

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

TURKEY

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Submitted By: Aasia Khatoun khattak

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SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

SUMMARY-POLITICAL NEWS

The country's main pro-Kurdish party might reconsider its call to boycott the Sept. 12 constitutional referendum if the government meets its demands, the deputy head of the party's parliamentary group said Thursday.

According to the study, conducted by the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality and Japan's International Cooperation Agency, 30 percent of the city's buildings are in danger of collapsing if a strong earthquake were to occur.

SUMMARY-GEO-STRATEGIC NEWS

Turkish business group has launched a campaign to help flood-hit Pakistan amid a deficit of assistance from the international community following the disaster.

Turkey will supply firefighting equipments to Russia in a bid to help deal with wildfires, a Turkish minister said on Friday.

Thousands of Russian workers and military personnel have been battling blazes in different parts of the country for three weeks. Fires killed at least 50 people and left thousands homeless. However, blazes spread to spots near Russia's nuclear facilities recently which raised concerns over a possible radioactive danger, even in Turkey.

Eroglu said wildfires were massive, however, did not pose any threat to Turkey.

President Abdullah Gül's two-day visit to Azerbaijan

Turkey and Azerbaijan made a key deal on strategic partnership on Monday, a sign that Turkey is keen to increase its strategic and security cooperation with the oil-rich former Soviet republic. Although details of the agreement with Azerbaijan are not yet available, it is believed the deal mostly includes cooperation in the security and military spheres.

Turkey has extended financial aid to Moldova

Turkey has extended financial aid to Moldova due to the flood disaster that took place in this country last month. Turkey had delivered 100,000 USD of financial aid to Moldova after the disaster.

Turkey donates ambulance to Lebanese village

Turkey's Ambassador to Lebanon, in a visit to Tripoli, donated an ambulance purchased by Turkey to villages where Turkmens are also living.

Government warns Israel to meet flotilla raid demands

The Turkish government has reaffirmed that it will follow up on its demands regarding Israel's May 31 attack on a flotilla of ships bringing aid to the Gaza Strip that resulted in the death of eight Turks and one Turkish-American in international waters. , Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said his government's demands for an official apology and compensation for the families of those killed by the Israeli attack still stand. "Israel must admit its mistake, extend an apology and pay the compensation. We will be following up on these demands," he emphasized.

Gas discovery in East Mediterranean likely to spark regional disputes

A recent discovery of natural gas in the eastern Mediterranean, the exploration of which is said to make it one of the largest natural gas producing regions in the world, may trigger disputes between countries in the region.

No Europe without Turkey, says Poland's ex-president

Turkey must be admitted to the European Union, Poland's former president and Nobel laureate Lech Walesa insisted on Wednesday.

Report: Obama warns Erdoğan on arms sale

US President Barack Obama has personally warned Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that his government risks not obtaining some of the weapons it wants from the US if it does not change its position on Iran and Israel, a news report has said.

Gül says peace in Caucasus remains Turkey's foreign policy priority

Turkish President Abdullah Gül said establishing peace, stability and welfare in the South Caucasus is among the priorities of Turkish foreign policy, adding that Turkey actively contributes to establishing a comprehensive and sustainable peace in the former Soviet region.

Netanyahu looks beyond Turkey in key visit to Greece

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu began on Monday Israel's highest-level visit to Greece in a sign that Israel is looking beyond its troubled alliance with Turkey for other strategic Mediterranean partners.

SUMMARY-ECONOMIC NEWS

Only Turkey's textile exports rose by 4.3 percent in the first five months of 2010, the head of association of RTW exporters said on Thursday.

Domestic auto sales in Turkey was up 16.1 percent in the first seven months in 2010 over the same period last year, a Turkish association said.

Turkey's unemployment rate fell to 11 percent in May, with the number of jobless down by 536,000 compared to the same month last year, the Turkish Statistics Institute (TurkStat) said on Monday.

SUMMARY-SOCIAL NEWS

An end to the hot weather is in sight in northern and central Turkey as temperatures will decline by 2 to 3 degrees Celsius starting Saturday. Temperatures have been 6 to 8 Celsius degrees higher than the seasonal norms since July.

In response to people trying to soften the smoking ban, the National Committee on Cigarettes and Health, or SSUK, has taken action, collecting 15,000 signatures over the past month from Istanbul and many Anatolian provinces.

Internet is being used in 41.6 percent of homes in Turkey, revealed a survey conducted by TurkStat.

Political news

Deal-making begins in wake of PKK cease-fire in Turkey

Thursday, August 19, 2010

Sevil KÜÇÜKKOŞUM

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

Following the announcement by the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, of a one-month Ramadan truce, the country's pro-Kurdish parties are determining how to respond to the move ahead of the Sept. 12 constitutional referendum.

"The Democratic Society Congress [DTK], an umbrella organization for Kurdish parties and actors, will gather Aug. 21 in Diyarbakır in order to discuss the possible outcomes of the cease-fire. Our demands will take final shape in that meeting," Bengi Yıldız, the deputy parliamentary group leader of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review on Thursday.

The PKK's cease-fire has been seen in some quarters as an initial gesture to strengthen the hand of the government in the referendum. The ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, is pushing for a "yes" vote on the proposed constitutional changes while the BDP has called for a boycott unless the government meets its demands.

"The negotiation process can start if the government takes steps to meet our demands; then we can support the new Constitution," BDP leader Selahattin Demirtaş said Tuesday.

The conditions set by DTK co-chair Ahmet Türk include ceasing military operations against the PKK, releasing arrested Kurdish politicians and reducing the 10 percent election threshold but there has been no immediate response from the government to the demands.

Türk said Wednesday that they would closely follow Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit in early September to Diyarbakır, where he will address the public as part of his referendum campaign.

"We want to hear the messages we are awaiting from him," Türk told the private channel NTV late Wednesday.

Following the DTK's late-August meeting, BDP and DTK officials will ask for meetings with Erdoğan and President Abdullah Gül, Yıldız said. Gül is already planning to meet with Türk and his DTK co-chair, Aysel Tuğluk, the Daily News has learned.

Senior PKK member Murat Karayılan previously said the cease-fire was brokered following talks between the outlawed group and the government, a claim denied by the AKP in a written statement.

"Making negotiations with an illegal organization is out of question," the statement read, arguing that Karayılan's remarks were part of an anti-AKP propaganda effort to influence the referendum process.

The PKK has been listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.

"It has become obvious that the government is in negotiations with the PKK for the referendum," Oktay Vural, deputy leader of the opposition Nationalist Movement Party, or MHP, told reporters Thursday.

Muharrem İnce, deputy parliamentary group leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP, also said Karayılan's statement reflected the collaboration between the government, the PKK and the BDP.

MGK convenes; Türk to meet Talabani

Pro-Kurdish politicians in Turkey are also seeking communication channels with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and Iraqi Regional Kurdish Administration President Massoud Barzani in order to strengthen their hand politically. “We [asked for an] appointment long before. A couple of days ago, Talabani responded to our request,” Yıldız told Daly News. “The visit will be held after the DTK gathering.”

The DTK delegation to northern Iraq is likely to be led by Türk, Tuğluk and some BDP deputies.

The country’s top security board meanwhile convened Thursday to review the state of anti-terror fight in the country amid the PKK’s unilateral one-month ceasefire, one of the key topics discussed at the National Security Council, or MGK, meeting. Security measures to be taken around the referendum and the future of Iraq following the withdrawal of U.S. troops were also on the agenda.

Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ, who will retire from the army in late August, participated in the MGK meeting for the last time, while Necdet Özel, the new gendarmerie commander, attended for the first time.

The meeting was ongoing as the Daily News went to press late Thursday.

Pro-Kurdish party bargains for 'yes' vote in Turkish referendum

Thursday, August 19, 2010

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

The country’s main pro-Kurdish party might reconsider its call to boycott the Sept. 12 constitutional referendum if the government meets its demands, the deputy head of the party’s parliamentary group said Thursday.

“Almost 90 percent of the country’s people demand a new Constitution,” Ayla Akat Ata of the Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, told daily Radikal on Thursday. “We are not going to support a delay on this demand or the justification of continuing with a Constitution prepared by coup leaders.”

The deputy said the party’s supporters would vote “yes” on the proposed reforms if five key demands are accepted. These demands include the preparation of a new Constitution that does not favor any ethnicity and the lowering of the 10-percent election threshold. In addition, the BDP official said, military operations against the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK, should be halted, negotiations should be launched to find a peaceful solution to the Kurdish issue and suspects – including many BDP mayors and local officials – detained in operations against the outlawed Kurdish Communities Union, or KCK, should be released.

The BDP had asked its supporters to boycott the referendum because the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, ignored its proposals and excluded it from the process of developing the proposed constitutional amendments. But announcements by nongovernmental organizations in the Southeast that they will vote “yes,” as well as the recent declaration of a unilateral cease-fire by the PKK, have forced the BDP to reconsider its position.

More than a dozen business organizations in the southeastern city of Diyarbakır recently announced that they would urge their members to approve the constitutional amendments package in the upcoming referendum.

Speaking on behalf of 14 organizations, including the Diyarbakır Chamber of Commerce and Industry, or DTSO, the Chamber of Agriculture and the Chamber of Pharmacists, DTSO Chairman Galip Ensarioğlu said the public's will was seized 30 years ago by a military coup and Sept. 12 would give the people a chance for payback.

"We believe that the 1982 Constitution cannot be fixed by partial amendments; the way to solve the problem is to prepare a new Constitution that advocates the principles of democracy," Ensarioğlu was quoted as saying by Anatolia news agency. "But we also value amendments that come at times when it is not possible to prepare a new Constitution."

The chairman added that although "we believe the package is not adequate, we will vote 'yes' to support any possible steps in the future for a new Constitution."

When asked if such a statement contradicted the BDP's call for a boycott, Ensarioğlu said the group did not support or oppose any political party. "Political parties will decide what to do after inner-party discussions," he said. "Our decision does not mean helping the government or hurting a political party. We believe that the amendments package is important for our country and thus we support it."

