 of the Constitution will also bring changes to the Unions Law, the Social Security Law, the Collective Bargaining, Strike and Lockout Law, the Law on Civil Servants' Unions, the Economic Social Council Law and the TCK -- to repeal the current laws on the right to collective bargaining and strikes. Because the right to collective bargaining will be given to retired persons, the relevant legislation will also be updated.

The amendment to Article 69 of the Constitution regulating the closure of political parties will redesign the criteria for shutting down a party. If the change is approved, then the procedure for shutting down parties will be completely rewritten -- requiring changes to many laws: the Law on Political Parties, the Elections Law, the TCK, the Law on Criminal Trial Procedure, the Court of Accounts Law, the Law on the Establishment and Duties of the Constitutional Court, the Parliament bylaws and more.

The establishment of an ombudsman system to be brought about via the amendment of Article 74 of the Constitution will mandate changes to the Law on Acquisition of Information, the Parliament bylaws and the laws on the Court of Accounts, the Supreme Court of Appeals and the Council of State. Meanwhile, the Parliament bylaws will also have to be amended due to planned changes to Article 84 of the Constitution regarding the election and terms of members of Parliament.

Thorniest issue military crimes

The proposed amendment to Article 125 of the Constitution would open up a judicial path for those expelled from the military by decision of the Supreme Military Council (YAŞ) to appeal the decision. But this will require a scouring of the TCK, the Military Penal Code, the Law on Civil Servants, the Municipalities Law, the State Personnel Law, the Administrative Trial Methodology Law, the Law on Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) Personnel, the Gülhane Military Academy of Medicine (GATA) Law and the War Academies Law for sections that must be amended. In addition, the laws on the organization of the four force commands will also be reviewed.

Meanwhile, the changes proposed to Article 145 of the Constitution aim to pave the way for the trial of members of the military in civilian courts when it comes to crimes committed outside the

scope of their military duties. This change to one article of the Constitution will require amendments to nearly 20 laws, among them: the Military Penal Code, the Law on the Establishment and Trial Procedure of Military Courts, the TCK, the Law on Criminal Trial Procedure, the Law on Legal Trial Procedure, the GATA Law, the Law on the National Security Council (MGK), the Law Regarding the Establishment and Duties of Military Administrative Courts, the Military Appellate Court Law, the Military Judges Law, the TSK Internal Administration Law, the Law on the Duties and Authorities of the Office of the General Staff, the Law on War Academies and the Law on Mobilization and Wartime.

A change to Article 129 of the Constitution is to bring under judicial supervision disciplinary offenses by civil servants; in order to accomplish this, changes will be made to the Law on State Personnel, the Law on the Trial of Civil Servants and Other Public Employees, the Law on Criminal Trial Procedure, the TCK, the Military Penal Code, the Law on the Organization and Duties of the Gendarmerie, the Law on the Establishment and Trial Procedure of Disciplinary Courts and the Law on Correctional Judges in addition to all the organizational laws of public institutions and ministries, which number more than 30.

Foundations of Constitutional Court to be shifted

The AK Party's planned amendment of Article 146 of the Constitution would change both the structure of the Constitutional Court as well as its jurisdiction and duties -- necessitating changes to a number of laws, including the Law on the Establishment, Jurisdiction and Duties of the Constitutional Court, the laws on the Court of Accounts, the Supreme Court of Appeals and the Council of State, the Attorney Law, the Notary Law, the Law on the Turkish Bar Association (TBB), the Law on the Establishment of the Higher Education Board (YÖK) and the Military High Administrative Court Law.

The ensuing changes to Articles 147 and 148 of the Constitution will mean the amendment of the Law on the Establishment, Jurisdiction and Duties of the Constitutional Court, the Law on the Supreme Court of Appeals, the Political Parties Law, the Parliamentary Election Law, the Law on Basic Elections Regulations and Voter Registers, Parliament's bylaws and more.

The amendment to Article 144 of the Constitution to expand the Justice Ministry's auditing authority will spell change for the Law on Organization of the Justice Ministry, the Law on the Supreme Court of Appeals, the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) Law, the Law on the Council of State and the Law on Sentencing and Prisons. The change to Article 156 of the Constitution will require the amendment of all the military laws to bring into effect changes with regard to military judges.

Leading the pack of the criticisms voiced by the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) is the foreseen change to the structure of the HSYK. The proposed change to Article 159 of the Constitution would mandate that changes also be made to the Justice Ministry Organization Law, the HSYK Law, the Law on the Establishment, Jurisdiction and Duties of the Constitutional Court, the Law on the Supreme Court of Appeals, the Law on the Council of State, the Attorney Law, the Notary Law, the Law on Criminal Trial Procedure, the Law on the Trial of Civil Servants and Other Public Employees and the Law on the TBB. Making these changes alone could take Parliament a month and lead to serious debates.

Public says 'yes' to constitutional reform, poll shows

15 April 2010, Thursday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

The results of a public survey have revealed that approximately 69 percent of the public demands judicial reform and about 62.5 percent of the public will say “yes” to change if it is presented in a referendum.

According to results obtained by the Cihan Data Gathering and Research Service for the Zaman daily, 62.5 percent of the public would vote for judicial reforms in a referendum, 19.6 percent would not and 18 percent did not indicate any opinion.

The survey was conducted on 6,440 people in 29 provinces from March 31 to April 5. For 70.2 percent of the survey participants, there is a problem regarding judicial independence in Turkey, while 16.8 percent of the public does not believe there is a problem and 13 percent “don’t have any idea.”

For 67 percent, the judiciary is politicized and steps outside the law in its decisions. Only 16.8 percent of respondents did not believe that the judiciary is politicized.

Those surveyed do not seem to support the opposition’s idea that “this Parliament cannot make constitutional changes” as 57.2 percent of respondents said the current Parliament can change the Constitution. On the other hand, 26 percent of respondents sided with the opposition, saying this Parliament cannot change the Constitution. In addition, 16.8 percent of survey participants did not have any opinion on the question.

When it comes to the question of whether or not referendums are a good method of changing laws, 61.1 percent said “yes,” 21.9 percent said “no” and 17 percent said “don’t know.”

Taking into consideration the voting distribution in 2007, the survey was conducted in major provinces such as İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir as well as in other provinces including Diyarbakır, Van, Mersin, Erzurum, Gaziantep and Sivas. A team of 125 people surveyed the public.

When asked if they thought reform is needed, 68.8 percent of respondents said “yes,” while 13.8 percent said “no” and 17.4 percent said “don’t know.”

According to the party affiliation of those surveyed, 94 percent of ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) adherents said “yes” to the need for judicial reform in Turkey, while this approval rate was 89 percent for Grand Unity Party (BBP) supporters, 78.6 percent for Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) supporters, 59.1 percent of Republican People’s Party (CHP) supporters, 56 percent for Democratic Left Party (DSP) supporters, 73.4 percent of Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) supporters, 89.9 percent for Felicity Party (SP) supporters and 61.2 percent for Turkey Movement for Change (TDH) supporters.

Of those who said they would vote “yes” to reform in a referendum, 48 percent were AK Party supporters, 21 percent were BDP supporters, 12 percent were CHP supporters, 10 percent were MHP supporters, 4 percent were SP supporters, 2 percent were BBP supporters, and BDP, DSP and TDH supporters accounted for 1 percent each of those who said they would vote “yes.”

Zaza, Kurdish offered as elective courses at Tunceli University

10 April 2010, Saturday

TODAYS ZAMAN

In a move that could be seen as the fruit of the government’s democratic initiative to expand the rights of previously disadvantaged Kurds, Tunceli University has begun offering Kurdish and Zaza language courses as electives

The rector of the university, Professor Durmuş Boztuğ, said the courses began in the spring term of the 2009-2010 academic year. Recalling that Mardin’s Artuklu University’s Living Languages Institute is offering Kurdish courses for graduate students only, Boztuğ said: “Tunceli University

is the only university that is extending its full support to the democratic initiative. It is also the only university that offers Kurdish as an elective course for graduate and undergraduate students.” Noting that 600 students are currently attending Kurdish courses while 400 are enrolled in Zaza, a related language, he said an instructor whose mother tongue is Kurdish is giving the Kurdish courses, while Zaza is taught by a retired Turkish teacher whose mother tongue is Zaza.

Speaking Kurdish was banned in Turkey until 1991. Prodded by the European Union, which has been pressing Turkey to strengthen Kurdish rights, the country has allowed private language schools to teach Kurdish and some Kurdish-language radio and TV stations to operate. In January, the government launched a 24-hour state-run Kurdish television station. In a gesture of goodwill to Kurdish citizens, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also uttered a few words in Kurdish on the day the station was launched.

List of Sledgehammer seminar attendees revealed

10 April 2010, Saturday

TODAY’S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

A list of military officers who attended a 2003 military seminar at which participants allegedly drafted a coup plot targeting the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government has been found, the Haber Türk daily reported yesterday.

The document found by the daily revealed that 162 military officers attended the controversial meeting, which was held at the General Staff’s Selimiye barracks in March 2003.

The Sledgehammer Security Operation Plan was drafted shortly after the AK Party came to power. The mastermind of the plan was apparently retired Gen. Çetin Doğan. According to the plan, the military intended to systematically cause chaos in society through violent events that would lead to a military takeover. Among the planned incidents were bombings at the Fatih and Beyazıt mosques in İstanbul and crashing a Turkish jet after a dogfight with Greek jets.

The discovery of the plot led to the arrests of dozens of active duty and retired members of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) on charges of attempting to destroy the government. Gen. Doğan was arrested in late February, but was released last week in a controversial ruling. He was immediately hospitalized at the Gülhane Military Academy Hospital (GATA). A panel of judges at the İstanbul 12th High Criminal Court, however, has ordered his rearrest. He remains at the hospital.

Around 30 military officers who attended the seminar have been arrested so far. Among the 162 officers, there are 25 active generals and 95 retired officers. Doğan’s name was at the top of the list.

The document found by Haber Türk also includes a seating plan for the seminar participants for photos. It is not known whether the prosecutors have photos from the seminar.

In the meantime, a war of words is taking place between Doğan and former Chief of General Staff Gen. Hilmi Özkök.

Following his release, Doğan claimed that Özkök leaked the Sledgehammer documents to the press and asked Özkök to address the issue.

“He has to answer the questions of the [Sledgehammer] prosecutors. He is not the one who should ask questions now. Now there are questions directed at him by the prosecutors. He should answer these questions rather than asking me questions. That is what he should do,” Özkök said on Tuesday.

Özkök, believed to have played an important role in preventing a possible military coup during his term as chief of General Staff, also called on Doğan to file a lawsuit against him if his allegations are true. “If he implies that these documents were leaked to the press by me, he should sue me for exposing state secrets by filing his evidences with the public prosecutors. I suppose a retired general who is deeply devoted to the military does not slander his former commander without evidence.”

Turkish man charged with PKK leadership role

12 April 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

German prosecutors say they have charged a 43-year-old Turkish Kurd on allegations he was a leader in Germany of the banned terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK. Federal prosecutors said Monday that Abdullah S. was charged on February 18 with allegedly running the organization's central sector in Germany from June 2003 to June 2004. They said the suspect allegedly coordinated organizational, financial, propaganda and personnel matters for the group while operating under the alias Hamza. No trial date has been set.

Biometric passports to take effect in Turkey on June 1

09 April 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The Turkish interior minister said on Friday that biometric passports would take effect on June 1. Turkey's Interior Minister Beşir

Atalay said that Turkey would start using biometric passports in line with international standards on June 1.

"Regular passports will be red and diplomatic passports will be black," Atalay told a press conference after a meeting of the Reform Follow-Up Group in the central province of Konya. Atalay said actual passports could also be used till 2015, and the government had prepared a bill to raise passport validity term to ten years from five.

A biometric passport, also known as an e-passport or ePassport, is a combined paper and electronic passport that uses biometrics to authenticate the identity of travelers. It uses contactless smart card technology, including a microprocessor chip (computer chip) and antenna (for both power to the chip and communication) embedded in the front or back cover, or center page, of the passport.

The chip inside the passport contains information about the holder's face – such as the distances between eyes, nose, mouth and ears. These details are taken from the passport photograph that you supply. They can then be used to identify the passport-holder. The chip also holds the information that is printed on the personal details page of your passport.

Imams to become women's rights activists across Turkey

13 April 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Imams will join the fight against domestic violence after the signing of a protocol on Monday envisaging cooperation between two state ministries.

Selma Kavaf, the state minister for family and women's affairs, and State Minister Faruk Çelik, who hails from the Religious Affairs Directorate, signed a protocol on training imams in dealing with cases involving violence directed at women.

Efforts to involve Religious Affairs Directorate employees and officials in activities undertaken by women's rights activists began in 2008, but taking concrete steps took time. Between then and now, Religious Affairs Directorate officials discussed many issues, including gender, the definition of violence, traditions and the Islamic approach to the issue.

In light of these discussions, guidelines for imams to follow were drawn up. Their publishing was contingent on the signing ceremony. With that completed, the guidelines will be ready within three weeks.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has contributed to this protocol. It has also trained the police force, judges and health workers on this subject.

The first phase of the project envisages 40 imams from Ankara receiving gender equality training. They are expected to participate in awareness programs and to examine traditional norms that create obstacles before gender equality. The imams will also learn how to help victims of domestic violence and direct them to relevant institutions.

The training will begin in May and continue through November. Upon completing the program, these imams will then serve as lead trainers of other Religious Affairs Directorate workers and officials. Starting with the directorate's Family and Guidance Office employees, all imams, preachers, muezzins and inspectors will be trained. The training program is expected to include all of Turkey by 2011.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, State Minister Kavaf said honor killings, early age marriages and domestic violence are severe problems plaguing the country and that religious leaders have an important role to play in the fight to stamp out these problems.

She added that officials from the Religious Affairs Directorate will not only contribute to increasing public awareness of these issues but will also learn how to approach and guide victims.

"Making laws to prevent violence against women is not enough, implementing all these measures is very important. Our government is pursuing a policy of 'zero tolerance for violence'," she said.

State Minister Çelik defined violence as the most prevalent social disease and said fighting against it requires a change in mentality.

"Religious officials have an important role to play in the fight against violence directed at women. No one should use religion as a tool to legitimize violence. Our religion has nothing of the sort," Çelik said.

According to statistics, every one in three women in Turkey is subjected to physical, psychological, economic or sexual violence.

Somali pirates hijack Turkish ship with 25 crew

09 April 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Somali pirates hijacked a Turkish vessel with 25 crew onboard on Wednesday, the EU Naval Force said. The MV Yasin C was taken around midday 400 kilometers off the Kenyan coast, said

EU naval spokesman Cmdr. John Harbour, adding that the crew onboard the 36,000-ton bulk carrier are believed to be Turkish.

It is the closest successful hijacking to Kenya's coast, said Karen Jacques of Dryad Maritime Intelligence, but two other attacks on March 31 were much closer -- one a mere 135 kilometers from the bustling southern port of Mombasa.

"The attacks were too far apart to be from the same group," she said, which she said indicates that at least two pirate groups are threatening shipping coming to the Kenyan port.

Somali pirate attacks have spiked in recent weeks, and both pirates and navies are becoming more aggressive.

At least 16 ships and around 24 crew are believed to be currently held by pirates off the lawless coast of Somalia.

Somalia has not had a functioning government since 1991. Multimillion-dollar ransoms have become a way to make money in the impoverished nation.

CHP's Proposals Raise Hopes of Compromise on Turkish Reform Package

Tuesday, 13 April 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's positive approach to the main opposition party's initial proposal to separate three controversial articles from the constitutional reform package has raised hopes for a potential compromise. A second proposal is met with negative reactions, but the AKP's stance will not be clarified until Erdogan returns from the United States.

Elements of a constitutional reform deal appeared to be coming together Monday as Turkey's prime minister responded warmly to a compromise offered by the main opposition party.

However tentative, the signs of life for a consensus over the ruling party's proposed amendments show promise for the future of Turkey's Constitution. But on Monday, Deniz Baykal, leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP, suggested a second part to the compromise, but was met with negative reactions from parliamentary deputies.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's feelings about the opposition's two-part offering will become clear after he returns from the United States, likely late Tuesday.

Baykal called last week on the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, to separate the reform package's three controversial articles regarding the judiciary and procedural changes for party closures. Baykal had said his party would support the rest of the package if the AKP implemented his suggestion.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has responded positively to the main opposition leader's proposal, saying his party will negotiate if necessary and that they were open to reconciliation, speaking to media ahead of his departure to the United States on Sunday.

As Erdoğan's positive approach raised hopes for a possible deal on the planned constitutional amendments package, Baykal presented a second proposal to the AKP on Monday, asking the government to delay the three controversial articles until after the 2011 elections.

Second proposal

"We have another proposal. Let's not make these three controversial articles, which have come to be seen as standing against the Constitution by the public, another source of tension," Baykal told a press conference Monday.

"We hence have come up with another suggestion to handle these articles in the new parliamentary period after the next elections in a move to demonstrate good will to attain

reconciliation with the ruling party and prevent possible future tension. This move will relieve the country."

Baykal also said his first proposal was still valid and did not affect his second proposal.

"If the AKP refuses our second proposal, our first proposal is still valid. If they accept our first proposal, we will act accordingly. We are trying to eliminate the tension created by the AKP's offers," said Baykal.

"Our deputy parliamentary group leaders will thus meet AKP representatives [Monday] and convey our written motion to ask for the separation of the three controversial articles from the package [in line with our first proposal,]" he said.

The second proposal, however, drew criticism from the AKP, which said the CHP had closed the door for reconciliation with its second offer.

CHP submits its proposal

Baykal also criticized remarks made by Erdoğan on Sunday, in which the prime minister had said the CHP leader "dealt in tricks" and that he had "politicized the presidency" with his calls for President Abdullah Gül to take the controversial three articles separately to a referendum.

"The president has such an authorization. There are some other implementations that politicize presidency but I don't want go further on that at this stage. We just called on the president to use his constitutional rights," Baykal said.

"It is improper for a prime minister to accuse us of dealing in tricks and use that terminology," Baykal told reporters.

Speaking to media on Monday, President Abdullah Gül, meanwhile, said his position did not permit him to engage in such debates.

CHP's deputy parliamentary group leaders Kemal Anadol, Hakkı Suha Okay and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu visited AKP deputy parliamentary group leaders Bekir Bozdağ, Suat Kılıç, Mustafa Elitaş, and Nuretin Canikli on Monday, with CHP officials presenting their written motion to separate the three controversial articles from the package. The CHP also wants to stage a parliamentary discussion on the rest of the package.

Bozdağ said after the meeting that his group would evaluate the proposal and respond to the CHP after Erdoğan returned to Turkey, adding that the AKP would unveil their response before the discussions in the general assembly begin.

The CHP will also visit the other opposition parties, Nationalist Movement Party, or MHP, and the Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, to ask for support on the CHP's first proposal.