Turkish artists' group say 'no' to referendum with protest

Thursday, August 19, 2010

ISTANBUL – Milliyet

Several artists from different artistic disciplines on Wednesday marched to say "no" to the constitutional amendment package that is set for a referendum in September.

Artists with the National Civil Society Institutions Association, or USTKB, carried posters saying, "Artists say 'no,'" in front of Galatasaray High School on İstiklal Avenue, emphasizing that only the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, prepared the Constitution amendment package.

Artists including Rutkay Aziz, Bedri Baykam, Genco Erkal, Nilüfer Verdi, Berhan Şimşek and Gülşen Tuncer issued a joint press statement, saying, "The preparation of the constitutional amendments by only the ruling government, without getting any perspectives from the science, culture and art worlds and without evaluating others' requests, has created concerns regarding modern Turkey's legal future and bothers us deeply."

Afterwards, the artists marched down İstiklal Avenue with the participation of the Republican People's Party, or CHP, Istanbul province branch and the Turkey Youth Union, or TGB, shouting slogans such as "'No' to pressure and fascism," "No pass for dictators" and "Independent justice, independent Turkey" accompanied by applause. Why do the artists say 'no'?

The politicization of justice has dealt a major blow to democracy in Turkey, said Aziz, emphasizing that most of the artists agreed on saying "no."

He also said real artists were responsible for looking at the issue from a critical stance. Baykam, a painter, claimed that constitutional amendments should be made with a social consensus and added that the ruling AKP made these amendments as an imposition. Tuncer, an actress, said she came to Taksim to support her friends. "Nowhere in the world must you give one answer to 26 questions."

The referendum is proposing 26 changes to articles in the Turkish Constitution.

Survey: İstanbul's buildings not strong enough to withstand earthquake

A new survey has found that most buildings in İstanbul are not strong enough to withstand a substantial earthquake. According to the study, conducted by the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality and Japan's International Cooperation Agency, 30 percent of the city's buildings are in danger of collapsing if a strong earthquake were to occur. When it comes to individual districts 9 percent of the buildings in Fatih, 14 percent in Zeytinburnu, 17 percent in Küçükçekmece, 30 percent in Bayrampaşa, 73 percent in Bahçelievler and 76 percent in Güngören could possibly collapse in a quake.

We see that around 3-4 million people in İstanbul would not be safe if an expected earthquake hit the Marmara region, which is the most densely populated area in the country," said Professor Naci Görür of İstanbul Technical University.

Officials will continue to inspect buildings in the districts of Esenler, Bağcılar, Beyoğlu and Eminönü. The İstanbul Municipality has also prepared several maps assessing risk in the event of an earthquake. One of the maps showed high-risk areas in case of a tsunami, a possibility in a city surrounded by water.

According to the map, tsunami waves could reach as high as 5.5 meters along a 10-kilometer area of the shoreline in İstanbul. The waves could reach the city's shores in eight minutes and are expected to be able to go as far inland as 150 meters.

The İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality has spent more than TL 1 billion on earthquake preparedness since the Aug. 17 earthquake in 1999 that hit the Marmara region, leaving over 17,000 dead and thousands of people homeless. Of those deaths, 1,000 were in İstanbul, and many were blamed on substandard buildings erected by a construction industry rife with corruption. Turkey lies on a major fault line and has had 90 earthquakes higher than magnitude 5 on the Richter scale since 1903.

According to geophysicists, Turkey has learned many lessons from earthquakes, the 1999 earthquake in particular, but preparations for the next big one are still insufficient. The World Bank has also contributed to earthquake preparedness with about \$322 million in credit. Approximately \$26 million of that was used for the purchase of fire trucks, \$71 million to strengthen bridges and roads and some \$40 million for seismic hazard maps. There have been several other projects involving seismology, preparations for an emergency shutdown of natural gas flow and various other engineering precautions.

So far there are 71 helicopter landing pads ready for the emergency transportation of goods and people in İstanbul, and some ferries have been designed to also serve as hospitals. In terms of emergency communication systems, TL 14.6 million has been spent on satellite and telecommunications backup systems. Wireless systems also have been updated in the city to cover areas from the easternmost part of the city, Şile, to the part farthest west, Silivri.

14 August 2010, Saturday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

GEO-STRATEGIC NEWS

Turkish chamber takes lead in Pakistan aid campaign

Thursday, August 19, 2010

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

Turkish business group has launched a campaign to help flood-hit Pakistan amid a deficit of assistance from the international community following the disaster.

“We need to act quickly,” Rıfat Hisarcıklıoğlu, the president of the Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodities Exchanges, or TOBB, said at a press conference Thursday to announce the aid effort. “If you can’t help today, tomorrow may be too late.”

Pakistani Ambassador to Turkey Tariq Azizuddin joined the press conference, thanking Turkey and calling upon the international community for further help.

“The international community has not yet fully realized the dimensions of the disaster. Pakistan does not have the capability to overcome such a calamity on its own,” the ambassador told reporters.

Some 600,000 houses have been damaged in the floods, leaving 6 million people homeless, with 2,000 injured and 20 million affected, Hisarcıklıoğlu said. Azizuddin added that a more accurate death toll will be calculated when the floodwaters recede and additional bodies are revealed.

“The disaster in Pakistan is actually larger than the earthquake in Haiti, but international aid has yet to reach the same levels,” Hisarcıklıoğlu said. “Right now, aid to Pakistan is largely insufficient. This is why, as the Turkish business community, we have decided to take action.”

“Pakistan was one of the first countries to come to our aid following the Marmara earthquake disaster 11 years ago. Eleven years later, it is Turkey’s turn to help,” he added. “In this framework, our executive board has decided to donate \$1 million, in addition to setting up a bank account for participation from all parts of Turkey.”

Ambassador Azizuddin called the disaster a “massive” one.

“Unfortunately the depth and magnitude of the disaster was not originally appreciated by the international community, perhaps because the number of deaths in this disaster was very small compared to others in the rest of the world,” he added. “The number of deaths has indeed been small here because floodwaters rise slowly, giving people time to move to higher ground. But with the infrastructure being destroyed in the flood-affected areas, getting food, shelter and water to the survivors has become a monumental task.”

Another risk for survivors is stagnant water, which increases the risk of diseases such as malaria, diarrhea and cholera.

All of Pakistan’s resources have been mobilized to deal with this disaster, said Azizuddin, adding that it is “a poor country, and we know that we do not have the capacity to deal with a disaster of this proportion. But we are trying with the help of our close friends in the international community.”

“Our brotherly nation of Turkey was again one of the first to come in,” he said, expressing his country’s thanks for the relief goods sent by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in addition to the \$10 million donated by the Turkish government.

The ambassador also thanked the other countries that have helped, but said the aid given thus far has been “unfortunately not yet adequate.”

Turkey to Send Firefighting Equipments to Russia

Friday, 13 August 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

Turkey will supply firefighting equipments to Russia in a bid to help deal with wildfires, a Turkish minister said on Friday.

Environment and Forestry Minister Veysel Eroglu said that Turkey would soon send equipments such as hose, masks and backpacks.

"Mr. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan phoned Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to offer help. We have earlier sent two helicopters and a team of 11 experienced experts," Eroglu said.

"Russia asked for equipments two days ago. We will soon send a cargo plane full of equipments which are being collected now," he said.

Thousands of Russian workers and military personnel have been battling blazes in different parts of the country for three weeks. Fires killed at least 50 people and left thousands homeless. However, blazes spread to spots near Russia's nuclear facilities recently which raised concerns over a possible radioactive danger, even in Turkey.

Eroglu said wildfires were massive, however, did not pose any threat to Turkey.

Friday, 13 August 2010

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey, Azerbaijan deepen strategic cooperation

Turkey and Azerbaijan made a key deal on strategic partnership on Monday, a sign that Turkey is keen to increase its strategic and security cooperation with the oil-rich former Soviet republic.

Turkey and Azerbaijan concluded a Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance deal on Monday during President Abdullah Gül's two-day visit to Azerbaijan at the invitation of his Azerbaijani counterpart, Ilham Aliyev. This came just days before expected agreements on a strategic partnership between Russia and Armenia, Azerbaijan's long-time foe, during Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Armenia on Aug. 19.

Although details of the agreement with Azerbaijan are not yet available, it is believed the deal mostly includes cooperation in the security and military spheres. The Azerbaijani Defense Ministry reported on Monday that Undersecretary Murat Bayar of the Undersecretariat for the Defense Industry (SSM) and Azerbaijani Defense Minister Sefer Abiyev held talks to discuss in some detail the strategic partnership agreement and possible military cooperation opportunities between the two countries.

In late July, Russia extended its lease of a Russian army unit in Armenia -- estimated to include 4,000 Russian troops, along with several S-300 air defense missile systems -- until 2049, which drew the ire of Armenian opposition due to fears that Russia is increasing its influence over the former Soviet republic.

Despite the intensified cooperation of Russia with Armenia in the region to deepen security ties, Russia remains a close friend and large trade partner of both Turkey and Azerbaijan. Russian Defense Ministry officials also leaked intelligence last week that Russia has sold two S-300 air defense systems to Azerbaijan, which was later denied by the Kremlin but not Baku.

Gül and Aliyev held talks along with their accompanying delegations, where they largely discussed Azerbaijan's protracted territorial conflict with Armenia. Gül said at a press conference on Monday that the occupation of internationally recognized territories of the former Soviet republic could not continue, promising that Turkey will continue every

effort to solve the problem. Gül said it is necessary to transform the Caucasus into a region of stability and cooperation through dispute resolution, reiterating this could only be realized by retaining Azerbaijan's territorial integrity.

“It is necessary to transform the Caucasus into a region of stability and cooperation. For this [Nagorno-Karabakh] dispute needs to be resolved and this solution undoubtedly will be within the framework of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity,” Gül said.

The Turkish president also pointed to the agreement Turkey and Azerbaijan signed, saying the deal is the most conspicuous sign of strong political relations.

Speaking during the press conference, Aliyev said Azerbaijan will attempt to restore its territorial integrity through decisions that it will make. “Azerbaijan will continue its political and diplomatic work. I believe the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan will be restored,” the president said.

Both Gül and Aliyev told reporters that domestic processes need to be completed in Azerbaijan to abolish visa requirements for Turkish citizens. Turkey abolished flexible visa requirements for Azerbaijani citizens in 2007 and reduced the residence permit to 30 days, making it harder for immigrants to stay in the country for long periods.

Underlining that bilateral relations in political, security, economic and cultural spheres between the two countries are improving, Gül said they would reciprocally promote organizations to strike more deals on trade and investment.

Remarking on the long historical ties between Azerbaijan and Turkey, Aliyev said this visit will contribute to improving friendship between the two countries.

Both Aliyev and Gül stressed the plight of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) as a result of the conflict and said they should immediately be allowed to return their homes. The Azerbaijani leader also said Armenia has violated international law and as a result of its adamant position the conflict still remains in limbo.

During his Baku visit, Gül also held talks with several high-level officials and visited a Turkish cemetery.

18 August 2010, Wednesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Turkey extends aid to Moldova for flood victims

Turkey has extended financial aid to Moldova due to the flood disaster that took place in this country last month.

Thursday, 19 August 2010 09:17

World Bulletin

Turkey has extended financial aid to Moldova due to the flood disaster that took place in this country last month.

Releasing a statement on Wednesday, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that Turkey had delivered 100,000 USD of financial aid to Moldova after the disaster.

"The Turkish government has delivered 100,000 USD of monetary aid to Moldova which has incurred a significant material damage due to the flood disaster stemming from heavy rains in July," the ministry statement said.

Turkey donates ambulance to lebanese village

Turkey's Ambassador to Lebanon, in a visit to Tripoli, donated an ambulance purchased by Turkey to villages where Turkmens are also living.

Thursday, 19 August 2010 15:06

The world bulletin

Inan Ozyildiz, Turkey's Ambassador to Lebanon, in a visit to Tripoli, donated an ambulance purchased by Turkey to villages where Turkmens are also living. In a courtesy visit to Tripoli Mayor Nader Ghazal, Ozyildiz said Turkey had always been with Lebanese people and expressed Turkey's readiness for cooperation. Ozyildiz said removal of visa requirements between the two countries would further improve relations. Ozyildiz later attended a ceremony in El Bire village where Muslims and Christians are living together. Speaking at the ceremony where the ambulance was donated, "Turkey has earlier constructed a health center here. Now we donate an ambulance to be used by three villages. Separately, construction of the network and water tanks which would give water to villages continues."

Constitutional reforms to "pave way for Turkey's EU bid": Bagis

Turkish chief negotiator said that the constitutional amendment package would pave the way for Turkey.

Thursday, 19 August 2010 11:32

The world bulletin

Turkish chief negotiator said on Wednesday that the constitutional amendment package would pave the way for Turkey. State Minister and chief negotiator Egemen Bagis, who is currently in New York to represent Turkey in a meeting on aid to flood-hit Pakistan at UN Security Council and Mevlut Cavusoglu, head of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), attended a fast-breaking meal in Brooklyn. Delivering a speech at the meal, Bagis said, "the constitutional amendment package will pave the way for Turkey. The package includes several important articles. Everyone should vote the package with his/her conscience by knowing its content." Bagis said that all articles in the package would make Turkey a more transparent, modern and respectable country. "As a result of these factors, Turkey will keep getting rich. The package will also make the country more developed and prosperous one," he said. "If people vote 'no' for the package, the country will not gain anything," he stated. In regard to the UN meeting on Pakistan, Bagis said that there was a serious disaster and crisis in Pakistan and countries would discuss how they would assist the country in the meeting in the UN Security Council. PACE president Cavusoglu said that if a Turk could be the president of PACE, Turkey could also be a full member of the EU. "Turkey should keep working hard to join the EU," he said.

Government warns Israel to meet flotilla raid demands

The Turkish government has reaffirmed that it will follow up on its demands regarding Israel's May 31 attack on a flotilla of ships bringing aid to the Gaza Strip that resulted in the death of eight Turks and one Turkish-American in international waters. Speaking during an annual fast-breaking dinner (iftar), organized by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) for the diplomatic community in Ankara on

Thursday, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said his government's demands for an official apology and compensation for the families of those killed by the Israeli attack still stand. "Israel must admit its mistake, extend an apology and pay the compensation. We will be following up on these demands," he emphasized.

In a sign of strained relations with Israel, the AK Party did not invite Israeli Ambassador to Turkey Gabby Levy to the dinner, unlike last year. The chief rabbi of Turkey, Ishak Haleva, and Turkish-Jewish community leader Sami Herman, however, attended the dinner.

Commenting on the decision not to invite Levy, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said respect for human rights and human lives was essential. "When this respect is not shown, some responsibilities emerge. We expect those responsibilities to be fulfilled," he said at a joint press conference with Mexican Foreign Minister Patricia Espinosa on Friday. Speaking on Thursday, Ömer Çelik, AK Party deputy chairman responsible for external affairs, said the decision not to invite Levy was an act of protest against aggressive Israeli policies. "It was not against the Israeli ambassador or Israeli people but against the lack of response on the part of the Israeli government to the demands of the Turkish government," he emphasized.

During a 20-minute speech after the dinner, Erdoğan dismissed charges of a change in direction in Turkish foreign policy and said full membership in the European Union was a strategic goal for Turkey. He blamed attitudes in the EU for the fall in Turkish public support for the membership process. "The EU should not erect artificial barriers to full membership," Erdoğan said, noting that his government has embarked on major constitutional changes to bring the country in line with the EU acquis. "Our government has done more than any other government in recent history to achieve EU goals," he added.

He reiterated that Turkey is interested in following developments in all parts of the world, saying the country is now a global player in the international arena. "Some wanted us to turn our back to the East while our face turned toward to Europe. Nobody has a right to demand such thing from us. Our government's face is turned to all corners of the world," he explained.

Erdoğan also said Turkey is working very closely with the Obama administration to expand on the model partnership between Washington and Ankara. He stressed that Turkey is closely following developments in Iraq and that any future government should be inclusive and representative of all factions and groups.

Erdoğan told the ambassadors and foreign diplomats that their countries should work actively with Turkey to stem the terror threat confronting it. "Terror is trying to sabotage the referendum process for constitutional changes in Turkey," he said, adding that it is disheartening to see some countries still tolerating organizations linked with the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) despite all evidence and warnings. "It is about time to expect solidarity, sincerity and concrete steps from our friends against a terrorist organization that is obviously acting as a contractor," Erdoğan emphasized.

Saudi Ambassador Mohammed Raja al-Hussaini, who is the acting dean of the diplomatic corps in Turkey, also addressed the audience. He praised the Erdoğan government for its "successful foreign policy," adding: "I remember when your party came to power you said Turkey had problems with almost all of its neighbors and that the situation is at times threatening and you made it a goal of your party not to make

enemies, but to make friends. And we can see now the Republic of Turkey enjoys the best relations with all its neighbors and that the relationship between Turkey and its neighbors has become that of cooperation and economic and commercial interaction.”

14 August 2010, Saturday
TODAYS ZAMAN

Gas discovery in East Mediterranean likely to spark regional disputes

A recent discovery of natural gas in the eastern Mediterranean, the exploration of which is said to make it one of the largest natural gas producing regions in the world, may trigger disputes between countries in the region.

Last week, Christopher Schenk, who heads a US Geological Survey (USGS) team assessing global oil and gas reserves, said the Levant Basin Province lying mostly off the coast of Israel and Lebanon could hold 3.4 trillion cubic meters of recoverable gas -- making it one of the world's richest deposits.

According to the reports, Schenk was invited by Israel's Infrastructure Ministry last week to discuss the results of the survey of the area, which stretches from a few miles inland in Israel and Lebanon out towards the Mediterranean island of Cyprus.

In Greek Cyprus, authorities were reluctant to make a huge deal out of the discovery, which could have huge implications for Cyprus, the English-language Cyprus Mail daily reported on Thursday.

“Exploratory drilling should take place -- scheduled in one or two years -- and then we can speak of specific quantities and the type of hydrocarbons,” Solon Kasinis, the head of the Greek Cypriot government's energy service, was quoted as saying by the Cyprus Mail, as he also noted that Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias has been handling the issue himself.

The island is divided into Greek and Turkish zones. As of Friday, there was no official statement regarding the issue from the Turkish Foreign Ministry. But, in recent years, Ankara has on many occasions made clear that according to international law, the sea boundaries between the countries and the limits of the continental shelf of each country need to be delineated via consensus among all coastal and neighboring countries when the issue is a semi-closed sea such as the East Mediterranean.

Since 2003, Greek Cyprus has sought to sign agreements with other coastal states to delineate the island's continental shelf in the Mediterranean, angering Turkey.

News reports, meanwhile, said that while the discovery of the reserves could potentially mean a huge economic windfall for Israel and Lebanon, both resource-poor nations, it could also spark a new war between the two neighbors, who are already technically at war and have no diplomatic relations.

Israel has a signed agreement with Jordan on the border in the Gulf of Eilat, and has unwritten agreements with Egypt and Palestine. There's no such agreement with Lebanon. In cases of dispute, it is usual practice to hand the decision to arbitrators, which are listed by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982. Israel is not a signatory to the convention because it is concerned about biased arbitrators.

14 August 2010
Today's zaman

No Europe without Turkey, says Poland's ex-president

Thursday, August 19, 2010

GDANSK, Poland – Agence France-Presse

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey must be admitted to the European Union, Poland's former president and Nobel laureate Lech Walesa insisted on Wednesday.

"There's no Europe without Turkey," Walesa told AFP in an interview. "Turkey should gradually reach Europe's level of development and enter tomorrow," he added. Turkey kicked off membership talks with the EU in 2005.

The process has been sluggish, however, in part because of France and Germany's wariness about letting the Muslim-majority nation of 75 million into the 27-nation bloc. Poland, which is due to take over the EU's rotating presidency in the second half of 2011, backs Turkish entry.

The deeply Catholic Walesa said religious-rooted concerns should not come into play.

"Borders and splits have led to conflict, especially on the religious side," he said.

"Religion has been exploited."

"Religion will return to its proper place. People will understand that in reality, God is the same for all religions but there are too many defenders of the faith," he said.