Commenting on the CHP's move, the MHP's Oktay Vural told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review that the CHP's initiative was "tactical."

"The MHP is a party that sticks to its principles. It doesn't draw its road map in accordance with the approaches of other parties. We are not looking for tactical steps and cunning. The developments showed how the MHP is right in its views," Vural said.

Parliamentary Justice Commission President Ahmet Yimaya, meanwhile, said even if Parliament takes the decision to bring the three controversial articles to a referendum, only Gül would have the discretion to order such a change.

"Parliament can't push for three articles for referendum by separating them from the package.

The president has the authorization and discretion to put them to referendum separately," he said.

Tuesday, 13 April 2010

GEO-STRATEGIC

Upcoming aid ship convoy may stoke tensions between Turkey and Egypt

TODAYS ZAMAN

10 April 2010

The Turkish Humanitarian Aid Foundation (İHH), together with several other international nongovernmental organizations, is planning to sail to Gaza with seven aid ships to draw attention to the embargo on the besieged area, but Egyptian and Palestinian diplomatic sources warn that such a move could create diplomatic problems and may not actually be beneficial to the people of Gaza.

The diplomatic sources recalled that a similar move by the Viva Palestina convoy last December caused problems and said this time the problems could be even more severe.

The December convoy, which carried British, Arab and Turkish aid to Gaza, first went to Aqaba, situated far from Gaza. Egyptian authorities did not allow the convoy to cross Egypt and directed it to El Arish, the closest harbor to Gaza. Demonstrations against Cairo were held in Turkey at that time.

İHH spokesman Salih Bilici said their goal this time is to enter Gaza via the Gaza harbor and that while they are aware of possible problems, they don't have an alternative plan. "We don't have a plan B, C or D. We have decided to reach to Gaza by sea and enter via its port," he told Sunday's Zaman.

He said they bought two ships for this purpose, one passenger vessel with a 1,083-person capacity, and a cargo vessel that can hold 3,500 tons. British NGOs will contribute two ships to the fleet, Greece one ship and Irish NGOs will send another. It is expected that five ships carrying aid to Gaza will set sail near the end of May.

Bilici said that in addition to medical aid, the ships would carry construction materials. "We are taking construction materials as a symbolic gesture. Since the war, construction materials have not been allowed in; there are many government buildings, schools and hospitals in Gaza that were devastated. We want to convey the message that 'they are destroying, we are rebuilding'," Bilici said.

Bilici claims that Israel does not have any right to prevent them from entering Gaza's port but said that Israel might find an excuse:

"They could find some pretexts, like holding military exercises, for not letting us reach Gaza. But we will. We will

They could find some pretexts, like holding military exercises, for not letting us reach Gaza. But we will. We will enter Gaza by sea via the Gaza port. We are determined," he said. According to Israeli sources, it is not possible to enter Gaza by sea, and additionally construction materials are not allowed in under any circumstances.

"We think those kinds of convoys are political. They are more directed at political propaganda and less directed at humanitarian aid," Amit Zarouk, a spokesperson at the Israeli Embassy in Ankara, told Sunday's Zaman.

He claimed that there is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza now, that electricity to the area is supplied by Israel, that exports are allowed from Gaza, that hundreds of trucks carrying food enter Gaza every day and that all sorts of medical aid is free to enter Gaza.

"But there are well-known ways to do this, and these are the ways used by the UN aid agencies, other international organizations and the Turkish Red Crescent. There are two gates to Gaza, Karni and Ke

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“But there are well-known ways to do this, and these are the ways used by the UN aid agencies, other international organizations and the Turkish Red Crescent. There are two gates to Gaza, Karni and Ke

Turkey believes Iran nuclear deal still possible

15 April 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's foreign minister said on Wednesday he believed it was still possible to revive a deal, widely regarded as dead, under which Iran would send much of its low enriched uranium, or LEU, for processing abroad.

Ahmet Davutoğlu told reporters he had discerned a change in the Iranian stance over the past several months during which he said he visited Tehran about a half-dozen times, most recently in early March.

"There is a positive development and change of approach," Davutoğlu told reporters. "We have some chance and if we continue this diplomacy, I think we can achieve a solution."

According to Western diplomats, Iran agreed "in principle" to a deal that would move most of its enriched uranium out of the country during an Oct. 1 meeting in Geneva with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany.

The uranium would have been further enriched abroad and sent back to Iran -- under tight international safeguards -- to run a nuclear research reactor in Tehran that was built before the 1979 Islamic revolution and produces medical isotopes.

Iran ignored a US call for a formal decision on the deal -- seen as a way to build trust and to start to address Western concerns it may be developing a nuclear bomb -- by the end of the year.

As a result, Western officials have all but declared the agreement dead and major powers have begun to discuss a fourth round of UN Security Council sanctions against Iran, which says its nuclear program is to generate power.

NOTHING BEHIND THE CURTAIN?

Davutoğlu, who said he may return to Iran in the coming weeks, said Tehran previously insisted on a simultaneous exchange inside Iran of its LEU for the fuel for its research reactor but it was now "more flexible in that position."

He said one problem was that the international community did not have sufficient stocks of medium enriched uranium, or MEU, to hand over to Iran in exchange for its low enriched uranium.

"If we have today enough MEU in our hand to give to Iran, we will get the Iranian uranium the same day," he said.

Davutoğlu repeated Turkey's opposition to sanctions against Iran. Some analysts suspect Iranian hints of flexibility may aim to undercut support for sanctions on Security Council, whose elected members currently include Turkey.

State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley voiced skepticism that Tehran was actually willing to resuscitate the deal.

"The details do matter," Crowley said. "Iran communicates publicly ... some greater flexibility, but when you, you know, look behind the curtain, there's really nothing there."

George Perkovich, a nuclear policy expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace think tank, also suggested the onus was on Iran to show it was serious. He said the West was likely to adopt the position that Iran should "give us some detail and show us that our concerns will be met too and then we can talk."

We haven't been informed on sanctions package against Iran,"

15 April 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish FM

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said Wednesday Turkey had not yet been informed about the sanctions package against Iran.

Speaking at a think tank organization in Washington, D.C., Davutoğlu said that "a country thousands of kilometers away, and I am not necessarily referring to the United States, can take a decision on possible sanctions., a as neighboring However country with great interests and connections, we have serious concerns on the matter".

Asked about Iran's nuclear program, Davutoğlu said that he believed a diplomatic solution could be possible.

Though U.S. President Barack Obama is working on sanctions, the door for diplomacy is still open. Turkey is the only country in the United Nations Security Council that is a neighbor of Iran. A country thousands of kilometers away from Iran can take a decision in favor of sanctions. Nonetheless, as a country neighboring Iran and that has great interests, we are deeply concerned with this matter, Davutoğlu said.

Iran is Turkey's second biggest supplier of natural gas. Turkey does not want to be dependent on Russia for natural gas. Iran is Turkey's "only gateway" to Central Asia, Davutoğlu said.

In regard to a question on Turkey-Armenia relations, Davutoğlu underlined that he believed the normalization process between Turkey and Armenia would reach a successful point.

Erdoğan, Obama hold 'constructive' talks on Iran nuke dispute, Armenia

15 April 2010, Thursday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

US President Barack Obama has urged Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to maintain Turkey's constructive contribution, initiative and efforts to achieve a solution to Iran's nuclear standoff.

Prime Minister Erdoğan had a meeting with US President Obama on Tuesday on the sidelines of two-day, 47-nation nuclear security summit in Washington. The leaders reportedly discussed many subjects during the meeting, while the topics of Iran and Armenia were addressed in particular, the Anatolia news agency reported. While Erdoğan briefed Obama on Turkey's activities to advance peace in the Middle East and the Caucasus, the leaders agreed to continue to pursue the work undertaken by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu with respect to the peace process in the Caucasus.

The Turkish prime minister also stated his views on Iran's nuclear imbroglio and reiterated Turkey's stance of opting for a diplomatic solution instead of imposing new sanctions. The US president, in response, reportedly said they are watching Turkey's activities directed toward diplomacy and peace with appreciation and that he also wanted Turkey to stay on course in order

to make progress and reach a solution concerning Iran. Contrary to speculation that the meeting would be tense due to “genocide” allegations, it lasted 45 minutes instead of the scheduled 15 and was held in an amiable atmosphere.

Turkey, Brazil intensify diplomacy on Iran

15 April 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The leaders of Brazil and Turkey, both of whom are reluctant to back a Washington push to impose sanctions as a way out of the diplomatic standoff over Tehran's nuclear ambitions, had a trilateral meeting on Tuesday with US President Barack Obama, urging him to design a strategy based on diplomatic negotiations, not sanctions.

Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim said on Tuesday that Obama's brief trilateral meeting with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan -- which took place in Washington on the sidelines of Obama's 47-nation nuclear security summit -- was based “exclusively on Iran.” Amorim had already said on Monday that Brazil and Turkey, which both hold non-permanent seats on the UN Security Council, are studying an alternative proposal to deal with Iran's controversial nuclear program. Lula and Erdoğan talked about designing a strategy different to sanctions, Amorim said of Tuesday's meeting, which was not on the agenda and lasted barely 15 minutes.

Lula and Erdoğan told Obama about their proposal to seek a “negotiated solution” regarding Iran that would avoid new UN sanctions that are being pushed by the US, Amorim said at a press conference.

Although Lula and Erdoğan did not obtain a firm commitment from Obama that he would “wait” on the sanctions issue, according to Amorim, Obama’s reaction “was not categorical.” Obama is “not at all negative about attempting a negotiated solution,” Amorim said.

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu is traveling to Brazil later this week for further talks on the row over Iran’s nuclear program.

Iran denies it intends to build an atomic bomb, and despite widespread concern about its intentions, Obama is having difficulty securing agreement on a new set of UN sanctions against the country.

As the summit drew to a close Tuesday, delivering a speech at the opening session on the last day of the two-day summit, Obama said Chinese President Hu Jintao had assured him that China would participate in drafting sessions at the United Nations on strong sanctions.

The US already has the robust backing of Great Britain, France and Germany in adopting further sanctions against Iran. Russia, too, has shown a willingness to join the sanctions effort, meaning the required clean sweep of permanent members of the UN Security Council.

In Tehran on Tuesday, Iran expressed doubts that China would back the US push for new sanctions. Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said he did not think Hu was signaling that with his comments.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu said in Beijing on Tuesday that China supports a “dual-track strategy,” combining diplomacy with the possibility of international sanctions against Iran, but said the country believes “pressure and sanctions cannot fundamentally solve it.”

In his speech at the nuclear summit on Tuesday, Erdoğan once again reiterated Ankara’s policy; Turkey believes that diplomatic means to resolve the issue have not yet been exhausted.

Brazilian diplomatic sources said Obama has clearly understood that neither Lula nor Erdoğan favor new sanctions on Iran, news reports said.

‘Same goal,’ different path

Speaking to reporters late on Tuesday during the Washington opening of an exhibition of maps depicting the Ottoman view of the world from Piri Reis to Katip Çelebi, who made some of the most significant contributions to Ottoman geography and cartography -- “The Ottoman Worldview from Piri Reis to Katip Çelebi” -- Erdoğan admitted that the two countries shared the same views when reminded of news reports suggesting that Brazil would stand by Turkey on the issue of Iran.

“Perhaps there are other countries. [They] may join this process. So, our all efforts are aimed at finalizing these processes through democratic means and resolving this process through diplomacy. We believe that means other than diplomacy are troublesome. Taking into consideration that we are all determined countries that have democratic parliamentary systems, we should aim to resolve this issue within this system,” Erdoğan said in response to another question.

The Iran controversy was also on the agenda of Foreign Minister Davutoğlu’s bilateral meetings with Amorim, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Tuesday.

During those meetings, on the subject of Iran, Davutoğlu “clearly reiterated Turkey’s stance on the issue and told his counterparts that Turkey believes sanctions are not an appropriate tool,” the Anatolia news agency reported from Washington, citing anonymous sources.

For their part, Clinton and Miliband told Davutoğlu that Turkey’s support on this issue is “extremely important,” the same sources said.

On Tuesday Clinton, meanwhile, cited “progress” with Turkey on international sanctions. “We’re working every day and making progress,” Clinton told Agence France-Presse when asked if in her opinion Ankara would end up agreeing to the sanctions.

US State Department spokesman Philip J. Crowley told reporters that Clinton told Davutoğlu and Amorim that it is time to apply sanctions pressure on Iran at the UN. “We feel very strongly that it is time to act,” Crowley said. “We think at this point the credibility of the international community is at stake,” he added.

Davutoğlu to visit Brazil ahead of Lula’s Iran visit

In addition to the Iran issue, details of Davutoğlu’s upcoming visit to Brazil were also on the agenda of his bilateral meeting with Amorim, Anatolia reported. Davutoğlu’s visit is scheduled to take place on Friday and Saturday.

While in Brasília, Davutoğlu will also have talks with President Lula, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement released on Wednesday. Davutoğlu’s meeting with Lula will come only weeks before the latter’s planned visit to Tehran, scheduled for next month. Lula’s visit has been described as a “last-chance” effort by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who says a UN Security Council resolution imposing penalties on Iran should go through by June.

Lula played host to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad last year and has said it is “not prudent to push Iran into a corner.”

Brazilian and Turkish officials will exchange views on international affairs that are on the global agenda “within the framework of the two countries’ membership in the UN Security Council and G-20,” the Foreign Ministry statement said, indicating that the Iran controversy would be high on the agenda of talks in Brasília.

Netanyahu shuns Obama's atom summit to avoid Erdoğan censure

10 April 2010, Saturday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu has cancelled a planned trip to Washington next week for President Barack Obama's 47-country nuclear security conference. He made the decision after learning Egypt and Turkey intended to raise the issue of Israel's assumed atomic arsenal at the meeting, a senior Israeli government official said on Friday in Jerusalem.

Opposing sanctions as a way of resolving the dispute between neighboring Iran and Western powers over the Iran's controversial nuclear program, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has firmly supported exhausting diplomatic efforts to resolve the dispute. Erdoğan, meanwhile, says Israel, which is widely believed to possess nuclear weapons although it has never openly acknowledged it, should also be facing pressure to get rid of them.

Israel is believed to be the only nuclear-armed power in the Middle East but has never confirmed or denied it. It has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Netanyahu saw Obama at the White House late last month to discuss the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process. But they failed to see eye-to-eye, and bilateral ties remain strained.

“The prime minister decided to cancel his trip to Washington to attend the nuclear conference next week after learning that some countries, including Egypt and Turkey, plan to say Israel must sign the NPT,” the Israeli official said.

In Ankara, Turkish diplomatic sources, approached by Today's Zaman admitted that Erdoğan would raise the issue of Israel's responsibility concerning the issue since he principally opposes the proliferation of nuclear weapons within the entire region.

“Our prime minister has always stated that Turkey doesn't want any nuclear weapons in the region, and he will most probably repeat this during the meeting in Washington,” the same diplomatic sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, added.

Speaking to reporters in the Central Anatolian province of Konya, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu declined to comment on the Israeli announcement, saying it is up to individual countries to decide which summit to attend and at which level.

While noting that the summit at the White House would also serve as a kind of preparatory gathering for a major conference to be held at UN headquarters in early May to review the NPT, the sources recalled Erdoğan's remarks on implementation of the NPT.

In October 2009, ahead of an official visit to Iran, Erdoğan had accused the West of treating Iran “unfairly,” warning that negative approaches towards the Islamic republic over its controversial nuclear program would harm regional peace.

At the time, he said it was “unfair and unjust” to put pressure on Iran, which lets experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) visit its nuclear sites, while other countries have such weapons. He did not mention any particular country but was apparently referring to Israel, which is not a member of the IAEA and not a party to the NPT, despite having nuclear power.

In Jerusalem, officials said Deputy Israeli Prime Minister Dan Meridor will stand in for Netanyahu at the Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) on April 12-13.

Netanyahu's attendance would have been the first by an Israeli premier at an international nuclear forum. Aides said he originally agreed to go after being reassured by the United States that the NSS communiqué would focus on efforts to secure fissile material with no allusions to Israel's undeclared arms.

The NSS had also offered Netanyahu an opportunity to drum up support for sanctions against arch-foe Iran, which the West suspects of seeking nuclear weapons despite denials from Tehran. Neither Iran nor North Korea will attend the NSS.

Based on estimates of the plutonium production capacity of its Dimona reactor, Israel may have stockpiled 80 to 200 nuclear warheads since the late 1960s, independent experts say.

Israeli leaders do not comment on this capability under an “ambiguity” policy billed as warding off enemies while avoiding the kind of provocations that can trigger regional arms races. The official reticence, and its tacit acceptance by the United States, has long aggrieved Arab and Muslim powers.

Israel avoids criticism from Turkey, Egypt

15 April 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Neither Turkey nor Egypt singled out Israel for criticism at the US-hosted nuclear security summit as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had feared, delegates said on Tuesday. Netanyahu withdrew last week from the 47-country conference, with aides citing concern Arab or Muslim powers would seize at Israel’s unprecedented participation at such a forum to assail its assumed atomic arsenal. They named Egypt and Turkey specifically.

But members of the delegation of Netanyahu’s stand-in, Deputy Prime Minister Dan Meridor, said there was no such flak from the Egyptians or Turks at the two days of talks. “It was completely low-key, no dramas,” a delegate said.

In his speech, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called for a nuclear-free world, saying everyone will be safe in such a world and that Turkey supported efforts to that effect. There was no reference, direct or veiled, to Israel, which is widely believed to have nuclear weapons. When asked later about Netanyahu’s absence from the summit due to fears of criticism from Turkey and Egypt, Erdoğan said, “You should ask him about this.”

A transcript of a speech to the summit by Egypt’s chief delegate, Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit, appeared to allude to Israel by urging inspections at nuclear facilities exempt from UN monitoring. Israel has avoided such scrutiny by not signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Saudi Arabia was more explicit. Its delegate, Prince Muqrin bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud, called Israeli nuclear weapons “a fundamental obstacle to achieving security and stability in the Middle East.”

Protests against Israel prove Turkey not changed its axis

13 April 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The US, most moderate Arab countries, the European Union and the UK in particular have strongly criticized Israel for its unacceptable practices in the West Bank and East Jerusalem as well as its reckless offensives in the Gaza Strip.

With Western countries, and even the US, which has been Israel’s closest ally, starting to criticize the Jewish state as a result of its ruthless policies toward Arabs, it has become increasingly evident that Turkey’s concerns about Israeli policies do not represent a shift in its axis but rather are justified fears stemming from a desire to retain peace and prosperity in its backyard.

Western media outlets once warned that Turkey was shifting its axis and was no longer a loyal ally of the West, positing that it had wanted to build strong relations with the East, even Iran. Turkey's strong stance against proposed sanctions on Iran and its frequent condemnation of Israeli policies irritated Israel and sparked a number of crises, including one in which Israel willfully disrespected diplomatic protocol.

But the arguments made by Turkey that led Israel to claim it had changed drastically in recent years have been echoed by Western countries. "This [US] pressure parallels Turkey's concerns," Serdar Erdurmaz, an expert from the Turkish Center for International Relations and Strategic Analysis (TÜRKSAM), told Today's Zaman. "Turkey is not interested in shifting its axis," he added.

Israel has faced a growing number of protests from around the world, including from its traditional ally, the US. Its relations with the UK have deteriorated, with the British government deciding to expel an Israeli diplomat from London in March over the use of forged British passports in the suspected Mossad assassination of a Hamas operative in Dubai. The EU was also infuriated after its member countries learned that their passports had been used by the perpetrators of the Dubai assassination. Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have condemned Israel for its relentless assassinations abroad. "I should note that the 'axis shift' debates are deliberately raised with the aim of manipulation by Washington, D.C.-based think tanks and particularly Israel's extreme right wing. They also know there is not an axis shift. As Turkey has not taken the position that Israel wanted it to take with respect to Iran, Israel raised the issue to stress that Turkey's policies are wrong," Osman Bahadır Dinçer, an expert from the International Strategic and Research Organization (USAK), told Today's Zaman. He also cited the UN's Goldstone report, which accused Israel of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity during its Gaza offensive in December 2008 and January 2009. Noting that if another government were in power in Turkey, it would also react the same way, Dinçer said only the method and style of expressing concerns would be different. "Prime Minister [Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan's style is emotional," he said. Speculating about the role played by US in ensuring peace and stability in the Middle East, Erdurmaz said Iran's nuclear standoff, the safe withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and the Palestine-Israel conflict are the three major issues currently facing US President Barack Obama's administration.

Priority will without doubt be given to the problem in Palestine, he said, adding that a solution for all other problems will follow if the status of Jerusalem is settled, but Israel appears unlikely to compromise. "These are the reasons why the US is putting pressure on Israel, and this is in line with Turkey's discourse," he said. Both Palestine and Israel consider Jerusalem their capital.

Diplomatic tension sign of major shift in Turkish-Israeli relations

11 April 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey and Israel have remained allies through the years despite constant ups and downs in their relations, but observers evaluating the tension that has surfaced since the latter launched its Gaza offensive in late 2008 say this time is different and the diplomatic aggression is, in fact, a sign of a major, if not irreversible, change in the course of their bilateral ties.

The long-time allies in the Middle East have been at odds far more often in the last 15 months than any other time since the Jewish state's declaration of independence in 1948. The exchange

of strongly worded statements between the countries' leaders has almost become the medium of diplomacy since Israel's 22-day Gaza onslaught started on Dec. 27, 2008.

Turkey was the first to react against Israel for the atrocities committed during Operation Cast Lead, and in return, it received accusations from Israel that it has been trying to boost relations with the Muslim world at the expense of ties with Israel.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's walkout from a panel discussion at last year's World Economic Forum in Davos shortly after accusing Israeli President Shimon Peres of knowing "well how to kill" is still fresh in people's memories. Israel's war crimes during the offensive were long talked about by Muslims and were confirmed by the UN's Goldstone report, which was released on Sept. 15 last year. According to the Palestine Center for Human Rights, Israel's reckless 22-day operation left 1,434 dead and 5,303 others injured. Some 960 of the dead were civilians, and more than 400 of them were women and children.

Erdoğan shows no sign of softening his widely lauded stance against Israel's endeavors in warfare, either. Speaking to reporters in Paris on Wednesday, he said that if the country exercises disproportionate force and wields phosphorus bombs in Gaza, then Turkey cannot say "bravo" to them and will call them to account. "The main threat to regional peace is Israel," Erdoğan added. Ankara says Turkey's criticism will continue if Israel does not cease activities that damage peace in the region.

Israel's hawkish foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, on the other hand, accused Erdoğan of damaging decades of "excellent" ties and "slowly turning into [Muammar] Gaddafi or Hugo Chavez," a reference to the leaders of Libya and Venezuela, respectively. Erdoğan's response was dismissive. He found it sufficient to say, "That guy is not my interlocutor." The Turkish Foreign Ministry also dismissed Lieberman's statements as "inappropriate and impertinent remarks which bear no truth" and called on Israel to "trade its meaningless and unacceptable attitude for common sense." Turkish analysts described Lieberman's remarks as unreasonable. Fundamental differences between Israel, Turkey on stage

Speaking to Sunday's Zaman, experts described the tension between the countries not as temporary frays but as signs of a major change in the course of their bilateral relations. "Those occurrences happened because of the differences in these two states' priorities over regional issues, including the Arab-Israeli conflict and Iran's nuclear program. To be honest, I am very pessimistic about the future of relations between the two," said Professor Özlem Tür of Ankara's Middle East Technical University (ODTÜ). "There was bickering in the past, too, but we never expected any change in the states' policies toward each other in general" she said, adding that she believed Israel will probably use any chance to attack Iran, which would further exacerbate Turkish-Israeli tension. Turkey, a nonpermanent member of the United Nations Security Council, thus lacking veto power, does not approve of sanctions being imposed on Iran, let alone an attack.

Professor Serhat Erkmen, who is affiliated with the Ankara-based Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM), sees fundamental differences between Turkey and Israel with regard to their approaches to some issues in the region. "For certain policies, there are structural differences between the two, unlike their mode of relations in the past" he said. Professor Türel Yılmaz from Gazi University in Ankara agrees with Tür that the diplomatic uproar that has gone on for over a year is different from previous incidents. "I simply glossed over them in the past because Turkish-Israeli relations had their own ups and downs back then, too." She dismissed Lieberman's claims that Turkey is taking steps with the Muslim world at the expense of Israel.

“Turkey is simply following a multidimensional foreign policy pursuing its interests. That’s all,” she concluded.

What’s more is that public opinion in Turkey does not consider the country’s ties with Israel important, either. Some 58 percent of respondents in a recent survey conducted in 31 Turkish provinces by the MetroPOLL Strategic and Social Research Center said they did not attach importance to Turkish-Israeli relations remaining at the level of close allies. More interesting is the fact that the supporters of all the opposition parties, be they left-wing, right-wing or pro-Kurdish, are even less inclined to see Israel as an important ally than those who voted for Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AK Party) in the last local elections, held in 2009. Lieberman’s Yisrael Beiteinu exacerbates the tension

Another point experts agree on is the adverse impact of Lieberman’s far-right Yisrael Beiteinu on bilateral relations.

“The main problem here is the fact that Israel sees every bilateral matter as intrinsic to the issue of survival and national security. In that sense, Israel’s foreign policy cannot be considered similar to that of any other state. Lieberman’s party is certainly exacerbating that,” Professor Hür said. Türel noted that Israel was alone in the region and “based its entire strategy on national security.” Erkmen drew attention to the same issue as well. “We should not forget that Israel has had recent problems not only with Turkey but also with the US. The role of the hawkish wing of the Israeli government needs to be underlined here,” he said. Israel-US relations suffered heavily over the former’s recent decision to construct new settlements in East Jerusalem, announced last month while US Vice President Joe Biden was on a visit to the country to push for peace talks between Israel and Palestine.

Turkish PM to Urge World Leaders to Criticize Israeli Nuclear Arms

Monday, 12 April 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

Underscoring his concern over nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan draws attention to Israel rather than Iran. 'I will call on the international community, which is so sensitive toward Iran, to pay attention to Israel too,' he says ahead of a nuclear summit in Washington.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan urged the international community Sunday to pay attention to Israeli nuclear weapons rather than focusing on “yet-to-be-proven” nuclear arms in Iran.

“We don’t desire any nuclear proliferation in our region and our policy is well known regardless of which country has such programs,” Erdoğan told reporters. “For us, it doesn’t matter whether it is Israel or Iran.”

The Turkish prime minister will take part in a nuclear-security summit Monday and Tuesday in Washington, D.C., where U.S. President Barack Obama will host leaders from 47 countries in a bid to secure new sanctions against Iran.

Though Iran’s controversial nuclear-enrichment program forms the core of the agenda, the nuclear weapons developed by Israel will be on the table as well.

“I will call on the international community, which is so sensitive toward Iran, to pay attention to Israel too,” Erdoğan said at Istanbul’s Atatürk Airport ahead of his departure for the United States.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided at the last minute not to participate in the

international talks in Washington because Turkey and Egypt are expected to express their concerns about Israel's nuclear proliferation in the Middle East.

"Of course, I cannot read their mind. But Iran has denied the claims of having nuclear weapons and says it only has a nuclear-enrichment program for energy production," Erdoğan said, adding that the International Atomic Energy Agency, or IAEA, "has yet to prove [its] claims." Though the Iranian program is not transparent, "you cannot judge people or make decisions based on speculations and possibilities," the Turkish prime minister added, saying that diplomatic efforts should be intensified to find a solution.

Israel is not an IAEA member and has not signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Israeli officials have neither confirmed nor denied allegations that the state has nuclear weapons. "We have not seen any international call against Israel. I will ask them why they don't take a certain attitude. Does it mean that it is wrong to be a member of the IAEA?" Erdoğan asked. "If you are a member state, you have responsibilities. But if you are not, you freely do whatever you want."

The Turkish prime minister underscored his concern about "the nuclear proliferation in the region" and vowed to draw the attention of world leaders to Israel's program.

Erdoğan calls on Obama to push Minsk efforts

In addition to the nuclear talks, the normalization process with Armenia will be on the top of Erdoğan's agenda in Washington.

Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu traveled between Ankara, Yerevan and Baku last week, conveying the prime minister's messages to the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents, Serge Sarkisian and Ilham Aliyev.

"In this scope, we will have the opportunity to evaluate our efforts" during the talks with Obama, Erdoğan said. "We want the Minsk Group to work more actively and reach a final settlement." Noting that both French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev "have confirmed efforts" to boost the group's work, Erdoğan said he would "raise the same issue during the face-to-face talks with President Obama."

Despite intensified pressure by the White House, Erdoğan is expected to say it is unrealistic to ratify the Turkey-Armenia normalization protocols in the Turkish Parliament prior to April 24, the day Armenians mourn those killed in what they term the genocide of ethnic Armenians during World War I. Turkey denies such claims.

Erdoğan will also stress that it would harm the peace process between Ankara and Yerevan if Obama uses the word "genocide" during his annual April 24 statement.

Obama did not invite Aliyev to the nuclear summit, although he is planning to host a meeting there between Erdoğan and Sarkisian to boost the normalization process.

With Baku irked at being sidelined, Erdoğan will stress that "a comprehensive solution" is needed in the southern Caucasus and that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan cannot be overlooked in reaching a settlement between Turkey and Armenia.

Monday, 12 April 2010

Obama urges Armenia, Turkey to normalize relations

13 April 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

President Barack Obama urged Armenia and Turkey on Monday to "make every effort" to advance the normalization of relations between their two countries, the White House said. Obama made the remarks in a meeting with Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan on the sidelines of a nuclear security summit in Washington.

"The president commended President Sargsyan for his courageous efforts to achieve normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey and encouraged him to fulfill the promise of normalization for the benefit of the Armenian people," the White House said in a statement.

Sargsyan's office said last week he was planning to meet Turkey's Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan in Washington.

Armenia and Turkey signed accords in October 2009 designed to overcome the legacy of the World War One mass killings of both Armenians and Turks.

Erdoğan has said Turkey was returning its ambassador to the United States, having withdrawn him in protest against a US congressional committee labeling the killings as 'genocide' earlier this year.

"President Obama also urged that both Armenia and Turkey make every effort to advance the normalization process and achieve legislative ratification of the protocols of normalization," the White House said, adding that Obama voiced support for Armenian democracy.

Erdoğan's letter to Sargsyan discussed in Erdoğan-Sargsyan meeting

12 April 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan who met in Washington D.C. on Monday discussed the letter Erdoğan sent to Sargsyan in details.

Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu, assigned as special representative by Erdoğan, earlier conveyed the letter to Sargsyan.

The parties agreed that foreign ministers of the two countries should continue studies on the issue.

The two leaders got together on the sidelines of the nuclear security summit hosted by US President Barack Obama.

Turkish premier to meet with Armenian president

12 April 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will meet with President Serzh Sargsyan of Armenia on Monday on the sidelines of the nuclear security summit in the United States.

The meeting will take place at the Washington Convention Center.

Earlier, Prime Minister Erdoğan sent Ministry of Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu to Yerevan, Armenia as his special envoy.

During Sinirlioğlu's talks with Armenian authorities, the parties agreed that Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Sargsyan would meet on the sidelines of the nuclear security summit in Washington, D.C. on April 12.

Turkey and Armenia signed protocols on October 10, 2009 to normalize their bilateral ties and establish diplomatic relations.

Erdoğan expects no tension in Armenia talks with Obama

13 April 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said he does not expect his meeting with US President Barack Obama today to be marred by tension over a congressional vote last month to recognize Armenian claims of genocide at the hands of the Ottoman Empire.

Erdoğan was speaking to a group of journalists late on Sunday on board a plane en route from İstanbul to Washington. "Our meetings with Obama do not start with tension," he said in response to a question. Erdoğan was to participate in a two-day nuclear security summit hosted by Obama that started at the White House on Monday. Turkey's ambassador to the US, Namık Tan, returned to Washington last week after being recalled to Ankara in March in protest of a vote by the US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, which passed a resolution declaring the killings genocide. Yet it is unclear whether the full House will vote on it. Tan said on Friday that he came back after assurances from the Obama administration that it would oppose the congressional action and not itself label the killings genocide. "We have received some satisfactory messages. I hope there will be a new chapter," he said.

When reminded of the issue and asked whether it would lead to tension during his meeting with Obama, Erdoğan suggested the tension had already been resolved. "We haven't brought it here," he said.

On Monday, both Erdoğan and Obama were scheduled to have separate meetings with Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan. As he did ahead of his departure from İstanbul, Erdoğan emphasized that the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has a responsibility for making a contribution to normalization efforts between Armenia and Turkey. The Minsk Group, the three co-chairs of which are from France, Russia and the US, has striven to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, a territorial dispute between Baku and Yerevan, for more than 17 years.

Recalling that Ambassador Feridun Sinirlioğlu, the Foreign Ministry undersecretary, last week paid consecutive visits first to Yerevan and then Baku as his special envoy, Erdoğan noted that he had sent a letter to Sargsyan via Sinirlioğlu. The letter contained a message that an agreement would better serve the interests of the two countries, especially when compared to the cost of the failure to achieve peace.

"We don't impose our memories on anyone else. We said [in the letter] nobody should impose its memories on us, either," Erdoğan said, in an apparent reference to the legacy of the World War I killings of Anatolian Armenians under the Ottoman Empire.

Armenia and Turkey signed accords in Zurich in October of last year designed to overcome this legacy. "We stated [in the letter] that we would continue doing whatever our signature [on the accords] requires. What is important here is the developments that will take place in the process assumed by the Minsk Group," Erdoğan continued.

Under the accords, Armenia and Turkey agreed to establish diplomatic ties and open their common border within two months of parliamentary approval. The deal would bring big economic gains to poor, landlocked Armenia. Turkey would burnish its credentials as a potential EU entry state and boost its clout in the south Caucasus, a region crisscrossed by pipelines carrying oil and gas to the West.

Reiterating that Turkey had discussed the issue earlier with Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev as well as with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Erdoğan referred to his meeting with French President Nicolas Sarkozy during an official visit to Paris last week.

“I told Sarkozy that opening the border [with Armenia] was no big deal. I proposed that he either take a car or the train and then we can pass through the border together as soon as the Minsk Group fulfills its duty,” he said.

Any pressure on Iran?

Obama has invited leaders and representatives from 46 other nations to the summit at which the president aims to press his nuclear policy agenda. He said he wants the international community put “on the path in which we are locking down that nuclear material in a very specific time frame with a specific work plan.”

During a press briefing about the summit held at the White House on Sunday, Ben Rhodes, deputy national security advisor for strategic communications, said during the meeting with Erdoğan on Tuesday, in addition to discussions on Iraq, Afghanistan and non-proliferation issues, the two leaders will likely “discuss the ongoing efforts to pursue normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia, which the United States strongly supports.”

Erdoğan laughed in responding when reminded of comments suggesting that Obama would press him to join imposing greater sanctions on Iran. “If there is any pressure, I’ll explain it to you on our way back. There should be some material for the return, too,” he said sarcastically.

The US administration is pressing hard this month for a new UN Security Council resolution that would tighten sanctions on the Islamic republic for refusing to engage in talks about its nuclear program. Nonetheless, just ahead of his departure from İstanbul, Erdoğan explicitly indicated that Turkey, currently one of the rotating members of the council, believes that diplomatic means for resolving the issue have not yet been exhausted.

Erdoğan, meanwhile, declined to say beforehand whether he would raise the issue of Israel’s assumed atomic arsenal at the meeting.

Erdoğan: Armenia talks linked to Karabakh settlement

15 April 2010, Thursday

Today’s zaman

Maintaining regional peace is among the fundamental elements of Armenia and Turkey’s efforts for normalization of their relations, thus the resolution of a territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan is naturally linked to this process, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has asserted.

Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan and Erdoğan held a rare bilateral meeting in Washington on Monday on the sidelines of a two-day nuclear security summit hosted by US President Barack Obama. The two leaders didn’t release any joint statement after the meeting. In remarks delivered at a gathering of the Armenian community, Sargsyan made clear that his country would not accept Turkey’s imposition of the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute as a precondition.

Speaking to reporters late on Tuesday during the inauguration in Washington of “The Ottoman Worldview from Piri Reis to Katip Çelebi,” an exhibition of maps depicting the Ottoman worldview from Piri Reis to Katip Çelebi, who made some of the most significant contributions to Ottoman geography and cartography, Erdoğan was reminded of Sargsyan’s remarks.

Two protocols signed between Armenia and Turkey in Zurich in October to establish diplomatic ties and re-open their border includes the words “without precondition,” Erdoğan first of all noted, adding: “There is a very important expression next to the expression of ‘without precondition’: Building regional peace. Can you push Azerbaijan aside while building this regional peace?”

Recalling that Turkey closed its border with Armenia in 1993 in solidarity with Azerbaijan over the disputed enclave, Erdoğan said an agreement on Nagorno-Karabakh was essential for opening the border and reiterated his call on the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to intensify its efforts. The Minsk Group, the three co-chairs of which are France, Russia and the US, has striven to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, a territorial dispute between Baku and Yerevan, for more than 17 years.

“Today we spoke about these issues with [Russian President] Mr. [Dmitry] Medvedev,” Erdoğan said, adding that he had also spoken about the issue with French President Nicolas Sarkozy during an official visit to Paris last week.

In response to a question, Erdoğan said no date had been set for parliamentary ratification of the protocols, while indicating that parliamentary approval would be encouraged after Turkey sees some positive signs concerning the process. He didn’t name it but he was most probably referring to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue.