Palestinian who attacked Turkish Embassy in Tel Aviv captured

Wednesday, August 18, 2010

TEL AVIV, Israel – From wire dispatches

Palestinian who broke into the Turkish Embassy in Israel trying to take hostages and demanding asylum was turned over to Israeli authorities Tuesday night, ending a tense standoff.

The attacker, identified as by an Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman as Nadim Injaz, climbed to the first story of the embassy in Tel Aviv and forced his way into the building, armed with a knife, a jerry can and a toy gun, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said in Ankara. No one from the embassy was hurt.

Israeli police said Injaz, a Palestinian from the West Bank town of Ramallah, was recently released from prison after serving time for an attack on the British Embassy four years ago, also to seek asylum.

Seven hours after he forced his way into the embassy, the attacker was escorted out of the embassy late Tuesday and bundled into an Israeli ambulance. Wearing a light blue shirt and limping slightly from an apparent gunshot wound, he raised his arms briefly and shouted before Israeli police and paramedics subdued him.

Channel 2 TV played a recording of a phone call it said came from the attacker. "I have two hostages," he said in Hebrew. "I will blow up the embassy. ... If they don't let me leave this country now I will burn down the whole building. I will burn everything. I will burn the cars, the doors I will break down the doors. I will break everything."

Late Tuesday, the Turkish government said it had the situation in hand. "Our embassy guards neutralized the individual as he tried to take the vice consul as hostage after shouting around for asylum," a Turkish statement said, adding he was armed with a knife, a gasoline can and a gun that turned out to be a toy.

Injaz said he admired Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. "I love him and I respect him," he said. The Turkish leader "should give me political asylum against these

murderers the Zionists, the murdering Jews," he added, linking the incident indirectly to recent tensions between Israel and Turkey.

Injaz's lawyer, Avital Horev, said his client was a former member of Israel's Shin Bet domestic security agency. Horev said Injaz was also wanted by the Palestinian Authority. Medical sources said he had been shot in the leg and sustained light wounds, after which he was taken to Tel Aviv's Ichilov hospital. "I saw my client in hospital during the night," Horev told public radio. "During the 1990s and the early part of this decade, he stopped Palestinian attacks, saving many lives of both soldiers and Israeli citizens, but the Shin Bet, from whom he asked for protection, refused to recognize its responsibility toward him," he said.

But Shin Bet denied having anything to do with him. "Nadim Injaz never worked for us and his case is being dealt with by the police," a Shin Bet spokesman told AFP.

The bungled attempt to seek asylum arose from a threat to Injaz's life if he were to return to the Palestinian territories, his lawyer claimed. "The Palestinian Authority has signed a death warrant against Nadim Injaz," said Horev, adding his client had been released from an Israeli jail only three weeks ago after serving time for theft and staying in Israel illegally. But Palestinian security officials contacted by AFP denied knowing anyone of that name from Ramallah.

Israel-Turkey relations have been strained over the May 31 Israeli attack on an international flotilla that was trying to bust Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip. The raid killed eight Turks and one American citizen of Turkish descent who were among hundreds of pro-Palestinian activists on board boats carrying aid. Many Palestinians have expressed support for Turkey in the aftermath.

In London, the British Foreign Office confirmed in a statement that the attacker was the same one involved in the 2006 British Embassy incident. Around the time of the first attack, police said Injaz was an informer and a criminal with a record of property and drug offenses who had run into financial and legal troubles.

He told an Israeli TV station in 2006 that he feared he would be killed by Palestinian militants if he returned to the West Bank.

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Compiled from AP and AFP reports by the Daily News staff.

Report: Obama warns Erdoğan on arms sale

US President Barack Obama has personally warned Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that his government risks not obtaining some of the weapons it wants from the US if it does not change its position on Iran and Israel, a news report has said.

But President Abdullah Gül, speaking to journalists aboard a plane en route to Azerbaijan on Monday, denied such a warning and said some were disturbed by Turkey's new activism in foreign policy. "I would have known about it had there been such a warning," he said. "There is no problem in our relations with the US. Turkey has been pursuing a constructive policy in every field. But, for some, the Turkey that they were used to no longer exists. Instead, there is a Turkey that plays an active role in many processes. This is puzzling for some." The Financial Times reported on Sunday that Obama warned Erdoğan about the issue during a meeting in Toronto at the G-20 gathering in late June, just weeks after the flotilla incident with Israel and Turkey's "no" vote against sanctions on Iran.

“The president has said to Erdoğan that some of the actions that Turkey has taken have caused questions to be raised on the Hill [Congress] ... about whether we can have confidence in Turkey as an ally. That means that some of the requests Turkey has made of us, for example in providing some of the weaponry that it would like to fight the [outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party] PKK, will be harder for us to move through Congress,” a senior US administration official told the daily.

According to the report, Obama’s warning is significant as Ankara seeks to buy US drone aircraft, such as the missile-bearing Reaper, to use in its fight against the PKK.

The administration has not notified Congress of any big arms sale to Turkey to date this year. Earlier, Turkey sought six Predator unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and two armed versions of the Predator UAVs, also known as Reapers, from the US, Lale Kemal, an expert on defense issues, said.

In September, the Obama administration notified Congress of a possible \$7.8 billion sale of Patriot PAC-3 antimissile batteries and related gear to Turkey, a transaction that would be one of the biggest US government-to-government arms sales in years. Kemal said the administration’s request for permission to sell arms passed through Congress, according to her sources, but she said the administration might also think of putting the delivery of the arms on hold depending on Turkey’s position regarding Israel and Iran.

The expert also said it was probable that Turkey has not yet requested any arms purchases from the US this year but that the US Congress recently approved the transfer of two Super Cobra attack helicopters to Turkey, though their delivery in early 2011 might be put on hold.

In the case of a NATO member such as Turkey, Congress has 15 days to block a proposed arms deal by passing a joint resolution of disapproval, though it never has stopped a sale once formally notified.

According to the Financial Times, Obama told Erdoğan that the Turks had failed to act as an ally in the UN vote on Iran and called on Ankara to cool its rhetoric about an Israeli raid that killed eight Turks and one Turkish-American on a flotilla bearing aid for Gaza.

“They need to show that they take seriously American national security interests,” the daily quoted the administration official as saying. The same official also added that Washington was looking at Turkish conduct and would then assess if there were sufficient efforts that the US could go forward with Turkey’s arms request.

Similar remarks were also made by Philip Gordon, assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, in Washington, only hours before a bilateral meeting between Obama and Erdoğan in Toronto.

“We think Turkey remains committed to NATO, Europe and the United States, but that needs to be demonstrated,” Gordon told The Associated Press in an interview. “There are people asking questions about it in a way that is new, and that in itself is a bad thing that makes it harder for the US to support some of the things that Turkey would like to see us support.”

17 August 2010, Tuesday

TODAY’S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Gül says peace in Caucasus remains Turkey’s foreign policy priority

Turkish President Abdullah Gül said establishing peace, stability and welfare in the South Caucasus is among the priorities of Turkish foreign policy, adding that Turkey actively

contributes to establishing a comprehensive and sustainable peace in the former Soviet region.

“Turkey closely monitors developments in the South Caucasus and actively contributes to building comprehensive and sustainable peace in the region. We will stress the importance Turkey attaches to stability, welfare and cooperation in the region during our meetings in Azerbaijan,” Gül told reporters ahead of his two-day visit to Azerbaijan’s capital, Baku, on Monday.

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, Energy and Natural Resources Minister Taner Yıldız and deputies who are members of the Turkey-Azerbaijan Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Group will be accompanying President Gül during his visit to oil-rich Muslim country. Despite just an 11-kilometer long border with Azerbaijan, Turkish-Azerbaijani trade volume is being boosted thanks to joint giant energy projects and is set to surge once the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad is completed by 2012.

Gül said he will hold talks with his Azerbaijani counterpart, Ilham Aliyev, and other high-level Azerbaijani officials to discuss bilateral relations and other issues regarding cooperation between the two Turkic states. He added that they will also have a chance to exchange views on regional and international developments.

Stressing that energy is one of the areas that has improved relations between the two countries and transformed into strategic cooperation, Gül said two energy projects are the most important sign of the cooperation in the energy sphere between the two countries.

Azerbaijan exports its oil and gas to the Western markets through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline through Georgia.

Azerbaijan’s energy giant, the state-controlled State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) is also heavily investing in Turkey’s energy sector, making it the largest foreign investor in Turkey in recent years.

Along with contributing to bilateral relations between the two countries, Gül said, these two energy projects are also significant for global energy security, particularly European energy security and he said they contribute to regional welfare and stability. “We once more want to stress our goal to improve our current cooperation in this sphere,” Gül said. President Gül also noted that they want the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad to be completed as soon as possible, improving trade relations.

The railway is expected to transport 1.5 million passengers and 3 million tons of freight per year. Forecasts predict that by 2034 it will transport 3 million people and more than 16 million tons of goods. The total cost of the project is estimated at \$500 million, with \$200 million covered by Azerbaijan and the remaining cost to be covered by Turkey.

Noting that they launched the foundation of the railway in Kars two years ago, the Turkish president said works are rapidly under way and that it will be completed soon. Speaking about the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, President Gül said he will underline Turkey’s position, which considers a peaceful solution to the territorial conflict within Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity. He said they will review their works with his Azerbaijani counterpart for lasting peace in the Caucasus. “We attach great importance to this,” Gül stated.

Azerbaijan and Armenia fought a fierce, full-scale armed conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh territory, predominantly populated by ethnic Armenians and surrounded by ethnic Azerbaijanis. A Russian-brokered cease-fire in 1994 helped stop armed clashes but

deadly border skirmishes have been common in past years, leaving the frozen fragile conflict ready to resume.

Gül also spoke at a joint press conference with Aliyev in Baku later on Monday, where he said Turkey's efforts for the establishment of comprehensive peace in the South Caucasus will continue and added that Turkey "silently yet decisively" undertakes serious works to solve frozen conflicts in the region.

Arguing that frozen conflicts could suddenly become a regional affair, the president said bold efforts need to be taken to solve long frozen conflicts.