In the US capital, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu had separate talks concerning the normalization process with his Armenian counterpart, Edward Nalbandian, and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

April 24

Erdoğan, who had a lengthy meeting with Obama earlier on Tuesday, told reporters that he still believed Obama will not use the g-word on April 24, the day Armenians claim marks the anniversary of the beginning of a systematic genocide campaign against Anatolian Armenians in the last years of the Ottoman Empire. “Personally, I don’t expect such a thing,” he said. “I believe the necessary messages have been mutually taken,” he said of the meeting with Obama.

Turkish Cypriot president disappointed with EU

15 April 2010, Thursday
TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) President Mehmet Ali Talat is disappointed with the European Union for using Cyprus as an argument against Turkey's possible accession to the 27-nation bloc, he told an Austrian newspaper on Thursday.

The EU is partly responsible for the growing indifference to reunification and also for the increasing support for my opponents who favour a different solution," President Talat said in an interview with the daily Wiener Zeitung ahead of Sunday's presidential election in the Turkish north of the island.

"The EU has not kept its promise to reduce the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots. There are still no direct flights or trade."

Turkey hopes reunification talks between the halves of the island divided since 1974 will clear the way for negotiations with the European Union on several policy issues stalling Turkey's EU membership bid.

Talat's rival calls for sovereignty in Cyprus deal

12 APRIL 2010, MONDAY

TODAYS ZAMAN

The frontrunner in the Turkish Cypriot presidential election promised on Sunday to continue reunification talks on the divided island, but said Greek Cypriots should accept equal powers with Turkish Cypriots.

Derviş Eroğlu, currently the prime minister, is likely to win the April 18 vote according to leading opinion polls. Incumbent Mehmet Ali Talat has staked his presidency on the drive for reunification, but the failure to wrap up a deal has handicapped his re-election bid.

Eroğlu is perceived as a hard-liner, and diplomats worry that a win for him would hinder reconciliation on the island. Eroğlu, in an interview with a Greek Cypriot newspaper, cautioned against making assumptions about what he would do. "How do Greek Cypriots know even before I enter the presidential office and sit at the negotiating table what will happen," he said. "Maybe I can conclude an agreement better than Talat could," Eroğlu was quoted as telling the Phileleftheros daily on Sunday.

Complex power issues relating to the sovereign rights of one side or the other have long dogged reunification talks and could be a potential deal breaker. Greek Cypriots want reunification to be an evolution of the existing Republic of Cyprus, while Eroğlu says it should emanate equally from the two sides.

"For us, bi-zonal bi-communal federation means the existence of two separate sovereign peoples in separate areas," Eroğlu said.

Talat and Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias have covered about half the areas of negotiation in peace talks launched in 2008. Eroğlu implied that if he were elected he would want to revisit everything negotiated. "Since nothing has been agreed we should review all six chapters which have been discussed up till now," he said.

Don't play down progress in Cyprus talks, says Talat

12 APRIL 2010, MONDAY

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat, seeking re-election in next weekend's polls, has said he and Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias have achieved significant progress in talks to reunite the island, warning that downplaying this progress erodes Turkish Cypriots' hopes for a settlement on the island.

"We have done more work in 17 months than was done in the past 40 years," Talat told Today's Zaman in a weekend interview. "Together with the Greek Cypriot side, we even produced 31 joint papers where the areas of convergence as well as the remaining issues are well recorded and also registered by the UN. This is a first in the history of Cypriot negotiations. Therefore, it is not fair to try to downplay the significant progress we have achieved and publicly declared. I see this attempt as a futile one aimed at eroding the hope of Turkish Cypriots for an early settlement and thus exploiting this in the forthcoming elections," he went on to say.

Talat and Christofias have held more than 70 rounds of talks since September 2008 but observers say the negotiations have achieved little progress. "It is completely misleading to say there is no full agreement on any issue other than the issue of the judiciary," Talat said. "In the informative meeting that was held last week, we put forward very clearly what issues and chapters we achieved convergence and on what issues and chapters our discussions are still under way on."

Over one-and-a-half years, we have achieved significant progress on the chapters on governance and power-sharing, the EU and economic matters.”

Opinion polls show Prime Minister Derviş Eroğlu is narrowly ahead of Talat in the April 18 election. An opinion poll published over the weekend by PollMark shows Talat is likely to win 34.1 percent of the vote while Eroğlu will receive 35.9 percent. There has been a roughly 10 percent increase in support for Talat compared to a survey conducted by the same company in February, which showed 24.8 percent of voters favor Talat and 37.7 favor Eroğlu. Talat warned that reunification talks will collapse if Eroğlu wins. Eroğlu has said he will remain committed to the talks if he is elected, but calls for a loose federation of two sovereign states, which the Greek Cypriots say is unacceptable. Talat said a mere pledge to continue with the talks without commitment to the basic parameters under which the talks are being held does not mean much in practice.

“Mr. Eroğlu has always refrained from publicly declaring that he supports continuing negotiations within this framework and even made statements that he is against these parameters. Under these circumstances, it is not possible to engage in meaningful negotiations within the parameters drawn up by the UN and supported by Turkey. What is important here is not to sit at the negotiating table, but to defend the positions of the Turkish Cypriot side with sincerity and determination in order to convince the parties at the table that you are genuinely putting all your effort to achieve a just and lasting solution.

Otherwise, if you just sit at the negotiating table and bring forward positions that are not in line with the agreed parameters, then it is inevitable that the whole process will collapse and that the responsibility of this will be put on your shoulders, which will be a development with grave consequences for both Turkish Cypriots and Turkey,” Talat said.

“It is an undeniable fact that Mr. Eroğlu and I have different visions vis-a-vis the settlement of the Cyprus problem. My vision is very clear. I came to the negotiating table with a view to bring a just and lasting solution to our protracted problem in line with established UN parameters. Mr. Eroğlu doesn’t believe in these parameters. Moreover, he doesn’t have a vision of a settlement. How can a person who doesn’t believe in the agreed framework and who doesn’t have a resounding vision of a settlement be effective in convincing the world of our rightful interests and rights? Therefore, his sincerity at the negotiating table will be questioned on day one. However, today, the sincerity of the Turkish Cypriot side at the table is beyond any doubt. That is why all of the international community is lending our efforts full support and that is the strong basis on which we, as the Turkish Cypriot side, together with Turkey, are able to defend our rights on every international platform,” Talat concluded.

Cypriot reunification a major election issue in KKTC

11 April 2010, Monday
TODAYS ZAMAN

Promises to improve the position of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (KKTC) in talks to reunify the divided island have become the dominant motif in KKTC presidential campaigns. Ongoing talks between the KKTC and Greek Cyprus are no doubt a hot button issue and have helped dictate the campaign strategy of almost all candidates running in the KKTC election, scheduled for April 18. The overall picture remains as grim as ever as candidates accuse each other of betraying the nation or suggest that their opponents would halt negotiations if they came to power.

Six candidates have registered for the election, but only incumbent President Mehmet Ali Talat and Prime Minister Derviş Eroğlu have a substantial likelihood of winning, according to the latest polls.

Talat is widely known to be a staunch supporter of talks with Greek Cyprus at any cost and has experience on the frontlines, spearheading a sustained effort to reunify Cyprus. Both Talat and Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias have been committed to talks since September 2008, yet they lost their appetite recently after Greek Cyprus harangued the European Union to push Turkey to open up its ports and airports to Greek Cypriot aircraft and vessels.

For the incumbent, one of the most vexing challenges of the election campaign are Eroğlu's accusations that Talat has made concessions in the reunification talks. Talat disclosed details of the peace talks on April 1 and noted that the sides have found an accord only in the chapter on the judiciary and that the talks have otherwise failed utterly. Observers say the talks have a smaller chance of succeeding if Eroğlu is elected president.

The election campaign in northern Cyprus does not necessarily address the social and economic situation of the country. Every year northern Cyprus has a budget deficit of nearly \$1 billion, which is covered by Turkey. A real solution to the country's socioeconomic problems is seen in the unification with the more prosperous Greek Cyprus. Greek Cyprus is a member of the 27-nation EU and pushes the bloc to maintain its economic embargo on northern Cyprus. This policy is driven by the logic of solving problems through sanctions, which has not produced any tangible results so far. It has tormented the Turkish community of the island for many years. To cushion the pain of these sanctions, Turkey provides a large amount of aid to the country.

Despite Turkey's continued lobbying in Europe to support Cypriot reunification, Greek Cyprus has maintained its uncompromising stance, rendering negotiations almost hopeless.

Evaluating the current situation, Cyprus-based analyst Hasan Hastürer said this election is distinct, as the struggle is between those who want change and the conservatives. "Those who resist the change are the National Unity Party [UBP], the party of former President Rauf Denktaş," Hastürer said. Noting that they want a "closed" country, the expert said they do not have any kind of vision or an initiative regarding a solution for problems on the island.

Polls do not paint a promising picture for incumbent President Talat. A poll conducted by the Greek Simerini daily reveals that Eroğlu is leading, with the support of 50 percent of KKTC voters while Talat is favored by only 24 percent. Another survey conducted by the Republican Turks Party (CTP) claims 25 percent for its former leader, Talat, and 22 percent for Eroğlu.

KKTC Foreign Media Association Chair Fevzi Taşpınar, who is known to be close to the Eroğlu camp, told Sunday's Zaman that Eroğlu is leading in the polls and the gap between Talat and Eroğlu is not likely to be reduced in the elections. Noting that the fate of the reunification talks are not dependent on who is elected, Taşpınar said, following Talat's report on the progress of the talks, that it was evident that there had been no progress during the negotiations. "Even the most important topics were not touched on during the talks," he said. "These made Talat lose many votes."

Stating that the UBP's goal contradicts that of the ruling party in Turkey, Hastürer said they want to cut work toward a solution to the problem short as they know it will halt Turkey's EU negotiation talks. "After they seize power in the KKTC, they will use it against Turkey-EU relations. The elections are vitally important both for Turkey and for Cypriot Turks," the expert warned.

Speaking about the fate of talks if Eroğlu comes to power, Hastürer said although Eroğlu has said he will not leave the negotiating table, the parameters of the talks are important. "His

parameters are not in line with the UN's parameters to solve the problem. We will find the UN at cross purposes with us as a result," the expert said.

In contrast, Taşpınar said Eroğlu has not announced any parameters and would take into account the changing nature of international affairs. "The criteria should be flexible due to the ever-changing nature of politics. We want to establish a calendar for the solution of the problem; we say it cannot last forever. Greek Cyprus seems to be reluctant to do that," Taşpınar said.

Observers claim that the KKTC's foreign policy is very much dependent on Ankara. In effect, regardless of who comes to power, no government in Ankara would countenance any change in the foreign policy of the KKTC. "Whoever is president ... talks will go hand in hand with Ankara's wishes," Taşpınar said.

Eroğlu will compete not only against incumbent Talat but also against a new candidate from his own UBP, Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu, for the presidency. The UBP itself is now gravely threatened from within by the rising leader. It appears that these attempts have been largely orchestrated to allow the incumbent to stay in power. Analysts claim Ertuğruloğlu's candidacy is likely to erode support for Eroğlu and may pave the way for Talat's victory. "This claim is an insult to my years-long struggle and to my personality," Ertuğruloğlu told Sunday's Zaman. Pointing out that everyone is aware of his differences of opinion with Talat, Ertuğruloğlu said he is against Talat's obsession with a "united Cyprus."

Ertuğruloğlu declared his candidacy on March 11, immediately following a visit to Turkey. Although Turkey could have an influence on the KKTC elections, a statement released by the Foreign Ministry declared that the Turkish government does not favor any of the candidates. The CTP was trounced at the polls last year as Eroğlu's right-wing UBP won 44 percent of the vote, obtaining enough seats in the 50-member parliament to form a single-party government.

Turkish Red Crescent prepares team for China

15 April 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay) has prepared a rescue team, a cargo plane, necessary medical equipment and food packages to help China, which was hit by an earthquake yesterday morning.

A magnitude 6.9 earthquake that hit China's western Qinghai province Wednesday morning was followed by several aftershocks, killing at least 300, injuring thousands and burying many others under rubble.

According to a written statement from Kızılay, the Turkish charitable organization is in cooperation with the International Red Cross to aid in earthquake relief efforts. In addition, the Turkish Foreign Ministry and the Prime Ministry's Disaster and Emergency Management Directorate are following the latest developments in China. "We wish China a speedy recovery on behalf of the Turkish people, and we have prepared everything necessary so as to not lose time in helping quake-stricken China," said the statement.

Erdoğan says he does not want any country to have nukes

14 April 2010, Wenesday

Today's zaman

In remarks delivered ahead of a bilateral meeting with US President Barack Obama during which Iran's controversial nuclear program was to be a key issue, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reiterated that his country does not want Iran or any other nation to have nuclear weapons.

The remarks by Erdoğan, who was in Washington to attend Obama's nuclear security summit on Monday and Tuesday, came on the first day of the summit as he delivered a speech at George Mason University's new Center for Global Islamic Studies in Fairfax, Virginia, just outside the US capital.

Turkey currently holds one of the rotating seats on the UN Security Council and the US is hoping that Turkey will cooperate with efforts to impose sanctions on Iran as punishment for its alleged work to create nuclear weapons.

While the United States worries about Iran's nuclear program, Turkey has its own concerns about Israel's nuclear program. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided not to attend Obama's summit, and insiders said he had expected Turkey and Egypt to use the conference as a platform to challenge him over the nuclear arsenal it is widely assumed his country possesses, something which the Jewish state has never confirmed.

Over the weekend, White House officials said "non-proliferation issues" would be on the agenda of the Erdoğan-Obama meeting scheduled to take place on Tuesday after Today's Zaman went into print.

Without specifically mentioning Israel's nuclear program, Erdoğan criticized Israel's treatment of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and called Gaza an "open-air prison."

While he said Turkey does not want nuclear weapons in "our region," he also said Ankara "would like to see all countries possessing nuclear weapons work to eliminate them in a certain time frame."

As for Iran's nuclear ambitions, Erdoğan noted that Tehran has denied it is pursuing nuclear weapons, but he also said that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has faulted Iran for a lack of transparency.

Previously Turkey indicated it did not support sanctions to punish Iran. In separate remarks on the issue, which were scheduled to be aired on CNN International on Tuesday, Erdoğan said his country was willing to act as a mediator in the diplomatic standoff over Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

"I believe that we can find a way out," Erdoğan was quoted as saying in transcript of an interview posted on CNN's Web site, declining to lend support to Obama's push for tough new sanctions against Iran.

"I am here for a diplomatic solution," he said. Countries that are members of the IAEA and the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) "must all work together on this, and as [for] Turkey, we could act as a very important intermediary."

While reiterating that Ankara does not want to see any nuclear weapons in the Middle East, Erdoğan noted that Israel, which does not recognize the NPT and is believed to have nuclear weapons, remains a member of the IAEA.

"Why do we not say the same thing to the country that does not recognize the NPT? That is also a cause for concern for me. It is important that we try to take steps to overcome those difficulties, so that we can strengthen peace in the Middle East," Erdoğan said.

While voicing his wish for Israel to make a contribution to peace, Erdoğan, said that was proving difficult because when Israel's coalition government speaks, "it's not a symphony, it's a cacophony."

Armenia, Turkey agree to continue reconciliatory talks despite rifts

14 April 2010 wenesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

At a time when efforts to normalize their bilateral ties have been stalled for a number of reasons, the leaders of Armenia and Turkey agreed at a landmark meeting to continue these efforts despite visible difficulties ahead.

Armenian President Serzh Sarksyan and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan held a rare bilateral meeting in Washington on Monday on the sidelines of a two-day nuclear security summit hosted by US President Barack Obama that started earlier on Monday at the Washington Convention Center. The two leaders had held another rare meeting in January 2009, when they both participated in an annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) held in the ski resort town of Davos, Switzerland.

The main item on the agenda of the almost one-and-a-half-hour-long meeting was a detailed exchange of views on a letter recently sent by Erdoğan to Sarksyan, well-informed sources said. The letter was sent via Feridun Sinirlioğlu, the Foreign Ministry undersecretary, who last week paid successive visits first to Yerevan and then to Baku as Erdoğan's special envoy.

It contained a message that an agreement would better serve the interests of the two countries, especially when compared to the cost of the failure to achieve peace.

In addition to Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian and his Turkish counterpart, Ahmet Davutoğlu, Armenian Presidential Administration Deputy Chief of Staff Vigen Sargsyan and Sinirlioğlu attended the meeting.

The Armenian and Turkish sides agreed to continue efforts to normalize their relations via contacts led by the foreign ministers of the two countries, the same well-informed sources said. Yet, there was no other statement on whether contentious issues regarding the process came on the agenda of the meeting and if they did, what the leaders said.

As an outcome of closed-door talks that had been held for more than a year through the mediation of Switzerland on ways to restore diplomatic relations and open their mutual border, Ankara and Yerevan announced almost a year ago, on April 22, 2009, that they had reached an agreement on a road map to normalize their relations.

Overcoming painful ups and downs -- particularly stemming from uneasiness over Azerbaijan -- the two countries took a landmark step in Zurich in October when Davutoğlu and Nalbandian signed two protocols to establish diplomatic ties and re-open their border.

However, the process hit a rocky patch in January after an Armenian court upheld the legality of the protocols but underlined that they could not contradict Yerevan's official position that the alleged Armenian genocide must be internationally recognized. Turkey accused Yerevan of trying to set conditions on the deals. The process of normalization has also been crippled by Turkey's insistence on parallel progress on the Nagorno-Karabakh territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

According to Turkish media reports, during the meeting, Erdoğan recalled that Turkey expects development in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, while Sarksyan said Turkey could not impose this as a precondition. The Turkish side also expressed uneasiness over the Armenian-American diaspora's intense lobbying efforts for official recognition of the alleged genocide, underlining that those efforts have been harmful to the efforts at normalization.

‘Language of conditions’

Despite the absence of a joint statement following their meeting, Armenian and Turkish leaders, in remarks delivered separately following the meeting, reiterated their well-known positions. Speaking at George Mason University’s new Center for Global Islamic Studies in Fairfax, Virginia, Erdoğan criticized a long-running effort in the US Congress to pass a resolution declaring that Anatolian Armenians were victims of genocide nearly a century ago.

“We are against a one-sided interpretation of history,” Erdoğan said. “History cannot be written in parliament and judged by parliament.”

Turkey recalled its US ambassador last month in protest after the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the House of Representatives passed a resolution declaring that the Ottoman-era killings amounted to genocide. The full House has yet to vote on the resolution.

The venue for Sarksyan’s remarks was Washington National Cathedral as he laid a wreath at the tomb of US President Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924), known as the architect of the “Wilsonian Armenia,” the boundary for an Armenian state drawn up by Wilson for the Treaty of Sèvres, which was imposed on the Ottoman government by the victorious Western powers at the end of World War I.