Along with Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia is also at odds with its northern neighbor Russia over its breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgia and Russia fought a four-day armed conflict in August 2008 and thanks to EU mediation then, the former Soviet Union republics struck a cease-fire deal to stop casualties.

President Gül will attend the opening of the new building of the Azer-Türk Bank -- established by Turkey's Ziraat Bank -- and a steel factory built by a Turkish company.

Gül will then proceed to the ancient northwestern city of Sheki, where he will visit historic and cultural sites.

17 August 2010, Tuesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Netanyahu looks beyond Turkey in key visit to Greece

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu began on Monday Israel's highest-level visit to Greece in a sign that Israel is looking beyond its troubled alliance with Turkey for other strategic Mediterranean partners.

Netanyahu's two days in Athens come a month after a groundbreaking visit to Israel by Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou, and follow a May Israeli raid on a Gaza-bound aid flotilla that killed eight Turks and one Turkish-American, souring Israel's ties with Turkey.

Netanyahu and Papandreou were holding talks in Athens to explore the possibility of improving trade and defense ties as left-wing groups held demonstrations, marching to the Israeli Embassy outside the city center to protest the flotilla raid and Israel's policies in the Middle East.

"There is a new warmth in Israeli-Greek relations," a senior Israeli official traveling with Netanyahu told Reuters. Long a traditional ally of Arab states, Greece forged full diplomatic ties with Israel later than other European countries, only in 1990, and has lately signaled a desire for closer relations, and a greater role in Middle East diplomacy. Papandreou told Israeli media during his July visit about stepped-up US-backed efforts to start direct Israeli-Palestinian talks. "We won't impose ourselves but yes, we could help, it's in our interest and the interest of the Middle East," he said.

Turkey, the only largely Muslim NATO state, had long played an intermediary role between Arab states and Israel. It also had close military and intelligence relations with the Israelis.

But relations deteriorated after Turkey criticized the Israeli attack on the Palestinian territory of the Gaza Strip in December 2008 and canceled several planned joint maneuvers. They hit a new low point after the deadly Israeli raid of a Turkish-backed aid flotilla to Gaza two months ago.

Netanyahu also anticipated discussion of diplomacy with the Palestinians, the senior Israeli official said. Israel “will of course be sharing ... thoughts with Greek leaders on how to move [the] peace process forward,” the official added. Greece, for its part, wants to establish closer relations with Israel, a Greek official said.

Turkish sensitivities

In courting Greece, the Israelis may well hit on Turkish sensitivities. Relations between Greece and Turkey have traditionally been tense and the two countries came to the brink of war on several occasions in the late 20th century. In recent years they have improved greatly, but old rivalries linger.

Officials from both Israel and Greece said topics on the agenda would include increasing tourism, seeking greater Israeli investment in Greek industry and ecological projects such as water conservation.

Greece was already seen as gaining in tourism from Israel since the Jewish state’s fallout with Turkey. Israeli tourists who once flocked in the tens of thousands to Turkish resorts are now heading to Greek destinations.

Israel may also seek closer military ties with Greece. “In terms of political and defense cooperation, we are interested in exploring closer cooperation in these areas as well,” the senior Israeli official said.

Turkey dismisses allegations that it used chemical weapons

Turkey has dismissed allegations that it has used chemical weapons against members of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) terrorist organization during its operations, claiming that such reports only serve the interests of the terrorist organization

Claims that our country might possibly have used chemical weapons do not reflect reality. As a signatory to the Chemical Weapons Convention since 1997, our country does not produce, possess or use chemical weapons,” the Foreign Ministry statement said late on Friday.

German magazine Der Spiegel reported on Thursday that some PKK members had handed over photos of eight PKK terrorists, supposedly killed in September 2009, to a German human rights delegation comprised of Turkey experts, journalists and politicians from the extreme-left Left Party and that a forensics report released by the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf confirmed the suspicions, arguing that “it is highly probable that the eight Kurds died due to the use of chemical substances.”

The Foreign Ministry statement urged those who suspect Turkey of using such weapons to seek further details from international institutions. “These kinds of claims shows that the PKK terrorist organization aims to distort the extraordinary efforts of our security forces against terrorism within the bounds of the rule of law,” the statement noted.

16 August 2010, Monday

TODAY’S ZAMAN ANKARA

De-crucifying Turkey’s Christians

Tuesday, August 17, 2010

MUSTAFA AKYOL

A little more than a year ago, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, made the headlines for saying that he feels “crucified” in Turkey. Many Turks had reacted to this statement then, arguing all was just fine for the Patriarchate. But His All

Holiness was right to complain, and Turkey certainly needed to take steps to advance religious freedom – such as the one it took last Sunday.

I am referring to the Christian mass celebrated in the ancient of Sümela Monastery, in northeastern Turkey, a little outside the city of Trabzon. Thousands of Orthodox Christians from Russia, Greece, Georgia and the United States joined the historic worship, led by Bartholomew I himself. “Those who believe in Christ are celebrating today,” said the 70-year-old patriarch. “Now is a great moment for the church of Constantinople.”

Enter 1922

It was such a great moment, for the Sümela Monastery had been closed to worship for a long time. The ecumenical patriarch marked the exact date, by noting, “after 88 years of lethargy we can all celebrate together.”

But what had exactly happened 88 years ago, in 1922?

Well, that was the year that the Ottoman monarchy, the protectorate of the Ecumenical Patriarchate since the mid-15th century, was abolished by Mustafa Kemal, Turkey’s new leader. It was also the year of the Treaty of Lausanne that Turkey signed with the British to define the borders and the tenets of the Republican regime that would be announced a year later.

One of the clauses of the treaty was about a “population exchange” with Greece. Accordingly, with the exception of Istanbul and Western Thrace, Greeks in Turkey and Turks in Greece would be “replaced” with each other. Trabzon (then “Trebizond”) was one of the settings for this enforced exodus. British journalist Bruce Clark explores this little-known history in his excellent book, “Twice A Stranger: How Mass Expulsion Forged Modern Greece and Turkey.” In early January 1923, Clark notes, “most of the Orthodox Christian families who still lived in [Trebizond] were told the they must leave within an hour, bring whatever they could carry, and gather near the harbor.”

That’s how the diverse Trebizond suddenly became the all-Turkish Trabzon — a background which might perhaps partly explain why the city has been a notorious crucible of nationalism. Consequently, Christian sanctuaries were deserted, and the most important of them, the Sümela Monastery, was soon converted into a “museum.”

As a believer in religious freedom and diversity, I feel certainly sad about this tragic end to the Greek Orthodox presence in Trabzon, and, actually, all of Anatolia. But I can also understand it, for it was a reaction to the invasion of Western Anatolia in 1919 by Greece, against which Turkey waged its perilous War of Liberation. That was a time of crisis, which replaced six-century-old Ottoman pluralism with nationalist monism.

What I don’t understand, though, is the dogmatic preservation of that phobia of the Greeks, and other Christians, to date. Their situation should have gone better, whereas it got only worse throughout the 20th century. In 1971, the Greek Orthodox seminary on the island of Heybeliada (Halki) was closed down by the military-dominated government of the time. In the 1990s, Turkish nationalists, official or civil, even started to lash out against the “ecumenical” title of Patriarchate, saying that it implies a “universal” authority, which surpasses that of the Turkish state. (Whereas the Patriarchate’s title should be nobody’s business except the Patriarchate itself.)

Ottoman wisdom

Today, what is ironic is the nature of the opposing camps on the Turkish side: Those who keep fueling paranoia against the Christians are often the secular nationalists, who take

inspiration from the arch-secularist Mustafa Kemal. Those who are more tolerant on this matter are often the so-called “Islamists,” who take inspiration from the Islamic Ottoman Empire.

I called this “ironic,” but maybe it isn’t. History, after all, shows that the Ecumenical Patriarchate had the darkest of its times during the Kemalist Republic. On the other hand, both the pre-Kemalist Ottoman centuries, and the emerging post-Kemalist future, look much brighter.

For a careful eye, that was evident in Bartholomew I’s address at Sümela. He blessed “the souls of the Ottoman sultans,” who “over the centuries helped the monastery of Our Lady.” And he expressed gratitude to “the courtesy of the Turkish government,” which is, as you know, run by the “Islamist” party of Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan.

The next day, Erdoğan took another good step, by publicly supporting the Patriarchate, blaming its opponents for paranoia, and praising religious freedom. He also advised the nationalists to “open up Ottoman history and read.”

Good job. But Erdoğan should not confine himself with Sümela, and move on to solve other problems of Turkey’s Christians, beginning with the re-opening of the Halki Seminary.

He should, in other words, de-crucify all the followers of Christ in this country. They have suffered enough.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Turkey's textile exports up by 4.3 pc

Only Turkey's textile exports rose by 4.3 percent in the first five months of 2010, the head of association of RTW exporters said on Thursday.

Thursday, 19 August 2010 13:15

The World bulletin

Only Turkey's textile exports rose by 4.3 percent in the first five months of 2010 among 20 countries including China, India and Egypt, the head of association of RTW exporters said on Thursday.

Releasing a statement by Hikmet Tanriverdi, the head of Association of Istanbul Ready-to-Wear and Textile Exporters, said that exports from several countries dropped in 2010, but Turkey caught a 4.3 percent increase in its exports between January and May 2010 over to the same period of 2009.

Turkish fashion industry could reach a better point with these figures, he said in his statement.

Domestic auto sales in Turkey up 16.1 percent

Domestic auto sales in Turkey was up 16.1 percent in the first seven months in 2010 over the same period last year, a Turkish association said.

Thursday, 19 August 2010 11:27

Domestic auto sales in Turkey was up 16.1 percent in the first seven months in 2010 over the same period last year, a Turkish association of automotive makers said in a monthly report.

Sales reached 363 thousand with a significant rise in demand for cars and light commercial vehicles as monthly figures for July climbed as high as 111 percent. Sales of cars and commercial vehicles in July increased 149 percent and 63 percent, respectively, as year-on-year figure for January-July 2010 was also up 10.1 percent over the same period last year due to reduction in Turkey's special consumption tax. The rise in the purchase of commercial vehicles as investment goods was seen as reflecting an optimistic outlook for future despite a sharp decline in bus sales continued in Jan.-July period to mark a 36 percent annual decrease, the report said. The report put the seven-month total export figure at 35 percent and rise in export of cars at 24 percent. Total production was up 31 percent and car production increased by 20 percent, the report said.