“This morning I met with the prime minister of Turkey. Our position has been and remains very straightforward. Turkey cannot speak with Armenia and the Armenian people in the language of conditions. We will simply not allow that. We are not preparing in any way to question the fact of the Armenian Genocide, or to pretend that we believe that Turkey can play any diplomatic role in the process of finding a solution to the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh,” Sarksyan was quoted as saying by Armenian media as he spoke to members of the Armenian community there.

“Any new foreign policy is subject to temptations because we are walking down a path no one has walked before. I am confident Armenia will pass this exam with honor,” Sarksyan also said in remarks delivered in Armenian.

Later on Monday, Sarksyan held a bilateral meeting with Obama, who has urged Armenia and Turkey to “make every effort” to advance the normalization of relations between their two countries.

“The president commended President Sarksyan for his courageous efforts to achieve normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey and encouraged him to fulfill the promise of normalization for the benefit of the Armenian people,” the White House said in a statement after the meeting. “President Obama also urged that both Armenia and Turkey make every effort to advance the normalization process and achieve legislative ratification of the protocols of normalization,” it said, adding that Obama voiced his support for Armenian democracy.

Erdoğan hopeful Obama won’t use g-word

Erdoğan was scheduled to have a bilateral meeting with Obama on Tuesday on the sidelines of the summit, only days before April 24, the day Armenians claim marks the anniversary of the beginning of a systematic genocide campaign against Anatolian Armenians in the last years of the Ottoman Empire.

Last year, Obama avoided using the g-word in his message, although he had pledged to recognize the Armenian diaspora’s genocide claims in his election campaign.

In an interview with CNN International aired on Tuesday, Erdoğan said Turkey cannot accept that the killings were genocide and that he was confident Obama would also not use the term. “That would be my expectation, because to this day, no American leader has uttered that word, and I believe President Obama will not,” he said.

Noting that the time when the killings took place was a period of war and revolts, he pointed out that the Turkish people also suffered terrible losses during the 1914-18 conflict. "No nation, no people has the right to impose the way it remembers history on another nation or people -- and Turkey does not try to do that."

EU's Spanish presidency welcomes reforms

14 APRIL 2010 WENESDAY

TODAYS ZAMAN

The European Union said on Tuesday that it welcomes plans by the Turkish government to amend the Constitution, saying reforms are essential to bring Ankara closer to the bloc.

The European Union welcomes the Turkish government's intention to present a package of constitutional reform proposals to be debated soon in the national assembly," Spain's Foreign Ministry, whose country holds the rotating EU presidency, said in a statement.

"Reforms have played an essential role in the process of bringing Turkey closer to the EU and they continue to be essential today. The reading of the constitutional reform package proposed by the Turkish government reveals that they are in tune with the general principles contained in the progress reports that the European Commission has regularly issued about Turkey," the statement said, according to AFP.

But referring to objections to the reform package from opposition parties, the Spanish presidency also called for maximum support for the proposals. "All successful democratic reform should enjoy the highest possible national support and take shape through political dialogue and consensus," the statement said. "Political parties and Turkish civil society should be encouraged to collaborate on the project and participate in a productive dialogue to achieve consensus on the reforms that includes the various interests and sensibilities of the country."

Turkey, US, Iraq agree on action plan against PKK

14 ApRIL 2010 Wenesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Officials from Turkey, the United States and Iraq have agreed on a joint plan to combat the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the US Embassy in Ankara has announced.

The agreement was the result of a trilateral security committee meeting held in İstanbul on Sunday, the embassy said in a statement late on Monday. "Participants had a useful exchange of views on the work of the Trilateral Security Committee and reiterated their strong commitment to combat PKK terrorism. In this regard, they have agreed on the trilateral action plan dated April 11, 2010," the statement said. It did not elaborate on the content of the action plan but said: "The Trilateral Action Plan sets out the guidelines for the future work of the Committee and contains the actions that should be taken to facilitate joint efforts against the PKK. Participants have expressed their commitment to rapidly work on the implementation of the trilateral action plan."

Turkish Interior Minister Beşir Atalay, Iraqi Minister of State for National Security Shirwan al-Waili and US Army Maj. Gen. Joseph Anderson, chief of staff, US Forces-Iraq, led the delegations participating in the meeting. It was the fifth meeting of the trilateral committee, which was first established in November 2008 to coordinate the three countries' efforts to eliminate the PKK, which infiltrates Turkey from its bases in northern Iraq.

Iran and Armenia top agenda of Davutoğlu's bilateral talks in Washington D.C.

14 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Iran and Armenia were on top of the agenda of Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's talks in Washington, D.C. during Nuclear Security Summit.

Davutoğlu reaffirmed Turkey's commitment to normalisation process with Armenia and relayed the message that Turkey disapproved sanctions on Iran.

Davutoğlu relayed the message to Armenian Foreign Minister Eduard Nalbandian and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that, "Turkey is committed to the process and works on creative ideas to advance the process".

Clinton gave information to Davutoğlu about the developments regarding Minsk process and the two discussed normalisation of Turkey-Armenia relations and reform works in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Davutoğlu told Clinton that Azerbaijan should also be invited to the summit and expressed Turkey's target that Armenia issue should be prevented from casting shadow over Turkey's relations with the United States every year.

Diplomatic sources said Davutoğlu and Clinton would meet again on Wednesday.

Davutoğlu and Nalbandian sat side by side during the lunch hosted by U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu. Upon a joke that, "you will solve the problem here", Davutoğlu, with a loud voice that could be heard from the other tables, said, "we will solve if the third parties do not cast shadow".

President Gül visits Oman to improve bilateral relations

12 April 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Turkish President Abdullah Gül will pay a three-day visit to Oman starting today, upon the invitation of Omani Sultan Qaboos bin Said al-Said, to improve bilateral relations, a Presidency statement reported on Sunday.

During his visit to the Omani capital of Muscat, scheduled for April 12-14, Gül will meet with the sultan and members of the Omani government. He is also expected to attend the Turkish-Omani Business Forum.

Gül's visit will be the first presidential visit since 1997, and he will discuss ways to further improve friendship, cooperation and new opportunities for cooperation in trade, investment and the defense industry. The president will also address regional and international developments and relations between Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Relations between GCC countries and Turkey have accelerated in recent years and have been institutionalized through the strategic dialogue mechanism. The statement said great efforts were being made to develop relations with Gulf countries in every sphere and to urgently conclude the Turkey-GCC Free Trade Agreement.

Gül will be accompanied by several ministers, deputies, university faculty members, representatives of the business world and journalists. He is expected to return to Turkey on Wednesday.

Turkish president holds talks in Oman

14 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's president held a series of talks in Oman on Wednesday.

Turkish President Abdullah Gül, who is currently paying a formal visit to Oman, separately received the country's Minister of Defense Affairs Sayyid Badr bin Saud bin Harib al-Busaidi and Minister of Commerce & Industry Maqbul bin Ali bin Sultan in capital Muscat.

Turkish Agriculture Minister Mehdi Eker attended the meetings as well.

Gül will meet with representatives of Turkish society residing in Oman on Wednesday.

Upon completing his talks, the Turkish president is expected to return to Turkey.

TRNC president says Turkey's EU membership depends on solution of Cyprus problem

14 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish Cypriot President Mehmet Ali Talat, who is also an independent candidate in upcoming Turkish Cypriot presidential election, said Wednesday that Turkey's EU membership depends absolutely on resolving the Cyprus problem.

Talat reminded that EU had suspended eight policy areas, known as chapters, in accession negotiations with Turkey in 2006 and said, "let alone accession to EU, not even a single chapter can be opened."

Talat is vying with Prime Minister Derviş Eroğlu for the April 18 election in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

"So, Derviş Eroğlu's presidency would be more dangerous, not only for Turkish Cypriots, but also for Turkey," Talat told AA aboard his campaign bus touring from Lefkosa to Gazimagusa.

Talat said Turkey had been supporting Turkish Cypriot policies, however he added that his policies carried out together with Turkish government would stall if Eroğlu becomes the new president.

Talat, president since 2005, has been engaged in peace talks with Greek Cypriot President Demetris Christofias since September 2008 in a bid to reunify the island divided since 1974 after an Athens-backed Greek Cypriot military coup on the island.

"Turkish Cypriots will be isolated again if Eroğlu wins," he said.

More than 164,000 people will cast vote in the election in which seven candidates are running.

The candidates are President Mehmet Ali Talat (independent), Prime Minister Derviş Eroğlu (National Unity Party), Mustafa Kemal Tümkän (independent), Arif Salih Kırdag (independent), Zeki Beşiktepelı (independent), Ayhan Kaymak (independent) and Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu (independent).

If any of the candidates cannot reach the required threshold of 50 percent in the first round, the second round of the election will be held on April 25 between the two candidates who received the highest number of votes in the first round.

Meanwhile, all the president hopefuls will get together for the first time during a TV debate on Friday, the last day of propaganda.

Turkish premier offers condolences over Polish president's demise

11 April 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan offered condolences on Saturday to Poland and Russia over the demise of the Polish president in a plane crash in Russia.

Turkey's Premier sent condolence messages to both Poland and Russia, and expressed his deep sorrow over demise of Polish President Lech Kaczynski and an accompanying delegation in a plane crash in Russia.

There were 96 people, including Polish President Kaczynki, his spouse, the army chief of staff and bureaucrats aboard the plane. All the passengers died in the plane crash.

The presidential plane crashed as it came in for a landing in thick fog when the presidential plane crashed as it came in western Russia.

Polish leader, 96 others dead in Russia jet crash

11 April 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The crash of an aging Russian airliner ravaged the top levels of Poland's military, political and church elite Saturday, killing the Polish president and dozens of other dignitaries as they traveled to a ceremony commemorating a slaughter that has divided the two nations for seven decades. Poles wept before their televisions, lowered flags to half-staff and taped black ribbons in their windows after hearing that President Lech Kaczynski and the upper echelons of the establishment lay dead in woods a short drive from the site of the Katyn forest massacre, where 22,000 Polish officers were killed by Soviet secret police in one of Poland's greatest national traumas.

Thousands of people, many in tears, placed candles and flowers at the presidential palace in central Warsaw. Many called the crash Poland's worst disaster since World War II.

Twenty monks rang the Zygmunt bell at Krakow's Wawel Cathedral -- the burial spot of Polish kings -- a tolling reserved for times of profound importance or grief.

The crash also shocked Russia. Sensing the depth of the tragedy for Poland, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin personally took charge of the investigation and very quickly and publicly offered condolences, along with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.

"On this difficult day the people of Russia stand with the Polish people," Medvedev said, according to the Kremlin press service.

Chunks of the plane were scattered widely amid leafless trees and small fires in woods shrouded with fog. A tail fin with the red and white national colors of Poland stuck up from the smoking debris. Early indications pointed to pilot error in heavy fog as a factor in the crash, officials said. On board were the national bank president, deputy foreign minister, army chaplain, head of the National Security Office, deputy parliament speaker, Olympic Committee head, civil rights commissioner and at least two presidential aides and three lawmakers, the Polish foreign ministry said. Kaczynski's wife, Maria, also died.

"This is unbelievable -- this tragic, cursed Katyn," Kaczynski's predecessor, Aleksander Kwasniewski, said on TVN24 television.

It is "a cursed place, horrible symbolism," he said. "It's hard to believe. You get chills down your spine."

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and some cabinet members flew to Smolensk from Warsaw. The president's twin brother, former Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski, headed to the area in a chartered plane along with party members.

Television showed Jaroslaw kneeling and praying at the crash site. Tusk, joined by Putin, placed a wreath at the site and knelt. When he stood up, Putin hugged him.

Afterward, Putin and Tusk held a video conference with members of a special commission in Moscow, who told them that doctors, psychologists and other specialists were ready to assist relatives of the victims. They said some bodies have already been flown to Moscow for identification and were being taken to the morgue.

The Polish military suffered the deepest losses. Among the dead were the army chief of staff, the navy chief commander, and heads of the air and land forces, who were all making the emotional trip to honor the Polish officers slain by the NKVD, the acronym for the Soviet secret police at the time of the killings in 1940.

Some on board were relatives of the officers slain in the Katyn massacre. Also among the victims was Anna Walentynowicz, whose firing in August 1980 from the Lenin Shipyards in Gdansk sparked a workers' strike that spurred the eventual creation of the Solidarity freedom movement.

"This is a great tragedy, a great shock to us all," former president and Solidarity leader Lech Walesa said.

Polish Parliament Speaker Bronislaw Komorowski, who became acting president, addressed his country on television: "Poland is in mourning, we have suffered a dramatically painful loss."

He said he would announce early elections within 14 days of the president's death, in line with the constitution. The vote must be held within another 60 days.

Russia's Emergency Ministry said there were 97 dead, 88 in the Polish state delegation. Poland's Foreign Ministry said there were 89 people on the passenger list but one had not shown up for the roughly 1 1/2-hour flight from Warsaw's main airport.

Poland called for two minutes of silence across the country Sunday and declared a week of mourning. Medvedev declared Monday a day of mourning in Russia.

In the village of Gorzno, in northern Poland, the streets were largely empty as people stayed home to watch television.

"It is very symbolic that they were flying to pay homage to so many murdered Poles," said resident Waleria Gess, 73.

The deaths were not expected to directly affect the functioning of Polish government: Poland's president is commander in chief of its armed forces but the position's domestic duties are chiefly symbolic. No top government ministers were aboard the plane.

Polish-Russian relations had been improving recently after being poisoned for decades over the massacre of some 22,000 Polish officers in and around Katyn forest.

Russia never has formally apologized for the deaths but Putin's decision to attend a memorial ceremony earlier this week in the forest was seen as a gesture of goodwill toward reconciliation.

Kaczynski wasn't invited to that event because Putin, as prime minister, had invited his Polish counterpart, Tusk.

Rossiya-24 showed hundreds of people around the Katyn monument, many holding Polish flags, some weeping.

Kaczynski, 60, was the first serving Polish leader to die since exiled World War II-era leader Gen. Wladyslaw Sikorski in a mysterious plane crash off Gibraltar in 1943.

The president was a conservative and a lifelong skeptic of Russia with many detractors at home and abroad. Condolences from world leaders paid tribute to his patriotism and defense of freedom during Communist rule in Poland.

Putin and Medvedev promised Tusk they would work closely with Poland in investigating the crash. Initial signs pointed to an accident, possibly due to the fog that is very common in the area in spring and fall, as well as pilot error.

Both black boxes have been found. Preliminary data indicated that the plane hit the treetops as it was making the approach to the airport in poor visibility, the ITAR-Tass news agency quoted Marina Gridneva, an official with the Russian general prosecutor's office, as saying.

Andrei Yevseyenkov, spokesman for the Smolensk regional government, said Russian dispatchers had asked the Polish crew to divert from the military airport in North Smolensk and land instead in Minsk, the capital of neighboring Belarus, or in Moscow to the east because of the fog.

While traffic controllers generally have the final word in whether it is safe for a plane to land, they can and do leave it to the pilots' discretion. Air Force Gen. Alexander Alyoshin confirmed that the pilot disregarded instructions to fly to another airfield. The Smolensk airfield is not equipped with an instrument landing system to guide planes to the ground.

"But they continued landing, and it ended, unfortunately, with a tragedy," Alyoshin said. He added that the pilot makes the final decision about whether to land.

The Tu-154 was the workhorse of East Bloc civil aviation in the 1970s and 1980s. Poland has long discussed replacing the planes that carry the country's leaders but said they lacked the funds.

According to the Aviation Safety Network, there have been 66 crashes involving Tu-154s in the past four decades, including six in the past five years. The Russian carrier Aeroflot recently withdrew its Tu-154 fleet from service, largely because the planes do not meet international noise restrictions and use too much fuel.

The presidential plane was fully overhauled in December, the general director of the Aviakor aviation maintenance plant in Samara, Russia told Rossiya-24. The plant repaired the plane's three engines, retrofitted electronic and navigation equipment and updated the interior, Alexei Gusev said. He said there could be no doubts that the plane was flightworthy.

Kaczynski became president in December 2005 after defeating Tusk in that year's presidential vote.

The nationalist conservative had said he would seek a second term in presidential elections this fall. He was expected to face an uphill struggle against Komorowski, the candidate of Tusk's governing Civic Platform party.

Poland has become a firm US ally in the region since the fall of communism -- a stance that crosses party lines.

The European Union member nation of 38 million people sent troops to the US-led war in Iraq and recently boosted its contingent in Afghanistan to some 2,600 soldiers.

US Patriot missiles are expected to be deployed in Poland this year. That was a Polish condition for a 2008 deal -- backed by both Kaczynski and Tusk -- to host long-range missile defense interceptors.

The deal, which was struck by the Bush administration, angered Russia and was later reconfigured under President Barack Obama's administration.

Under the Obama plan, Poland would host a different type of missile defense interceptors as part of a more mobile system and at a later date, probably not until 2018.

Turkish, Kazakh presidents discuss riots in Kyrgyzstan

09 April 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Presidents of Turkey and Kazakhstan held Friday a telephone conversation on the recent crisis in Kyrgyzstan.

Turkish President Abdullah Gül discussed with Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev the latest developments in Kyrgyzstan, Turkish President's Press Office said in a statement.

"Both presidents have expressed the importance of putting an end to the ongoing crisis in the country and the relevant parties' taking a calm stance regarding the matter. They have also agreed to continue to hold talks and exchange views in upcoming days," the statement said.

Turkish President Gül followed the developments in Kyrgyzstan closely and kept getting regular information from relevant institutions, the statement added.

A temporary government was established in Kyrgyzstan following the anti-government riots in the country. At least 75 deaths have been confirmed so far.

Turkey ready to help restore stability in Kyrgyzstan

10 April 2010, Saturday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey is ready to assist in any way it can to restore peace and stability in Kyrgyzstan, Turkey's foreign policy chief said during a news conference on Thursday.

"Kyrgyzstan is a very important and brotherly country to us, and we share a common destiny with it. The stability and welfare of Kyrgyzstan is as important for us as our own stability and welfare," Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu told reporters at a joint press conference with his visiting Slovenian counterpart, Samuel Zbogar, late on Thursday. "We are ready to do what we can to help end the current negative developments and help Kyrgyzstan regain peace and stability."

A temporary government was established in Kyrgyzstan following anti-government riots in the country. At least 75 deaths have been confirmed so far. Davutoğlu said it was important that a new government which has the backing of the public is established in Kyrgyzstan. "We have been giving advice to that effect to all parties involved," he added.

The Turkish foreign minister also said he has discussed the situation in Kyrgyzstan with his Kazakh and Azerbaijani counterparts on the phone. President Abdullah Gül also had a phone conversation with Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, whose country holds the rotating presidency of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), to discuss the unrest in Kyrgyzstan, his office said in a statement on Friday.

"Both presidents expressed the importance of putting an end to the ongoing crisis in the country and the relevant parties taking a calm stance regarding the matter. They have also agreed to continue to hold talks and exchange views in upcoming days," the statement said. Gül is following the developments in Kyrgyzstan closely, it added.

Italy disagrees with Germany, France on Turkey's EU bid

10 April 2010, Saturday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Italy disagrees with France and Germany's view that Turkey should have a "privileged partnership" with the European Union rather than membership, Italy's foreign minister said ahead of a French-Italian summit on Friday.

I believe that after starting to negotiate membership with Turkey, we cannot tell them the next day: 'It's all over. It has all changed. We should make it a partnership'," Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini told France24 TV.

Italy has long been a firm supporter of Turkey's EU membership, and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi is close to his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, whose visit to Paris this week ended in an "agreement to disagree" with France over Turkey's EU membership. Turkey rejects the partnership option proposed by Germany and France. French European Affairs Minister Pierre Lellouche said Paris favors "a big Europe, the 27 [current EU members] in a partnership with Russia and Turkey."

"France and Germany will think about it. Italy for its part will think about it, but I believe that the right path is to keep our promises," Frattini said. Berlusconi had talks with French President Nicolas Sarkozy in Paris on Friday.

Turkey and Italy to hold intergovernmental summit

Meanwhile, the Turkey-Italy Intergovernmental Summit, which was called off after a physical attack on Berlusconi last December, will be held on April 21, the Anka news agency reported on Friday.

Seven Turkish and eight Italian ministers initially planned to attend the summit. The summit will feature discussions on economic cooperation and energy projects in particular. In line with this, it is said the talks will primarily be about the gas pipeline projects and investment opportunities in the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP).

It is also reported that Erdoğan will also have bilateral meeting with Berlusconi on the sidelines of the summit. During the meeting, Erdoğan and Berlusconi are expected to discuss Turkey's EU membership talks, Iran's nuclear standoff, the Middle East problem and the Balkans.

The first summit of the Turkish and Italian governments was held in İzmir in 2008, and the leaders decided to host the annual meetings on a rotating basis.

Bağış defines Erdoğan-Sarkozy meeting as constructive

09 April 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's EU negotiator has called the meeting between Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and French President Nicolas Sarkozy one of the most fruitful and constructive meetings ever.

Turkish-French relations and Turkey's EU membership negotiations as well as important global issues were discussed during the meeting, noted State Minister and chief negotiator for EU talks Egemen Bağış, who spoke to reporters in the Central Anatolian province of Eskişehir on Thursday. Bağış said Erdoğan and Sarkozy assessed the common vision of Turkey and France as well as what could be done to bring peace to global problems. Erdoğan was received by Sarkozy in Paris on Wednesday. During the meeting, Sarkozy accepted an invitation by Erdoğan to visit Turkey and said he would come after November 2010. Erdoğan visited France to attend the closing ceremony of "Season of Turkey in France" activities. Turkish culture was in the spotlight

in France with more than 600 activities in 120 cities throughout the nine-month-long “Season of Turkey in France.”

Erdoğan urges Turks in France to integrate, not assimilate

09 April 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Integrate into a society by learning its language and becoming involved in its social life but never assimilate, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said while addressing the Turkish community in Paris.

The prime minister spoke to an audience of 6,000 ethnic Turks living in France at the Zenith Arena late on Wednesday, the second day of his visit to France. Met with great applause when he stepped onto the stage, Erdoğan talked about the rise of Turkey and urged the French Turks to become better represented in the economic, political and social life of the country they are living in.

Stressing that assimilation is different from integration, Erdoğan said no one can demand that a person assimilate. “The demand to assimilate is a crime against humanity,” he said. “No one can ask you to abandon your values, your culture.” Erdoğan said if they want to live in harmony with the society they are living with, they need to integrate into the society in the best way possible.

Reminding his audience that France allows dual citizenship, Erdoğan criticized those who do not apply for French citizenship. “Apply, my brothers. Apply! Use the right to vote and to get elected that France has granted you. This is a great asset, make use of it,” Erdoğan stressed. The prime minister said being a French citizen will not deprive them of their identity. “Why shouldn’t there be some amongst you running for the European Parliament?” Erdoğan asked, urging the Turkish community to be better represented and integrate into French society.

Speaking about Turkey’s European Union membership bid, Erdoğan said Turkey will only strengthen the EU with its young, dynamic and educated population of 73 million. Saying that there are nearly 5.5 million ethnic Turks living in Europe, Erdoğan asked his audience not to end the “Turkish Season” both in France and in other parts of the Europe, after reminding them that they marked the end of the Season of Turkey in France on Wednesday.

“I ask each of you to make more of an effort as an envoy of your country to better promote Turkey here,” the prime minister said.

Saying that they have lifted visas requirements with 23 countries in the past seven-and-a-half years, Erdoğan said Turkey’s face is turned toward the West but it has never turned its back on its eastern neighbors. “We cannot be indifferent to the people with whom we have lived for a thousand years,” Erdoğan underlined.

No deal with France on EU bid

During talks with Erdoğan in Paris earlier in the day, French President Nicolas Sarkozy reiterated his opposition to Turkey’s membership in the EU, while Erdoğan repeated that Turkey remains committed to its goal of EU membership and rejected the French and German proposal for a privileged partnership instead.

“We agree to disagree,” French Minister for European Affairs Pierre Lellouche told reporters after Erdoğan met with Prime Minister Francois Fillon. “Turkey has its project, that of integrating with the 27 [EU members]. We respect this project but we have our own project, that of a big Europe, the 27 in a partnership with Russia and Turkey,” Lellouche added.

But the two leaders agreed to work to expand bilateral ties despite disagreements concerning Ankara's membership bid.

Top EU official finds Sledgehammer plans worrisome

09 April 2010, Friday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Füle said yesterday in Brussels that plans included in a military action plot with the code name Sledgehammer, such as shooting down a Turkish fighter jet, are "worrisome."

According to Sledgehammer documents, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) had a systematic plan to create chaos in society by bombing mosques and attacking popular museums with Molotov cocktails. It also aimed to provoke clashes between Turkish and Greek warplanes over the Aegean. If the Greek warplanes had failed to shoot down a Turkish warplane, other Turkish planes would have been ordered to do it. The purpose of the attacks was to increase pressure on the government for failing to provide security to its citizens, eventually leading to a military coup.

Füle responded to a written motion from Georgios Koumoutsakos, a Greek member of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) regarding allegations that serious incidents including a war would be provoked between Turkey and Greece.

Füle said the EU Commission stays informed about allegations that resulted in the arrest of senior military members in Turkey and finds the allegations "worrisome."

Twenty-seven active and retired military members have been arrested in Turkey so far as part of the investigation into the Sledgehammer plot. Füle also noted that the EU would continue to closely follow the developments regarding the coup probe while demanding that the investigation into the probe is carried out by respecting the rights of the suspects and paying full respect to compliance with the principles and standards of a fair trial. The plan was drawn up in 2003 and discussed in a seminar held at the General Staff's Selimiye barracks in March of that year. The General Staff has denied that the Sledgehammer plot was the subject of a seminar, saying it had no record of such an event. It defended itself by claiming that the Sledgehammer plan was merely a war game.

China launches an online tourism portal for Turkey

Thursday, 15 April 2010 22:56

WORLD BULLETIN

China launched an online culture and tourism portal to improve dialogue and cooperation with Turkey.

China on Thursday launched an online culture and tourism portal to improve dialogue and cooperation with Turkey.

"silktrk.com" was launched at a ceremony in Istanbul with the participation of Li Changchun, member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee.

"We want to build a world on harmony, joint prosperity and lasting peace through boosted dialogue and communication," Changchun said at the inauguration ceremony of the Turkish web portal.

Changchun said China attached great importance to Turkey as an industrializing country and the leading member of the Muslim world.

Turkish flags to be at half-mast for late Polish president

Thursday, April 15, 2010

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

All Turkish flags in Turkey and at missions overseas will be at half-mast Sunday for the funeral ceremony of late Polish President Lech Kaczynski and 95 other senior officials killed in the same plane crash.

“I’d like to express my thankfulness for the kind gesture by Turkey and to those Turkish officials and people sharing our sorrow,” Poland’s Ambassador to Ankara Marcin Wilczek told reporters Thursday.

President Abdullah Gül will represent Turkey at the funeral ceremony in Poland. “This participation is quite meaningful for us. We appreciate it a lot,” Wilczek said.

On Saturday, a religious service will be held at a church in Ankara in memory of the victims of the April 10 plane crash. Polish President Kaczynski, his wife, the army chief of staff and senior bureaucrats were onboard the flight.

Wilczek praised “Russia’s sincere approach to display full cooperation in this tragic accident” and stressed his country’s appreciation for the actions of Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who has paid serious attention to the incident and inspected the accident scene himself.

A delegation consisting of 60 Russian prosecutors and 20 Polish experts have been carrying out the investigation and inspecting the plane’s black boxes.

“All state institutions continue to work despite this tragedy taking place,” the ambassador said. Poland will hold presidential elections in January.

Gul's Attendance in Late President's Funeral Important For Poland, Senior Polish Diplomat Says

Thursday, 15 April 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

Turkish President Abdullah Gul's prospective attendance at a forthcoming funeral ceremony for late Polish President Lech Kaczynski is of great meaning and importance to Poland, the top Polish diplomat in Ankara said Thursday. Ambassador Marcin Wilczek said they appreciated Turkey's declaring a day of official mourning on Sunday, when the late Polish president is set to be buried.

Kaczynski, his wife and several high ranking Polish military officers and civilian bureaucrats were killed in a plane crash last Saturday in western Russia.

The presidential plane carrying Kaczynski and his entourage went down as it approached Smolensk airport, killing all on board.

Kaczynski had been flying to Russia to attend the 70th anniversary of the Katyn massacre, where Soviet secret police executed 15,000 Polish officers during the second world war.

The ambassador said his country was grateful for support and solidarity shown by senior Turkish officials and Turkish people.

Thursday, 15 April 2010

ECONOMIC NEWS

Turkey, Iran to jointly establish zone

09 April 2010, Friday

TODAY’S ZAMAN ANKARA

Technical delegations from Ankara and Tehran are expected to commence studies for the establishment of a free industrial zone between Turkey and Iran in the eastern province of Iğdır, the city governor announced on Thursday.

Iğdır Governor Saffet Karahisarlı, officials from the Ministry of Industry and Trade along with experts from Iran met on Thursday in Iğdır to discuss the establishment of a free industrial zone. Speaking to reporters, Karahisarlı said technical delegations from Turkey and Iran would shortly come together to discuss the necessary preparations for the zone, which will be situated along the border connecting Turkey, Iran and Nakhchivan. Following talks in Iğdır, the technical delegations will proceed to the Turkish provinces of Ağrı, Van and Hakkari, the governor said. An eastern Anatolia province, Iğdır borders Armenia, Nakhchivan and Iran.

Banks fear political intervention most, survey shows

09 April 2010, Friday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

According to the "Banking Banana Skins 2010" report released by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) and the Center for the Study of Financial Innovation (CSFI), the threat bankers are most worried about is political intervention into the sector.

The report, which included results from a survey of 443 "bankers, banking regulators and close observers of the banking scene" in 49 countries, outlined 30 risks, with political intervention topping the list. This is the first time in 15 years that the CSFI's results have shown political intervention as a threat to the sector.

"Heavy regulation" came in third place, demonstrating that the fear of government is ever present in the global banking sector -- which played a major role in the events that unfolded during the global financial crisis.

The managers and experts surveyed stated that the large sums of taxpayer money that propped banks up and the nationalization of failing banks meant that banks were becoming increasingly "politicized" and that this could be a large threat to financial stability. Bankers and non-bankers had differing reasons for this opinion, with bankers stating that politics could negatively affect the way banks give loans while non-bankers said political and monetary help to banks could lead to banks acting carelessly.

CSFI Research Editor David Lascelles, discussing the report findings, said he found it ironic that banks were citing political intervention as the biggest risk at a time when governments need to support the banking sector to stop a bigger crisis from occurring.

PwC Turkey Banking and Capital Markets Manager and Partner Zeynep Uras said that with these results and this overwhelming fear of politics in the banking sector, it appears that the future of banks lies in exogenous factors that can affect the sector. She added that although government funding for banks to pull them out of the depths of the financial crisis did temporarily help them, overly politicizing banks may lead to negative effects on the financial crisis.

Ergün: Syrian, Turkish industrialists should further develop cooperation

09 April 2010, Friday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Industry and Trade Minister Nihat Ergün has said that Turkish and Syrian companies should cooperate and establish partnerships both in Turkey and Syria along with third countries. Ergün, who was on an official visit to Syria, toured an organized industrial zone in the capital of Damascus with Syrian Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Abdullah al-Dardari. Speaking during his visit, Ergün pointed out the importance of establishing cooperation between Turkish and Syrian industrialists. “We want Turkish and Syrian companies to make investments in each other’s countries and even to cooperate in third countries. From now on, we will carry out activities to strengthen the relevant infrastructures and to provide partnership between them,” said the minister, also commenting on the improvement in Turkish industry. “Turkey used to export agricultural products in the past, but now 90 percent of its exports comprise industrial products that are mainly sent to EU countries,” he said, stressing the importance of establishing cooperation between the industrial sector and universities. Al-Dardari also stated that scientific research and dialogue between industrialists were essential elements in Turkey and Syria’s cooperation in the industrial sector.

Bank Asya secures record murabaha syndicated loan

10 April 2010, Saturday

TODAY'S ZAMAN WITH WIRES İSTANBUL

Leading participation bank Bank Asya has received a \$250 million “murabaha” syndicated loan from international financial institutions, marking the highest ever such loan for a Turkish bank. Murabaha is an Islamic method of extending loans and encompasses a particular kind of sale where the seller states the cost of the commodity to be sold and sells it to another person by adding a specified amount of money to the price. Since murabaha is not a loan extended with interest but the sale of a commodity for cash or a deferred price, interest-free banks commonly use it as a financial instrument to earn profits.

The bank authorized Standard Chartered Bank, ABC Islamic Bank and Noor Islamic Bank to find \$75 million from international lenders in murabaha loans. These three banks, however, found a much higher demand -- nearly three times larger than what was originally intended -- from the financial institutions that wanted to contribute to the formation of the syndicated loan. The authorized banks were able to secure a total amount of \$250 million -- \$121.5 million and 99.2 million euros -- from 26 international lenders. The cost was determined to be equal to the London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR) plus 2.25 percent. The loan will be payable in a one-year term, during which time a profit margin will be determined twice.

Speaking at the symbolic signing ceremony for the syndicated loan in İstanbul on Friday, Bank Asya General Manager Cemil Özdemir discussed the bank’s performance last year, during which time it grew much more than the sector’s average in terms of asset size, loans and collected funds. The bank is strengthening its position in the banking sector with such a superb performance, he added.

Bank Asya last year undertook the funding of 2.34 percent of exports and 2.46 percent of imports, he mentioned, adding that it aims to increase its activities in this segment of the sector.

Turkey enjoys revival in exports to EU market

12 April 2010, Monday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Turkish exporters have been buoyed by the past few months' noticeable increase in sales to the EU, one of Turkey's traditional export markets.

Turkey sustained a heavy decline in exports to the EU following stagnating demand during a 2009 global financial bottleneck. Exporters are now endeavoring to regain their market share in the EU export market. Officials from the Turkish Exporters' Assembly (TİM) said Sunday that members were encouraged by a pick-up in Turkey's exports to European markets since the beginning of the year. According to the latest TİM data, Turkey's exports to Germany were up 18 percent in the first quarter of 2010 as compared to the same period of 2009. The increase to Italy was 38 percent, while Turkey enjoyed a 39 percent rise in exports to France and the UK each in the same period. Turkey's exports to Spain climbed 54 percent, 30 percent to Romania and 45 percent to Sweden in first three months of this year as compared to same quarter of a year before. TİM officials also said the recent removals of visa requirements with several neighboring countries had a positive impact on Turkey's exports to these markets. Exports to Russia jumped 23 percent and to Iran by 35 percent. Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkmenistan were among the countries to which Turkey boosted its exports, with 46, 37 and 61 percent increases, respectively, in the first quarter of 2010 over the same months of 2009.

Turkish companies' direct investments rise in Middle East

14 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

With relations developing between Turkey and countries in the region, Turkish foreign direct investment (FDI) has recently become more concentrated in Middle Eastern countries, rising by 55.9 percent in the first two months of the year over the same period of 2009 and accounting for 43.8 percent of all investments made.

According to a report on the February balance of payments released by the Central Bank of Turkey on Monday, Turkish FDI totaled \$153 million in the January-February period of this year. Of this figure, 43.8 percent was invested in Middle Eastern countries, up from \$43 million a year earlier, to \$67 million, representing a rise of 55.9 percent. The total amount of investments made in this region since 2002 until the end of February reached \$2.86 billion, while overall investments made abroad during this period amounted to \$11.37 billion.

Turkish FDI made in the Gulf countries in the first two months of the year totaled \$22 million. In this period, Azerbaijan received the greatest amount of investment from Turkey, with \$38 million.

The manufacturing industry saw the highest amount of investments made abroad by Turks since 2002, accounting for 62 percent of Middle Eastern investments and 53.42 percent of overall investments. During this period, the service sector accounted for 38 percent of total investments made in the Middle East and 46.45 percent in overall investments.

Turks' investments in Europe, on the other hand, suffered an 88 percent drop in the January-February period over the same months of 2009, totaling \$60 million. With \$18 million, the Netherlands became the top country receiving the greatest investments from Turkey, followed by Russia and Switzerland with \$8 million each.

Budget deficit down 41 pct in Q1, gov't happy

14 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's budget deficit for the first three months of this year was TL 11.3 billion, down 41 percent compared to the same period of 2009, bringing strong relief to the government, Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek announced on Tuesday in Ankara.

Speaking to reporters during a press conference on the latest macroeconomic developments and the economy's first quarter performance, Şimşek said the state enjoyed a 21 percent increase in revenue, which reached TL 57 billion in the first quarter, over the same period of 2009 while expenditures rose by 3 percent to reach TL 68.4 billion. Tax revenue increased to TL 47.9 billion in the first quarter, 26 percent higher than the same months of 2009. The minister said the government expects swift recovery, particularly following the Q1 figures.

The non-interest deficit was TL 1 billion in the first quarter while the non-interest surplus reached TL 3 billion in the same period.

As regards last month's figures, Turkey's budget deficit reached TL 5.9 billion in March 2010, 32 percent less than the same month a year before. The budget revenue surged by 34 percent to reach TL 17.5 billion while expenditures reached TL 23.4 billion. The state's tax revenue increased by 34 percent over March 2009 to reach TL 14.5 billion. "We have gotten spending under control, and there has been a greater-than-anticipated increase in revenue," Şimşek said, evaluating the picture.

Underlining that although world markets, and in particular Asian economies, had entered a noticeable period of recovery, starting from the beginning of this year, Şimşek said the budget deficit and public debts still remain high in most countries. "We are concerned that such problems will continue haunting the markets for some time to come. Economies will be busy dealing with these shortcomings," he said.