AA

Jobless rate down by 2.6 pct, proving rapid economic recovery

Turkey's unemployment rate fell to 11 percent in May, with the number of jobless down by 536,000 compared to the same month last year, the Turkish Statistics Institute (TurkStat) said on Monday. The total number of unemployed Turks has dropped below 3 million, according to the latest official announcement, confirming analysts' expectations of an accelerated recovery in the Turkish economy from the limited impact of the short-lived global financial crisis. The unemployment rate had already decreased by 2.9 percent to 12 percent in April over the same month in 2009. Participation in the labor force, on the other hand, rose to 49.4 percent in May, marking a 1.2 percent increase compared to the same month last year.

TurkStat's most recent figures also bolstered Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's prediction in May that the unemployment rate could drop below 10 percent in a couple of months.

"Do not be surprised if it drops to 10 percent and even falls below that in a month or two. Yes, I am saying this. Those who made fun of us when we said the world's economic crisis will only touch and pass Turkey are now drowning in their words," he said at the time.

Some 2.85 million people were reportedly unemployed in the country in May. Yet even this figure fails to provide a complete picture of Turkey's labor market, where, official data indicates, undocumented employment is rampant. According to TurkStat, unreported unemployment amounted to 43.6 percent of Turkey's labor force in May, a 1 percent decline from May 2009. Particularly in the agriculture sector, many people work without reporting their employment to the relevant authorities. TurkStat said on Monday that undocumented workers accounted for 85.8 percent of agricultural labor, while in non-agricultural sectors the figure was 29.3 percent. Both figures saw a reduction of around 1 percent over the same month last year.

TurkStat also released detailed district unemployment rates in urban and rural areas. While the share of the unemployed in Turkey's labor force was 13.4 percent in May in urban regions, with a 3.1 percent drop over the same month last year, this figure was 6.4 percent in rural areas, with a 1.4 percent drop.

Over 1 million people enter labor force in one year

According to TurkStat figures, Turkey's labor force grew from 24.84 million people to 25.9 million in May over the same month last year, an increase of 1.06 million people.

The number of employed increased by 1.6 million in the same interval, hence the impressive reduction in the number of unemployed by over 500,000 individuals in just one year.

TurkStat figures also show that the rise in employment occurred mostly in non-agricultural sectors, with 1.18 million of 1.6 million finding jobs in those fields. In a report issued yesterday, Bahçeşehir University's Center for Economic and Social Research (BETAM) noted that TurkStat's figures represent a 7.3 percent expansion of employment in non-agricultural sectors and that this "high rate of increase is in accord with a double-digit growth rate" for Turkey's economy.

'Jobless rate will drop to single digit'

Foreign Trade Minister Zafer Çağlayan was the first to make a statement on the latest unemployment numbers. He boldly claimed that the figures for May 2010 clearly attested to the fact that the rate would drop to one-digit figures in the upcoming months.

"Aside from the developments in Turkey's economy, the increase in our export figures in the January-May period has played a particular role in the drop in the unemployment rate," Çağlayan argued, adding, "In order to reduce the unemployment rate, the sustainable growth of our exports should continue."

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17 August 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

SOCIAL NEWS

Weekend rain expected in northern Turkey

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Thursday, August 19, 2010

ANKARA – Anatolia News Agency

An end to the hot weather is in sight in northern and central Turkey as temperatures will decline by 2 to 3 degrees Celsius starting Saturday. Temperatures have been 6 to 8 Celsius degrees higher than the seasonal norms since July.

Mehmet Çağlar, head of the Turkish State Meteorological Service, or DMI, said the hot weather would continue on Friday but would diminish by the weekend.

In the western part of the Marmara region, there will be sporadic rain over the weekend and on Monday. In the middle and eastern parts of the Black Sea region, the rain will continue for five days, said Çağlar, but added that other parts of the country would not see rain.

It will rain in the eastern part of Istanbul's Anatolian side during the weekend and on Monday. "There will be short periods of rain; do not expect to have long rain showers," said Çağlar.

Following the weekend, temperatures will increase a few degrees but the weather will still not be hotter than the last several weeks.

Çağlar also said this year the hot weather around Turkey was a result of a Basra low pressure system. He said the weather is hotter in the central and eastern provinces compared to other places because of the interior climate there.

Committee hopes to convince top court to uphold Turkish smoking ban

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Thursday, August 19, 2010

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

In response to people trying to soften the smoking ban, the National Committee on Cigarettes and Health, or SSUK, has taken action, collecting 15,000 signatures over the past month from Istanbul and many Anatolian provinces.

They have sent the signatures and the results of the Constitutional Freedoms and Right to Health Workshop that took place in Aegean province of İzmir to the Constitutional Court, which is examining the constitutionality of the smoking ban.

The Council of State ruled June 20 that the ban on smoking in teahouses is unconstitutional, saying that it limits personal freedoms as well as the freedom of labor. It recommended establishing separate smoking and non-smoking areas in place of the blanket ban on smoking indoors.

The Council of State case started with a filing by the Chamber of İzmir Teahouse Owners against the first article of the memorandum on Prime Ministry Law No. 4207, which defines the smoking ban. If the Constitutional Court decides to repeal the article, indoor smoking may return not only to traditional teahouses, but also to all cafes, bars and restaurants because the law covers “restaurants owned by private individuals alongside establishments where entertainment services are offered, such as teahouses, cafeterias and pubs.”

Elif Dağlı, head of SSUK, said “I do not believe the Constitutional Court would risk people’s lives by softening the ban.”

SSUK said in their press release that the latest research suggested the smoking ban is supported by 92 percent, which is 77 percent among smokers and 88 percent among people who regularly visit dining establishments.

The legislation for banning smoking in closed quarters took full effect July 19, 2009, and outlawed smoking in all enclosed public places, including bars, cafes, restaurants, taxis, trains and outdoor stadiums. The ban includes premises that serve nargile, or hookah, and excludes private residences. Businesses are additionally required to make arrangements to protect non-smokers if smoking is permitted in open-air sections of the premises.

TurkStat survey shows 41.6 percent of homes in Turkey use internet

Internet is being used in 41.6 percent of homes in Turkey, revealed a survey conducted by TurkStat.

Turkstat-Turkey's national statistics authority, made public the results of a survey titled "2010-Information Technology Usage in Households" on Wednesday.

The survey offers insight into the internet and computer usage in Turkey.

Turkstat figures revealed 41.6 percent of the households nation wide use internet at home, up from 30 percent last year while 26.3 percent of the households do not feel the need to use internet.

According to the survey, ADSL is the most preferred internet access technology with 73.3 percent.

Results suggest a rise in both computer and internet usage among the population between the ages of 16 and 74, with usage highest in the 16-24 age group. Computer and internet usage among the male population in the said age group was respectively 53.4 percent and 51.8 percent, while 33.2 percent and 31.7 among the female population. In 2009, usage rates among men were respectively 50.5 and 48.6 and 30 percent and 28 percent among women.

The survey showed, in the last three months, 72.8 of the users got online to check emails, 64.2 percent to post messages in chat rooms, news groups, or forums, 58.8 to read online news or download news, 55.7 percent to get information in goods and services, 51.2 percent to download games, music and movies.

18 August 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Commentaries

TÜSİAD, the economy and the referendum

YAVUZ BAYDAR

With less than a month to go until the referendum, the political winds are getting stronger day by day. For the “no” camp, Sept. 12 will be the day to cast a sort of vote of confidence for the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and its leader, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

For the “yes” camp, it is slightly more complex. For some of its followers it will remove some of the obstacles before reform, setting a faster pace towards adopting democratic norms (not necessarily strictly linked with EU membership). For others it means a greater predictability in the globalized liberal Turkish economy. To many, it is a step forward for the supremacy of the rule of law. And, finally, as a vote of confidence it is a sort of “dress rehearsal” for Erdoğan’s aspirations to become the next president of Turkey.

We are seeing a country that is facing a crossroads, the significance of which should not be underestimated. The blowing winds shakes and stirs not only the main political actors, but also institutions, traditional professional organizations -- such as the trade unions -- and powerful civilian players such as the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association (TÜSİAD).

Maintaining priorities along with concerns of preserving a delicate balance has become a difficult task. TÜSİAD is suffering from a case of passivity, of not being able to take a side in a crucial issue (democratization) which it has been passionately and actively pushing for. TÜSİAD now argues, basically, that Turkey needs a new constitution, not a partial change to the existing one. This makes it sound like the current government is avoiding such and that their demand is based on a realistic assumption. But, sadly, it is not true and this stance pushes the powerful organization into a hypocritical position, by

highlighting the group's internal divisions over how to approach the government -- an apparent shift of focus.

Generally, much of the trouble over what position to take is a result of misreading what sort of changes are taking place in Turkey -- in its economy in particular. The axis is shifting, certainly. Goldman Sachs recently stated that growth in the global economy is now defined by 15 emerging countries, including Turkey, India, Brazil, South Korea, Russia and China. Their share in global trade is increasing along with their direct investment in South Asia and Africa. More than half of global production has shifted to these countries.

It would be a mistake if one does not put recent events into this global context, that of Turkey's involvement in such a major shift in the world's economic development. Süleyman Yaşar, a prominent expert on the Turkish economy and a columnist with the Sabah daily, explained how the socio-political geography of Anatolia (as opposed to TÜSİAD's focus on İstanbul) is contributing and related to these changes. More than half of Turkey's exports in the first half of 2010 originated from Anatolian cities. He gives the example of Antep, an eastern city, which now exports to over 140 countries with a volume of \$5 billion per year.

I found one of the statistics he cited particularly striking. Arguing that "Turkey is now too small for Anatolian capital," Yaşar refers to official figures, saying that around two-thirds of some 45,000 Turkish university students abroad are now from this or that part of Anatolia -- no longer mostly from İstanbul. This is a result of the economic boom that is taking place.

This means that there is no longer a defining center for business in Turkey. Anatolian economic players found an interlocutor in the AK Party, and their hopes and concerns will have a lot of weight on the outcome of the referendum. TÜSİAD's misreading, which by its refusal to say yes seems to welcome uncertainty as an alternative, is based on the group's ignorance of the AK Party's major role as a mediator for the economic actors of Anatolia, as well as a lack of clarity in the alternative economic policies of the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP).

In this sense, if we agree that the referendum will be a vote of confidence, then at the end of the day it will also, inevitably, be about economic policies.

16 August 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

From the Bosphorus: Straight - More work needed on Azeri alliance

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Wednesday, August 18, 2010

To be sure, we are encouraged by the visit of President Abdullah Gül to neighboring Azerbaijan and the show of warm words and gestures that ensued during his meetings with both his counterpart İlham Aliiev and the Azeri Prime Minister Artur Rasizade. This was the first presidential visit to Baku since relations were sent into a spiral earlier this year by the pending execution of a border-opening protocol with Armenia. That historic deal, of course, was shelved in the face Azeri outrage that it was proceeding without progress on the enclave of Nagorno-Karabagh and surrounding districts, occupied by Armenia since 1993.

It has long been our position that Turkey's relationship with Azerbaijan is an important one. We have also endorsed, and continue to support, the now-stalled "normalization" of relations with Armenia. And we further believe that this process, symbolically begun with Gül's attendance at a Yerevan football match two years ago, is ultimately critical to the creation of proper relations between Baku and Yerevan as well – not to mention to the resolution of the complex issue of Nagorno-Karabagh, which has displaced nearly 1 million Azeris.

That communications became so frayed, and that Azeri fears of abandonment by Turkey derailed the border opening protocol, is a failure of effective diplomacy. Privately, Azeri diplomats complain not just of being left outside the Armenia discussion. They also complain of being left outside the newly expansive regional foreign policy of Turkey that has included a greater embrace of Iran, Syria, Sudan and other countries. Sometimes this complaint turns on worries that Azerbaijan's secularism makes them less than appealing to Turkey's "Islamic outreach." Sometimes it turns on a fear of simply being taken for granted.

In either case, Azerbaijan needs to have these fears assuaged. Perhaps more important evidence that this is occurring was the June agreement between Ankara and Baku that renewed an agreement for gas sales. The deal reflected a price increase, but what Turkey pays for Azeri gas is still far below market prices and the terms reflect Azeri generosity in light of historic cultural and linguistic ties. Now this has been followed by a state visit. All this adds up to progress in an important relationship for Turkey. A strategic cooperation and partnership agreement initialed by the two leaders should further strengthen Azeri confidence in Turkey.

But we still believe Turkey can and should do much more to build and deepen ties with this important ally. This is a relationship that was needlessly allowed to erode. Healthy relations with Azerbaijan are good for that Caspian nation. They are good for Turkey. And ultimately, we believe they are good for the ongoing reconciliation of both countries with Armenia.

De-crucifying Turkey's Christians

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Tuesday, August 17, 2010

MUSTAFA AKYOL

HURRIYAT

A little more than a year ago, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, made the headlines for saying that he feels "crucified" in Turkey. Many Turks had reacted to this statement then, arguing all was just fine for the Patriarchate. But His All Holiness was right to complain, and Turkey certainly needed to take steps to advance religious freedom – such as the one it took last Sunday.

I am referring to the Christian mass celebrated in the ancient of Sümela Monastery, in northeastern Turkey, a little outside the city of Trabzon. Thousands of Orthodox Christians from Russia, Greece, Georgia and the United States joined the historic worship, led by Bartholomew I himself. "Those who believe in Christ are celebrating today," said the 70-year-old patriarch. "Now is a great moment for the church of Constantinople."

Enter 1922

It was such a great moment, for the Sümela Monastery had been closed to worship for a long time. The ecumenical patriarch marked the exact date, by noting, “after 88 years of lethargy we can all celebrate together.”

But what had exactly happened 88 years ago, in 1922?

Well, that was the year that the Ottoman monarchy, the protectorate of the Ecumenical Patriarchate since the mid-15th century, was abolished by Mustafa Kemal, Turkey’s new leader. It was also the year of the Treaty of Lausanne that Turkey signed with the British to define the borders and the tenets of the Republican regime that would be announced a year later.

One of the clauses of the treaty was about a “population exchange” with Greece. Accordingly, with the exception of Istanbul and Western Thrace, Greeks in Turkey and Turks in Greece would be “replaced” with each other. Trabzon (then “Trebizond”) was one of the settings for this enforced exodus. British journalist Bruce Clark explores this little-known history in his excellent book, “Twice A Stranger: How Mass Expulsion Forged Modern Greece and Turkey.” In early January 1923, Clark notes, “most of the Orthodox Christian families who still lived in [Trebizond] were told they must leave within an hour, bring whatever they could carry, and gather near the harbor.”

That’s how the diverse Trebizond suddenly became the all-Turkish Trabzon — a background which might perhaps partly explain why the city has been a notorious crucible of nationalism. Consequently, Christian sanctuaries were deserted, and the most important of them, the Sümela Monastery, was soon converted into a “museum.”

As a believer in religious freedom and diversity, I feel certainly sad about this tragic end to the Greek Orthodox presence in Trabzon, and, actually, all of Anatolia. But I can also understand it, for it was a reaction to the invasion of Western Anatolia in 1919 by Greece, against which Turkey waged its perilous War of Liberation. That was a time of crisis, which replaced six-century-old Ottoman pluralism with nationalist monism.

What I don’t understand, though, is the dogmatic preservation of that phobia of the Greeks, and other Christians, to date. Their situation should have gone better, whereas it got only worse throughout the 20th century. In 1971, the Greek Orthodox seminary on the island of Heybeliada (Halki) was closed down by the military-dominated government of the time. In the 1990s, Turkish nationalists, official or civil, even started to lash out against the “ecumenical” title of Patriarchate, saying that it implies a “universal” authority, which surpasses that of the Turkish state. (Whereas the Patriarchate’s title should be nobody’s business except the Patriarchate itself.)

Ottoman wisdom

Today, what is ironic is the nature of the opposing camps on the Turkish side: Those who keep fueling paranoia against the Christians are often the secular nationalists, who take inspiration from the arch-secularist Mustafa Kemal. Those who are more tolerant on this matter are often the so-called “Islamists,” who take inspiration from the Islamic Ottoman Empire.

I called this “ironic,” but maybe it isn’t. History, after all, shows that the Ecumenical Patriarchate had the darkest of its times during the Kemalist Republic. On the other hand, both the pre-Kemalist Ottoman centuries, and the emerging post-Kemalist future, look much brighter.

For a careful eye, that was evident in Bartholomew I’s address at Sümela. He blessed “the souls of the Ottoman sultans,” who “over the centuries helped the monastery of Our

Lady.” And he expressed gratitude to “the courtesy of the Turkish government,” which is, as you know, run by the “Islamist” party of Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan.

The next day, Erdoğan took another good step, by publicly supporting the Patriarchate, blaming its opponents for paranoia, and praising religious freedom. He also advised the nationalists to “open up Ottoman history and read.”

Good job. But Erdoğan should not confine himself with Sümela, and move on to solve other problems of Turkey’s Christians, beginning with the re-opening of the Halki Seminary.

He should, in other words, de-crucify all the followers of Christ in this country. They have suffered enough.

Changing tactics or changing strategy?

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Tuesday, August 17, 2010

JOOST LAGENDIJK

HURRIYAT

Till last week, Kurdish nationalists made life very difficult on the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, and its efforts to get the constitutional amendments package adopted on Sept. 12.

The outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK, and the Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, acted as, what is called in conflict resolution theory, “total spoilers,” actors with immutable preferences, implacably opposed, so it seemed, to the constitutional reform process. The PKK continued with terrorist attacks that created an atmosphere of fear, anger and polarization in society, not conducive at all to a relaxed run-up to the referendum, making it almost impossible for the ruling party to focus on the benefits of the proposed changes to the 1982 Constitution. The BDP on the other hand had announced a boycott campaign, calling on people not to vote because the proposals did not go far enough and did not contain some key Kurdish demands such as lowering the electoral threshold. Now, all of a sudden, the situation has changed. The PKK announced a cease-fire till after the referendum and the BDP seems to have softened its opposition to the constitutional amendments. What has happened? Is this changing attitude a temporary tactical move or does it foreshadow a more fundamental strategic change?

To be honest, the PKK cease-fire has been turned upside down by many analysts but my impression is that, in the end, nobody really knows what goes on in the mind of Abdullah Öcalan, the undisputed leader of the terrorist organization. Again, as on previous occasions, demands have been put forward in order for the cease-fire to be continued after Sept. 20. Most conditions will definitively not be met and it remains hard to predict what will happen then.

More interestingly is the immediate effect of the Kurdish U-turn on the referendum campaign. I am sure that the ruling party is happy with the end of the PKK attacks because it allows them to make the case for a “yes” vote on Sept. 12 more easily.

Especially among the Kurds and among the National Movement Party, or MHP, supporters, who won’t be distracted anymore by the violence and will be more receptive to the anti-1982 Constitution sentiments promoted by the AKP.

It is not quite clear how the BDP will act from now on. Will they stop campaigning for a boycott? According to me that would be a wise decision. From the start, I did not

understand their position. Yes, from a Kurdish perspective, there are many legitimate grievances against the ruling party: not lowering the 10 percent threshold, not involving the Kurds in the democratic initiative and finally stalling the whole process, allowing the judiciary to first close down the Democratic Society Party, or DTP, and then the arrest of hundreds of Kurdish elected politicians. There are many reasons to be angry and disappointed. But not good arguments against constitutional amendments that deal with key Kurdish demands such as diminishing the role of military courts and reforming the high judicial bodies. Many Kurds have realized that the Sept. 12 package might not be enough, but it was absolutely something they could not afford to reject. All opinion polls indicated that even among BDP voters many planned to act against the advice of their leaders. An impressive coalition of Kurdish organizations spoke out in favor of a “yes.” Öcalan and the BDP clearly got it wrong.