Şimşek said Turkey stands at an advantage, having maintained a strong financial industry and sticking to its own economic program amid the global credit crunch. Recalling that the economy grew 6 percent in the final quarter of 2009 over a year before, the minister said Turkey needs some more time before it can regain its past economic strength. "We will not be surprised to see two-digit growth in the first quarter over the same period of 2009," he continued, adding that current indices, including capacity utilization, exports and the manufacturing industry, already signal that this is likely. "We owe all these encouraging developments to recent structural reforms applied by our government in the economy," he explained.

Mentioning Turkey's unemployment problem, a major burden on the country's economy, he said the government expects a recovery in employment will be much slower. "World markets will have to live with a serious unemployment problem for a certain time. A genuine recovery could come only following stable growth in markets in the long term."

The minister said the government expects to allocate more support to such critical fields as health and infrastructure once it reduces the interest burden on the budget. "The state paid 86 percent of tax revenues to interest payments in 2002. This number declined to 31 percent last year, and we are planning to bring this share to below 30 percent this year."

Turkish minister urges Kazakhstan to remove bureaucratic obstacles

14 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish State Minister for foreign trade Zafer Çağlayan urged Kazakhstan to remove the bureaucratic obstacles before businessmen.

Çağlayan who chaired the Turkish-Kazakh Business Council meeting in Almaty on Wednesday said the trade volume between Turkey and Kazakhstan was below desired levels.

He said Turkish businessmen were troubled with obstacles posed by too much bureaucratic procedures, urging Kazakhstan to remove bureaucratic obstacles.

Responding to a question asking him to name the said obstacles, Çağlayan said, "it takes only one day to open a company in Turkey. The transfer of capital and profits is easy. The capital flow has accelerated. Thanks to these Turkey has been able to draw 8 billion USD of foreign investments," said Çağlayan.

Çağlayan said Turkey attached great importance to the completion of the Kazakhstan-Turkey railway as soon as possible.

"Kazakhstan is one of the largest grain producers in the world. It ranks top in the global flour production. Once this railway is completed, we want Kazakh products to be distributed to the world through Turkey. This will also be lucrative for Turkey," said Çağlayan.

Çağlayan said that he would meet with six Kazakh ministers including Prime Minister Karim Massimov, and ask for their support for removal of bureaucratic obstacles.

Kazakhstan willing to set up special trade zone for Turkey, Çağlayan says

15 April 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish State Minister for foreign trade Zafer Çağlayan said on Thursday that Kazakh officials had offered to open a special trade zone in the country that would serve for Turkish businesspeople only.

Giving an account of his meeting with Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Masimov, Çağlayan said the proposed "Turkish zone" would house investments by Turkish companies, adding that Kazakh officials would leave the planning of the trade zone to their Turkish counterparts.

Çağlayan said he had conveyed to the Kazakh premier problems Turkish investors faced in Kazakhstan, mostly bureaucratic ones.

The Turkish minister said construction business in Kazakhstan offered great opportunities for Turkish contractors.

Çağlayan said a preferential trade agreement between the two countries was also on the agenda.

Turkish Energy Ministry introduces 5-year strategic energy plan

15 April 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish Energy Ministry, which unveiled its 5-year strategic energy plan in March, has made a presentation to the media on Thursday to introduce the plan.

In its new plan for 2010-2014, Turkey, an energy import-dependent country, plans to increase power generation using domestic resources, diversify natural gas suppliers, increase the amount of oil pumped to Turkey's oil hub Ceyhan and begin construction of nuclear power plant by the year 2014.

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

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

Turkey makes natural gas imports from five supplier countries. Turkey supplies two thirds of its natural gas need from Russia. However, Turkish government wants to reduce its dependence on Russia and plans to cut Russian stake in Turkey's gas imports to below 50 percent in a move to diversify suppliers.

Turkey also plans to rise its oil and gas production by the help of its projects launched to explore oil and natural gas in the Black and the Mediterranean.

According to strategic energy plan, Turkey plans to extend the duration of a crude oil pipeline deal with Iraq, finalize negotiations on Nabucco pipeline project deal this year, commence construction of the Nabucco pipeline in 2011, launch the project to connect natural gas networks of Turkey and Syria in 2011. The governments also aims to make Ceyhan, a port in the southern part of the country, a wholly-integrated oil hub by the year 2015. The amount of oil pumped to Ceyhan is expected to reach 500 million barrels a year.

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

One of government's priority is to start construction of country's first nuclear power plant by 2014 and increase the ratio of renewable energy resources to 30 percent in total energy generation by 2023.

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

Turkish minister says unemployment to be in line with med-term program targets

15 April 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The Turkish industry minister said on Thursday that unemployment figures would be in line with medium-term economic program targets.

Turkey's Industry and Trade Minister Nihat Ergün said it was likely to have fluctuations in unemployment figures in the first months of 2010.

"However, when we take the year as a whole, we can say that unemployment figures will be in line with medium-term program targets, and even a bit below them," Ergün told reporters in İstanbul.

Ergün said particularly developments in tourism and agriculture industries in coming months would decrease unemployment figures.

Turkey's statistical board, TurkStat, announced earlier on Thursday that the unemployment rate was up to 14.5 percent in January 2010 over December 2009.

It was 13.5 percent in December 2009, and 13.1 percent in November 2009.

However, the unemployment rate was down 1 point year-on-year in January 2010. It was 15.5 percent in January 2009.

Turkey's unemployment rate rises to 14.5 percent

15 April 2010 Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's unemployment rate increased to 14.5 percent month-on-month in January 2010. Turkey's statistical board, TurkStat, released a statement on Thursday and said the unemployment rate was up to 14.5 percent in January 2010 over December 2009. It was 13.5 percent in December 2009, and 13.1 percent in November 2009. However, the unemployment rate was down 1 point year-on-year in January 2010. It was 15.5 percent in January 2009.

According to the TurkStat's Household Labor Force Survey for January 2010, number of unemployed people decreased 59,000 to 3,591,000 when compared with January 2009. It was 3,650,000 in January 2009.

The number of unemployed was 3.3 million in December 2009.

Below are unemployment figures in January 2009 and 2010 (pop. stands for population):

- (Thousand) JANUARY 2009 JANUARY 2010
- Non-institutional pop. 70,166 70,975
- Pop. 15 years & over 51,323 52,150
- Labor force 23,523 24,753
- Employed 19,873 21,162
- Unemployed 3,650 3,591
- Labor force participation rate % 48.8 47.5
- Employment rate % 38.7 40.6
- Unemployment rate % 15.5 14.5
- Non-agricultural emp. rate % 18.5 17.6
- Youth employment rate % 27.9 25.9
- Not in labor force 27,799 27,397

Problems with BTC pipeline cost Turkey \$208 mln

15 April 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey has lost nearly \$208 million in the past three years due to problems it has faced in the operation of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline (BTC), carrying Caspian Sea crude oil to European markets, officials from the Energy Ministry have told Today's Zaman.

Once hailed as “the project of the 21st century,” the BTC now seems to have lost its charm as the pipeline has been costing Turkey millions of dollars in losses for the past three years.

Relations between BOTAŞ International Limited (BIL), an affiliate of the Turkish Pipeline Corporation (BOTAŞ) that operates the Turkish section of the BTC, and the BTC Co., the major firm responsible for the operation of the entire route, have been at odds for some time. According to claims that have recently surfaced, BIL complains that the BTC Co. failed to meet the criteria stipulated in their contract and that this has led to the loss of around \$300 million for BIL over the past three years.

BIL signed a contract with the BTC Co. to operate the Turkish part of pipeline in 2006. BIL had a condition in the deal that the BTC must drill oil at full capacity, to which the BTC Co. agreed. However, an unexpected alteration to the contract — a switch to natural gas from oil in drilling operations — cost BIL millions of dollars in losses. In 2007, BIL decided to use natural gas in compressor and drilling stations since it is relatively cheaper; however, a swift rise in gas prices

starting from that year led to large losses for the company. The company is now demanding that the BTC Co. compensate BIL for their loss.

BIL recently applied to the Prime Ministry's arbitration committee to solve the problem. The company said they would not be able to profit from the project until the year 2012 unless the current issue is solved.

Turkey faces another problem in the project: According to the contract, if the pipeline operates at full capacity, Turkey would receive \$170 million for transit services per year. However, the pipeline was operating at 57 percent capacity in 2007, 67 percent in 2008 and 79 percent in 2009, incurring a loss to Turkey of \$165 million in transportation revenue alone. BIL paid \$32 million for oil compared to \$10 million in 2009. The use of natural gas has cost BIL \$70 million in three-and-a-half years. With these amounts combined, BIL's loss is anticipated to exceed \$300 million by the end of 2010.

The BTC is a crude oil pipeline that covers 1,768 kilometers (1,099 miles) connecting Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia and Ceyhan, a port on the southeastern Mediterranean coast of Turkey. The BTC is the second longest oil pipeline in the world after the Druzhba pipeline. The first oil that was pumped from the Baku end of the pipeline on May 10, 2005 reached Ceyhan on May 28, 2006.

More than 400K trucks waiting idle due to economic crisis

15 April 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

More than 400,000 trucks in all corners of Turkey are waiting idle due to the economic crisis. In a report submitted to Turkish Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek, the Federation of Turkish Drivers and Automobile Owners (TSOF) said that over 400,000 trucks in Turkey were parked idle due to the ongoing economic crisis and high taxes on gas.

The report said that at least 80 percent of all expenses of truck drivers are born out of the cost of gas.

The taxes collected from consumers of gas must be reduced immediately, the TSOF report underlined.

The report also said that those vehicles whose taxes were not paid and were taken to parks of the Ministry of Finance should be given more time and that a necessary legal arrangement should be made to help the drivers of such vehicles.

Turkey's new seaports to spice up modern Silk Road

15 April 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

As Asia regains its spot as a production hub in the global economy, Turkey, with its key geographic location, is finding itself at the edge of a new, modernized Silk Road and is looking to reap the fruits of expanded maritime and land trade between the East and the West.

Ülker Yetkin, the head of the Survey of Port Projects Department at the General Directorate of Railways, Ports, and Airport Construction (DLH), speaking at the Port Finance International conference in İstanbul yesterday, shared the DLH's various seaport projects with the attendees, taking special note of Turkey's importance as a land bridge and a corridor between the Mediterranean and the rest of Asia. Stating that Black Sea and Mediterranean traffic has

increased substantially along with trade, Yetkin noted that this has created significant stress on Turkey's ports and straits and that relieving this stress was one of the highest priorities of the DLH.

She stated that the DLH currently has three sea port projects in line that will act as hubs or transfer points for cargo traveling between Asia and the rest of the world. One of these new hubs will be the Filyos Port, to be built on Turkey's western Black Sea coast. This new port will have a capacity of 25 million tons per year and will be connected to railways. The port is designed to connect Anatolia to Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and the Black Sea countries as the beginning of a land bridge between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea -- a much-needed development to lighten transit traffic on Turkey's straits.

The end of this bridge will be in Mersin, where the current port will be expanded to handle further traffic coming from both the Black Sea and from land transit from eastern Turkey.

Çandarlı is another port that is expected to be built on the Aegean coast near İzmir, where an older and overcrowded port is located. The port will again be used as a transit port to push transit onto Turkey's roadways.

New financing model necessary

Yetkin, regarding the financing of such projects, which have yet to break ground, stated that many ports have been built using the build-operate-transfer (BOT) model, which offers concessions to the private company building the port, allowing them to operate the port for long periods of time. She noted that although the legal framework for BOT exists, it isn't fit for all types of projects. According to Yetkin, the private sector cannot at times handle these heavy investments. Yetkin thus stated that private-public partnerships (PPP) are currently a method that the government is looking at legalizing so that the risks and the costs could be shared between private and public actors.

Turkey eyes more meetings with Southeastern Europe on economy

Saturday, 10 April 2010 14:23

WORLD BULLETIN

Turkish state minister for economy said that the duty of Southeast European countries was to ensure a sustainable and robust growth.

The Turkish state minister for economy said on Saturday that the duty of Southeast European countries was to ensure a sustainable and robust growth.

Turkey's State Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan said their most important duty was also to reduce unemployment figures.

"In this context, we have to behave in coordination regarding our policies, and take necessary steps to reduce effects of internal and external shocks," Babacan said during the meeting of ministers of economy and finance of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEEC) in Istanbul.

Babacan enumerated four factors of policy towards the Balkans as security for everybody, high-level political dialogue, creation of mutual economic dependence, and preservation and fortification of multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious structures.

"It is not possible for us to talk about lasting peace and stability in the Balkans unless peace and stability is ensured in Bosnia and Herzegovina," he said.

Babacan said all bordering neighbors of Bosnia and Herzegovina had been included in the visa regime of the European Union (EU), and Bosnia and Herzegovina's remaining out of these developments was unacceptable.

"Bosnia and Herzegovina, like other regional countries, should catch this train, complete its integration to Euro-Atlantic institutions, and take its place among the developed countries of Europe as soon as possible," he said.

Babacan said Albania should also enjoy removal of visa procedures as soon as possible.

Turkey thought the stability of the Balkans was indispensable for peace and security of Europe, Babacan said.

Babacan said Turkey attached utmost importance to boosting its economic and commercial relations with Southeast European countries, and Turkish contractors had undertaken projects worth 5 billion USD in the region.

"We think we should ensure an economic integration by cooperating in energy, infrastructure, regional trade and investments," Babacan said.

Babacan said Southeast European countries were organizing regular economic and commercial meetings, and encouraging their entrepreneurs to invest in other countries.

Laws on investment incentives, prevention of double taxation, mutual assistance in customs, and economic cooperation agreements would contribute to relations among the Southeast European countries, Babacan also said.

Economies of Southeast European countries grew around 5 percent annually between 2000 and 2008, however their economies shrank 5 percent in 2009 due to global crisis.

The South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) is a forum for diplomatic and political dialogue among Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Turkey, Croatia, and Montenegro.

The initiative was launched in Sofia in July 1996, during a meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of South-East European countries, which decided to start a long-term process of multilateral cooperation among participating states in the following four fields: Strengthening stability, security and good-neighbourly relations; economic development; humanitarian, social and cultural issues; justice, combat against organized crime, illicit drug and arms trafficking, and terrorism.

As of June 5 2009, Turkey has assumed the presidency of the South-East European Cooperation Process.

Turkish health tourism sector targets \$20 billion income

Wednesday, April 14, 2010

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

The Turkish Health Tourism Association, or TUHETO, is promoting health tourism to Turkey at a number of events in Ukraine, Dubai, Switzerland, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan during April, May and June. The association aims to attract an income of \$20 billion from health tourism to Turkey in the long-term

The Turkish Health Tourism Association, or TUHETO, is promoting health tourism to Turkey at a number of events overseas during April, May and June.

İbrahim Artukarslan, a founding member of the TUHETO advisory board, said Wednesday the association's goal is to attract an income of \$20 billion from health tourism to Turkey in the long-term. The association recently organized a promotional workshop in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

“People from Kazakstan have been traveling overseas for health treatments and operations for many years now, with top destinations including Israel, India, Spain, the United States and Hungary. When we asked representatives of the local health sector representatives why Turkey is not among these countries, the response was that they are very keen about health tourism to Turkey but have not had the chance to meet with the representatives of the Turkish health sector so far,” Artukarslan said.

He said Turkish businesses active in the sector have to plan their packages in a very careful and detailed manner to preserve the good reputation Turkey’s private health care sector enjoys.

“We need to consider very carefully the legal and insurance aspects of package tours to Turkey, which include, for example, in vitro-fertilization treatments or eye surgery. One mistake in one operation could ruin our reputation,” he said.

Soaps great PR for Turkish hospitals

The scenes shot at private hospitals for Turkish soap operas broadcast in Arab countries have also notably contributed to the growth of health tourism to Turkey. “Of course, any appearance and publicity is good. Private hospitals are attracting more health tourism from Arab countries, where people have seen the hospitals on the soaps,” he said.

The upcoming activities TUHETO is organizing in order to promote health tourism to Turkey include promotional activities in Baku, Azerbaijan, on April 29, attendance at the Arabian Travel Market Exhibition in Dubai on May 4, a meeting of 600 Kazakh doctors in Almaty on May 13, promotional activities during a visit of Russian dentists in Antalya on May 18, a workshop in Kiev, Ukraine, on May 21 and promotional activities in Zurich, Switzerland, on June 5.

Turkish Airlines Posts 387 Mln Euro Profit In 2009

Saturday, 10 April 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

Turkey's national air carrier posted 387 million Euro of profit in 2009, the director general said on Saturday.

Turkish Airlines (THY) director general Temel Kotil said the company made 389 million Euro of profit in 2009, becoming the top five airline companies following Air China and Ryan Air in the world that recorded the highest profit in 2009.

"Our turnover was 3.2 billion Euro, and revenues were 2.8 billion Euro in 2009," Kotil told AA correspondent.

Kotil said Air France, American Airlines, Iberia, British Airways, Singapore Airlines and Delta closed 2009 with losses, whereas the profits of Emirates, Korean Air and Lufthansa were below that of THY.

The director general said 33 percent of passengers arriving at Istanbul's Ataturk Airport was transit passengers, and if this trend continued, THY would start serving international market more than domestic market.

"When all airports in Europe shrank in 2009, Ataturk Airport grew 5.2 percent and the number of passengers the THY was carrying from this airport was up 10 percent," he said. Kotil said Istanbul could become a global transit point in 2023, and THY was ranked the 13th in world aviation.

The director general said THY's market share in Europe was up to 8.5 percent from 4 percent, and enumerated the reason of their success as lowering expenditures, giving high-quality service, becoming a brand.

Kotil also referred to THY's performance in the first quarter of 2010, and said THY's passengers were up 26 percent when compared with the same period of 2009 and reached 6.2 million.

The airliner carried 4.9 million passengers in the first quarter of 2009.

Kotil said the number of business class and transit passengers in international lines was up 32 and 37 percent respectively in the mentioned period.

"Although March was not so busy, we reached the number of passengers we carried last June," he said.

Kotil said, "we want to carry THY, which is actually the fourth biggest airliner in Europe, to the third place with this performance."

THY carried a total of 6,155,000 passengers in the first quarter of 2010, including 2,012,000 passengers in January, 1,912,000 in February and 2,231,000 in March.

British Airways, the third biggest European airline company, carried 6,667,000 passengers in the same period.

Based in Istanbul, Turkish Airlines is one of the fastest growing and prosperous airlines in the world. It carries approximately 25 million passengers a year, with direct flights to 120 international and 37 domestic destinations.

The airline was founded in 1933 with a fleet of five airplanes that carried a total of 28 passengers. The airline made its first domestic flight in 1933 and the first international flight in 1947.

Saturday, 10 April 2010

SOCIAL NEWS

A spring day in İstanbul

11 April 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Spring has arrived in Turkey. Tulips have started to bloom, and violets along roads are the surest sign that winter has come to an end.