I am sure that the strong opposition in Kurdish society against the boycott campaign has played an important role in the decisions of last week. In combination, as always, with cynical calculations about how best to survive. It is good to see that even hardheaded “total spoilers” can be influenced and pushed in a different direction. Most Kurds understood that they have a clear interest in changing the 1982 Constitution and, by showing so, forced their leaders into a tactical retreat. Let’s hope that next time around, when a structural solution to the Kurdish problem is at stake, the same grass roots realism pushes Kurdish leaders to change strategy. That would mean rejecting, without any preconditions, any further violence, putting aside maximalist inclinations and entering into a political dialogue with other parties on legitimate demands for more cultural freedom, sustainable economic development and an effective administration.

Obama’s choice as envoy to Ankara: Is Ricciardone a friend of Turkey?

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Wednesday, August 18, 2010

BARÇIN YİNANÇ

HURRIYAT

An American diplomat who used to work in the Ankara Embassy in the mid-1990s had told me he kept a map of the Sevres treaty on the wall of his study in the basement. He said he would show the map, which partitioned the territories of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I by ceding territory to Greece and Armenia and creating a Kurdish zone, to explain to those unfamiliar with Turkey the Turks’ fears of the revival of the Sevres treaty. I call this the “Sevres syndrome.”

I don’t have one, most probably because I went to a foreign school. But I grew up with parents who had Sevres syndrome. So you can be sure that generations have grown up with that *idée fixe* that Western powers never gave up the idea of partitioning Turkey among Kurds, Armenians and Greeks.

As a journalist who has spent the last 20 years running in the corridors of international politics, who held on-the-record as well as off-the-record conversations with decision-makers and occasionally had the opportunity to have a look at secret documents, I am always confronted with the criticism of being naïve when I would argue that dividing Turkey into pieces would not serve the interests of Western countries, like the United States for instance. They brush aside all my knowledge and experience. Yet while even I

do question whether I am really naïve or not, my friends who are lawyers, doctors or engineers – in short those whose professions have nothing to do with diplomacy and international politics – never question the validity of their strong conviction that the U.S. wants to divide Turkey into pieces. That’s why the U.S. government loves and supports Kurds, Armenians and Greeks. That’s why they would probably tell me, “That CIA agent was probably looking at the map to get inspired.”

Honestly, had I been an American diplomat in Turkey, I can imagine I could have had a hard time explaining to the head of the Turkey desk in Washington why even some of the Turkish elite are freaking out about the idea of holding a mass in Trabzon’s Sumela monastery or opening the Halki seminary. It probably would not make sense to explain to those dealing with Turkey that people are afraid that repeated masses by the Greek Orthodox in Trabzon will revive the Greek Pontic Empire in the Black Sea and that the opening of the Halki Seminary would turn Istanbul into a small Vatican. That’s why I had thought showing a map of Sevres was a good way to explain some of the attitude of Turks that might sound meaningless for some.

One of the jobs of diplomats is to explain the reasoning behind a certain policy action to their own government and their government’s actions to their host government. But as the recent case of the Israeli ambassador to Ankara proved, sometimes diplomats please neither their government nor the host government. While trying to explain the reasoning behind a certain policy choice, they might be labeled as identifying too much with the country where they have been assigned.

Francis Ricciardone, who has been chosen by U.S. President Barack Obama as his administration’s new envoy to Ankara, is under fire from Republicans. Apparently he is accused of being a soft-spoken person who sympathizes too much with the country of his assignment. Republicans are complaining that he did not support democratization efforts in Egypt and did not develop relations with the Egyptian opposition.

It comes as a big irony to see, of all people, Republicans suddenly become the beacon of democracy. What the Republicans are probably alluding to is the implementation of the Greater Middle East Initiative. In the framework of the initiative, there were efforts to organize representatives of civil society, but the initiative has often been obstructed by Egypt. Anyone who knows a bit of the nature of the regimes in these countries would know that they don’t like the idea of foreign envoys getting intermingled with opposition members and an ambassador that gets too close to the opposition is likely to be declared persona non grata. I am sure Ricciardone had a hard time preaching democracy to Egyptians while the administration he represented was enjoying an extremely brilliant human rights record with Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo.

I met Ricciardone when he was the deputy chief of mission in Ankara. He gave me the impression of a sound, objective diplomat who was trying to understand the country in which he works. So if he had to receive an instruction from Washington along the lines of, “We better tell the Turks to behave,” he would probably argue that it wouldn’t be a good idea since showing teeth to Turks would be counterproductive.

That’s why Republicans are looking for an envoy who will show Turks the day. What a futile effort! The objection of the Republicans is a joke.

Yet it is serious in the sense that there is a group in Washington that wants to lean on a “big stick” policy with Turkey in order to make it pay for its deteriorating relations with Israel and improving relations with Iran.

I believe the Obama administration is not willing to listen to the hawks. Yet that does not mean that the administration is happy with the current state of affairs and will sit and watch Turkey side with a foe while moving to the brink of war with another of its allies. Washington knows Turkey is too important to just turn its back on it. And Washington knows that Turks know they are not expendable.

It is no coincidence that two stories were leaked to the press one after the other. The first one was about a meeting that took place in the State Department on Turkey, which under normal circumstances should not carry news value, since any serious foreign ministry holds periodic meetings to overview its bilateral ties. Second, the details of the Obama-Erdoğan meeting was leaked, making it public that Obama said it would be difficult for Turkey to acquire U.S. weapons if it continues its policies on Israel and Iran.

By convincing Israel to accept the establishment of an international committee at the U.N., Washington conveyed the message to Turkey that it can still rely on the U.S. as an ally. But by leaking the two news stories, Washington tried to appeal to the Turkish public that its warnings go unheard by the Justice and Development Party, or AKP. It is a valid message: “If you don’t act as an ally, it will increasingly become difficult for me to act as an ally.”

The U.S. wants relations back on track. Yet it takes two to tango.

That will probably be the main message conveyed to the Turkish Foreign Ministry delegation headed by Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu that will be in Washington next week to review bilateral ties.

Seeking a new balance with the US

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Wednesday, August 18, 2010

MURAT YETKİN

HURRIYAT

Let’s continue with where we left off yesterday: The White House disclaimed the news in the Financial Times that the President of the United States Barack Obama gave an ultimatum to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during a G-20 meeting held in Toronto in June and, allegedly he said, “If you do not change your policy in Iran and Israel, you cannot purchase weapons.”

The other evening, Erdoğan on Habertürk refuted the ultimatum rumors, so did Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in the southern province of Kahramanmaraş.

But what was right was, as I wrote in Radikal daily, Obama told Erdoğan that sales of unmanned weaponry such as Reapers, which requires permission from the U.S. Senate, may be difficult because of the Congress’ reaction against Turkish policy in Iran and Israel.

Indeed, this was neither an ultimatum as exaggerated by the FT nor U.S. might get into an adventure and ruin relations with Turkey over Iraq and Afghanistan by giving an ultimatum for Turkish foreign policy Iran and Israel.

I received the following information from American sources that I talked to yesterday. Yes, the U.S. is disturbed by worsening Turkish-Israeli relations and by having differences of opinion with Turkey on Iran. And my source said in a way to confirm Erdoğan that the situation was worse two months ago, but not now.

What’s on the table?

However, the U.S. and Turkey have cooperation in many different areas and for Obama Iraq and Afghanistan take the lead among the most strategic.

All these will be laid down on the table next week (Aug. 23-24) during a high level meeting in Washington.

Davutoğlu assigned a delegation last week to attend “deep-dive” meetings by U.S. State Secretary Hillary Clinton. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Williams Burns leads the American team. And Turkish Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu will lead the Turkish delegation. Turkish Foreign Ministry Undersecretary for U.S. Affairs Ambassador Selim Yenel and Undersecretary for NATO Affairs Ambassador Tacan İldem will accompany Sinirlioğlu. Turkish Ambassador to Washington Namık Tan will also attend the meetings.

For Turkey, two subjects are critical, one of which is about current issues. Turkish Foreign Ministry sources list them as Iraq, Iran and Israel. Afghanistan will be taken up under the NATO heading. But there is also an economic issue on the agenda.

Turkey and U.S. stands so close on the Iraq issue. Both want a stable government in Iraq. The outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK, continues to be trouble, but Obama focuses on the pullout with the least damage.

On the Iranian issue, Turkish delegation will explain the “No” vote in the United Nations Security Council seeking sanctions against Iran. Turkey will also try to clarify the purpose of “No” was to keep Iran at the table and was not against West. (Among Americans, however, some believe Iran signed the Tehran agreement with Turkey and Brazil because China could vote in favor of sanctions.)

Americans also believe Israel should be allowed to make its presence felt. Israel’s going against Turkey is perceived as something poisoning the chemistry between the two countries.

There is no ‘meeting the halfway’ but...

The subject of Israel is rather complex. Turkish delegation will repeat the thesis “We have no problem with Israel, but the Israeli government has some...” and continue to seek support of the State Dept. American sources, however, complain that Israeli officials say the opposite, “We have nothing against Turkey, but the Turkish government...”

The U.S. delegation during the meetings might say to Turkish side that for Israel to meet “apology and compensation” demand of the Erdoğan government, several steps could be necessary so that Israeli officials might perceive this as mellowing.

As for the other issue on the table, Davutoğlu in his Kahramanmaraş speech yesterday implied “We create a new image for Turkey abroad,” which in short, “We are not overlooking the issues voiced by the U.S., but are not exaggerating them either. Our alliance policy towards U.S. did not change, but the world did. Turkey’s role in the world and what it can do have changed. We should set-up a balance suitable to the situation.”

To wrap it up, the Erdoğan government is trying not to “meet the halfway” with the Obama administration but to seek support in order to break the opposition in the U.S. Congress due to Turkish foreign policy in Iran and Israel.

Possible but not easy...

It is possible because the U.S. is aware of Turkey’s increasing importance and does not want to throw off cooperation with Turkey. A sign for this is the Turkish-American Business Council agreement expected to be signed in Oct. during a trip to U.S. by Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan and Industry Minister