Spring means a new awakening, a new hope and a new life for many people. People feel a desire to come out of their shells during this season. Tired of winter's dreariness, people often dream of springtime because it is a season that should not be missed. Spring offers beautiful days since Cemre, three fireballs that, according to Turkish folklore, warm the earth after winter so it can transition into spring, have fallen, saying, "I [the spring] have come." The sun is warm, and a nice breeze can be felt during springtime. Therefore, getting away from the hustle and bustle of the crowded parts of İstanbul to truly experience spring is essential. Of course, it is a good idea to take along a sweater or jacket so you don't get cold; the sun can be deceiving. Here are some places to go on a spring day in İstanbul:

Adalar (The Princes' Islands): When people go to one of İstanbul's islands only once, they can see themselves visiting many more times, drawn by the islands' idyllic quality. For people who want to take a break from intense work pressure, one should head to one of İstanbul's islands. The islands of Büyükada, Heybeliada, Kınalıda and Burgazada are nice places to visit during any season, but they are especially beautiful in the spring. The islands are not crowded in the spring like they are in the summer, as they attract many people because of the three-month summer vacation. When you go to the islands, you can walk the cobblestone streets, take a fayton (horse-drawn carriage) or rent a bicycle.

Fenerbahçe Park: One of the finest parks on the Anatolian side of İstanbul, Fenerbahçe Park is cut out for people who want to read books while enjoying a view of the sea. The park, in İstanbul's Kadıköy district, is a great area for families as well as individuals to spend time together, and it's the perfect place to have a picnic.

Moda Burnu: It is one of the most beautiful places in the spring to spend time alone or with friends or family since Moda Burnu, an area along the water in İstanbul's Moda district that resembles a nose from the air and where there are long stretches of greenery and sidewalks, is rarely crowded. Going to a café in İstanbul's Moda district to drink tea is a must. One should enjoy the view while eating a simit (round, sesame-covered Turkish bagel popular for breakfast and sold on the streets). Moda Burnu has a great view of the Sea of Marmara.

Emirgan Park: When you go to Emirgan Park on a spring day, you can easily see many people around the park taking photos, since the park is covered in colorful tulips during tulip season. If you want to go to İstanbul's Emirgan district during the height of tulip season, you should wait one or two weeks. However, people who want to have breakfast with family or friends should go to Emirgan now. The park will become more crowded once tulip season begins.

Çamlıca Hill: Popular not only with locals but also with many foreign tourists, Çamlıca Hill (Çamlıca Tepesi) is one of the most beautiful places in the city, especially during the summer. Spending time on Çamlıca Tepesi, which is located in İstanbul's Çamlıca district, allows you to look out over İstanbul. İstanbul from atop Çamlıca Tepesi is like nothing you have ever seen before.

Mihrabat Grove: A hidden garden, Mihrabat Grove (Mihrabat Korusu) offers people all the beauties of spring. It's a great destination for people who want to hear nightingales. Located on a hill in İstanbul's Kanlıca district with a perfect view of the Bosphorus, Mihrabat Grove is a place where you can spend a great deal of time relaxing and enjoying the scenery on a spring day.

World's best rally drivers hit the road in Istanbul

Wednesday, April 14, 2010

ISTANBUL - Daily News with wires

The world's best rally drivers will be gearing up for a four-day competition in and around Istanbul when the Rally of Turkey, the fourth leg of the 2010 FIA World Rally Championship, or WRC, starts Thursday.

While Turkey has been a mainstay of the WRC since 2003, this year's event features a brand-new route and location, representing uncharted territory for the leading drivers and teams. Previously based on mountainous and punishing roads above the Mediterranean resort of Kemer, the event has relocated 700 kilometers north to Istanbul following a one-year absence from the WRC under the calendar rotation system. The event will be organized as a part of the 2010 European Capital of Culture activities.

Turkey's largest competition will host a ceremonial start in Sultanahmet Square, close to the spectacular Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia, on Thursday at 5:30 p.m. Crews will reach the site by taking a ferry over the Bosphorus, and the main base for the teams will be located in Pendik, a short distance from Istanbul Park, the venue of the Turkish Grand Prix.

Although the 23 stages included on the event's itinerary are new to the WRC, the stages have been used on rounds of the European Rally Championship and Intercontinental Rally Challenge in the past. They are characterized by their wide, fast and smooth nature, along with occasional sections of tarmac.

In the past, Turkey's WRC round was frequently subjected to changing weather conditions, ranging from bright sunshine to torrential rain and even thick fog. The rally's move north is expected to lead to more consistent weather although chunks of the route, particularly the stages run in forest areas, were subject to a tough winter, which made some sections impassable until as recently as last month.

With ambient temperatures failing to exceed 15 degrees Celsius in recent weeks, the surface on many of the stages is likely to remain slightly damp following heavy winter rain, meaning the use of road position tactics will not be as evident as it was during the tour's last stop in Jordan.

Race favorites

Sebastien Loeb, the six-time world champion, heads the drivers' standings after three events. With back-to-back wins in Mexico and Jordan under this belt, the Citroen C4 ace will be vying for victory number three. However, Turkey brings bitter-sweet memories for the 36-year-old. He won in 2004 and repeated his victory the following year before immediately departing to take part in pre-qualifying for the Le Mans 24 Hours race.

He was forced to remain absent in 2006, however, after breaking his shoulder when he fell off his mountain bike during training. In 2008, he could manage no better than third after being forced to run first on the road for much of the event when Ford used tactics to ensure a one-two finish for Mikko Hirvonen and Jari-Matti Latvala, both of Finland.

Loeb has suggested that his victory in Jordan has removed a degree of pressure. His lead over Latvala stands at 25 points, which is the same amount awarded for a victory under the new-for-2010 scoring system. Because of this, Loeb will not be overhauled at the top of the drivers' table even if he has a poor Turkish race.

The new route of the rally will make things more difficult, Loeb said in a recent interview, adding that he will have to concentrate more during reconnaissance.

"When we've got our old notes and the route hasn't changed all that much in relation to the previous event, I know where the major traps and bumps are, and I don't have to worry too much," he told rallybuzz.com. "In this case, we just fine-tune the details. When we reconnoitre a stage for the first time, it's a lot more complicated. First time through in the rally we always give ourselves a bigger scare than usual! So it's preferable to allow yourself a bit more leeway and then correct the notes for the second run."

Hirvonen knows he must score well in Turkey in order to get his world championship challenge back on track following a crash in Jordan. He won in Turkey on the WRC's last visit to the country in 2008 and needs a similar result this year to not only get back on level terms with Loeb but also move back ahead of teammate Latvala, who is six points ahead in the championship running.

"I enjoy competing in new rallies. It's a new challenge, both in driving the stages and in preparing pace notes during the race," he said. "I have a good record on rallies that are new to the championship. Last year I won in Poland and Australia, and in previous years I also won in Norway and Jordan when they were held for the first time. I'm not sure why that is, but if I can extend that record in Turkey then I'll be delighted."

Henning Solberg landed his first podium finish in Turkey after steering his Peugeot 307 to third place back in 2006. The Norwegian is now armed with a semi-works Ford Focus and keen to improve upon his seventh place in the WRC drivers' standings. His younger brother Petter, who drives a Citroen C4 for his eponymous team, will be chasing his third consecutive podium finish of the year.

Sebastien Ogier, who partners with ex-Formula One driver Kimi Raikkonen on the Citroen Junior Team, will also be in contention for a top-three result in his C4 WRC after a frustrating final day in Jordan when he was instructed to check in early for a stage to clear the road for team leader Loeb. The resulting time penalty restricted him to sixth overall behind Britain's Matthew Wilson.

Turkey marks the return of Ken Block in his Monster World Rally Team Ford Focus. The American, who has achieved widespread fame through his Gymkhana stunt driving videos, still has much to learn as he adapts to the rigors of driving a World Rally Car.

The Rally of Turkey will forever be remembered for being Colin McRae's last world championship outing before his untimely death in a helicopter accident less than 12 months later. The legendary Scot was deputizing for the injured Loeb but retired on the final day when his Citroen Xsara suffered alternator failure.

Turkish Cigarettes Free of Pig Blood, says Health Ministry

Thursday, 15 April 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

Religiously inclined smokers in Turkey are breathing easier following an announcement Wednesday from the Health Ministry that said there were no traces of pig blood in cigarette filters.

Religious groups had expressed their concern after Dutch research recently identified 185 different industrial uses of a pig – including the use of its hemoglobin in cigarette filters.

The announcement prompted Turkish health authorities to conduct a series of tests on different brands of cigarettes sold in Turkey, concluding that there was no trace of the blood.

University of Sydney Public Health Professor Simon Chapman, who initially revealed the outcome of the Dutch research on March 30, said the findings offered an insight into the otherwise secretive world of cigarette manufacturing, and that it was likely to raise concerns for devout Muslims and Jews.

"I think there would be some particularly devout groups who would find the idea that there were pig products in cigarettes to be very offensive," he said.

Although the Turkish study revealed no traces of pig blood, officials said they would conduct further tests to determine whether other extracts from the animal are present in the filters, such as pig fat.

The tests were carried out on cigarette filters at the Refil Saydam sanitation center in Ankara.

Thursday, 15 April 2010

COMMENTARY

Turkey's new ambition to stabilize the Middle East

RAHIME SEZGIN İSTANBUL

HUGH POPE

09 April 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey's negotiations to join the European Union may have faltered of late, but, in a little-noticed turnaround, it is now using the same ideas that brought stability to post-World War II

Europe in an effort to calm the bitter divisions of the Middle East.

Syria, Jordan, Libya and Lebanon have recently joined Iran and other regional countries enjoying visa-free business and tourism with Turkey. Ankara, also doing all it can to champion the integration of regional infrastructure, has successfully boosted trade with its neighbors, and is now even bringing governments together for joint meetings of senior Cabinet ministers.

This conversion to the basic EU idea of progress through interdependence is still in its infancy, partly because Middle Eastern regimes can fear that regional integration is a political threat.

Turkey long shared this tendency too, until the end of the Cold War allowed its sense of security and commercial opportunity to rise. The centre-right Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government, in power since 2002, has developed even further the country's growing ties with Russia, Africa and particularly Muslim neighbors in the Middle East.

Early in this period, Turkey's relationship with the European Union sped ahead. Despite many obstacles after 2005 -- including Europe's Turkey-skeptics, the slow pace of Turkish domestic reform and the stand-off over Cyprus -- Turkey remains in a full negotiating process that could still lead to membership of the club in a decade or two. Already Europe's biggest city according to Eurostat, Europeans have begun to see İstanbul as a culturally European city in recent years due to its newly sophisticated shopping, nightlife and festivals.

These apparently contradictory dynamics have reopened debate on the question of whether Turkey is becoming "European," "Eurasian," "neo-Ottoman" or even "Islamic." Few take into account the limitations of Ottoman Empire analogies and the relatively predictable modern Turkish context. This debate is also too often a proxy for domestic political concerns -- be it Europeans fearful about jobs, immigration and Islam, Arab commentators seeking sticks with which to beat their own governments, or pro-Israel activists seeking to bring US pressure to bear on Turkey.

In fact, the EU and the West in general, contrary to what some Europeans think, need Turkey partly for the stabilizing impact that it wants to have among its eastern neighbors. Ankara's priority is not a reborn caliphate, but the expansion of an economy that is already more than half the size of the whole of the Middle East and North African region. When Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan makes over-enthusiastic statements on visiting Khartoum, Tehran or Damascus, he is partly thinking of the contracts to be signed by the hundreds of business supporters who accompany him. Similarly, when Erdoğan visited the United States last December, the main public result was a joint committee to boost trade.

AK Party leaders, even if they have left behind the Islamism of their youth, certainly feel a special warmth for fellow Muslim leaders. Some AK Party officials even talk of Erdoğan as the "representative of 1.5 billion Muslims." But Turkey as a whole is more interested in Europe and visitors to Turkish bookshops will search in vain for much about the Middle East.

Turkey actually sells proportionally less to the Middle East than it did two decades ago, a figure that represents less than a quarter of its total exports. The EU has long accounted for half of Turkish trade and for nearly 90 percent of foreign investment in 2008. Some 4 million Turks live in Europe, vastly outnumbering the couple of hundred thousand in the Middle East. Turkish airline companies fly frequently to a dense web of European cities, but serve more destinations inside Turkey than in Iran and Arab states. While two Turkish Airlines (THY) planes a day connect İstanbul and Damascus, four go to Tel Aviv.

Extraordinary praise in Arab newspapers for Erdoğan when he confronts Israel should also not be mistaken for Arab endorsement of Turkish regional hegemony. Arab envoys to Turkey say

they are happy to see a fellow Sunni Muslim state act as spokesperson for their concerns and as a counter-balance to the rejectionist defiance of Shia Muslim Iran. But they say their governments can feel uneasy at Erdoğan's outbursts of anti-Israel populism and that they would reject any Turkish effort to do more than offer its good offices in regional disputes.

Turkey's rising interest in its neighbors persuaded its leading think tank, the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV), to ask 2,000 people in seven Arab countries what they thought. In November it published results that found that three-quarters of respondents were in favor of a high-profile role for Turkey in Israeli-Palestinian and other Middle Eastern issues. But 57 percent said they wanted to see "a Muslim country" in the EU, and 64 percent believed that Turkey's EU negotiation process had a positive impact on its role in the Arab world -- including 62 percent in Saudi Arabia.

Turkey also believes EU ideas can help heal the divisions of the region. The recent popularity of Turkish sitcoms and singers in the Arab world is not just because the two have grown closer once again. In a Turkey in which EU-inspired reforms and competition have helped open up society, the economy and culture, Turkish music and films are now simply much better made -- and win more prizes in Europe too.

The key to all democratic initiatives

09 April 2010, Friday

BÜLENT KENEŞ

TODAYS ZAMAN

For the last two years, Turkey has been trying to find radical solutions to its acute problems, some of which are almost 100 years old and some of which date back centuries. These efforts mainly include the Kurdish initiative, the Alevi initiative, the Armenian initiative and finally the Roma initiative.

Unfortunately, these initiatives have not produced tangible results so far, though they have certainly made considerable positive contributions to the psychological and sociological aspects of these problems. It is true that the thick files that were transferred to the dusty shelves of our tragedy-laden history have been reopened, but they cannot be concluded because the decisive and radical steps they entail have not been taken. Perhaps, just at the beginning, one could have predicted that the initiatives were doomed to such a course with our usual tendency to procrastinate.

To better explain my case, I will reiterate one of my frequent themes in this column: I personally do not believe that there is really a Kurdish issue or an Alevi issue, or a minorities issue or an Islam issue or a Roma issue. Rather, I think that the real problem Turkey has is its lack of a full-fledged democracy, the full-blown rule of law and genuine secularism. So, it is my conviction that when we realize that all social and political problems which we have been trying to solve tirelessly for many years, but all in vain, are nothing but a manifestation of this democracy deficit, lack of rule of law and lack of genuine secularism, we will move closer to the final settlement of these problems.

This said, we can safely assert that with the recent package of constitutional amendments that are intended to uproot the militarist mentality as the mother of all these problems, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) has finally and for the first time made the right move toward the settlement of this country's deep-rooted problems. It was really high time that we introduce radical changes to the militarist-spirited Constitution which serves to extensively undermine

democracy and the national will and perpetuate the suppressive effects of the military coups as the source of all these fundamental problems we have been suffering from. In the final analysis, the existing Constitution, which is the work of the military coup of Sept. 12, 1980, is essentially a militarist text that presents as binding norms the diseases of certain groups within the military, such as social and political engineering. The government's reform package is intended to introduce democratic tailoring of the top judiciary and similar mechanisms designed by the military -- which has made it a tradition to overthrow the democratically elected governments and then infiltrate up to the remotest corners of the state apparatus -- in order to sustain its secret power, and if Parliament passes it, we will see how many issues which appear to us as extremely large and complicated are gone without a hitch or any trouble.

When this reform package, whose negotiations at the parliamentary Constitution Commission began on Thursday, is implemented with or without a referendum, we will also see that Parliament, whose legislative powers have been stripped by the Constitutional Court on various occasions, will represent the national will in a more appropriate manner. Moreover, this country will eventually see the days when civilian power, which derives its democratic legitimacy from the people and which is responsible or accountable only toward the people, will not have to share its executive mandate with the militarist mentality of the high courts and will truly control the fate of the country.

A Turkey that has implemented a reform package, a first in terms of exhibiting the courage to touch the militarist spirit in the Constitution as the source of the mechanisms for securing the regime of secret powers, will remove all roadblocks to its economic and political progress with full steam. So, when this day comes, we will witness in amazement that the Kurdish issue -- which has resulted in Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorism causing the deaths of more than 40,000 people, the wounding of tens of thousands of people, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people and material losses amounting to \$300 billion -- can be easily solved. When it comes, the Alevi issue, the Roma issue, the Armenian issue and all artificial problems devout Muslims are suffering from will head toward eventual settlement.

The key to the solution of all of Turkey's acute problems is finally before us. The constitutional reform package, as a major milestone that will banish the hidden powers and crown the national will as the sole power over the fate of the country, deserves the support of all democrats inside or outside.

Acquisition of Turkish citizenship by investment

BERK ÇEKTİR

14 April 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

As you may already know, new legislation has been passed changing the Turkish Citizenship Law. I wrote several articles earlier, and it is possible to find all articles in the online archive of Today's Zaman.

I have an interesting question which stands for a summary of several inquiries in respect to the same topic: acquisition of Turkish citizenship by investing in Turkey.

The e-mail I received was sent from Iran, and it reads as follows: "Dear Berk Çektir, I am from Iran/35 years old. I have a question about citizenship. There are some countries that grant citizenship to foreign persons through investments. I want to know if it is possible to obtain citizenship in Turkey through investment. All the best..."

Acquiring Turkish citizenship by way of investment is an exceptional way of gaining citizenship. The Turkish Citizenship Law gives a general rule for application on exceptional conditions or circumstances first.

The primary rule for being eligible to apply for Turkish citizenship is that the applicant should not be in a position endangering or threatening Turkish national security and Turkish public order. It is usually very difficult to determine who is endangering Turkish national security and who is not. "Public order" is another question mark that many scholars still cannot define. To sum up, this precondition for qualification as an applicant is in the hands of the Turkish Ministry of the Interior.

If the applicant is in compliance with this requirement, then he/she would be qualified for the later stages of application. Once the prequalification matter is resolved, then the following steps for applying for Turkish citizenship will be taken before the Ministry of the Interior and later before the Turkish Cabinet.

Applicant nomination

The applicant should be nominated by the relevant ministry with a reason for exceptional acquisition of Turkish citizenship. The applicant should be someone who brings in industrial plants to Turkey or a person who already is, or shall be, deemed to have rendered social, scientific, sportive, economic, technological, cultural or art-related services to Turkey, such as an athlete who will compete in the Olympic Games on the Turkish team.

In my former articles, I have given the example of Telman Ismailov, who built a \$1.4 billion hotel and was deemed to be the first person who might be nominated for Turkish citizenship due to his huge investment.
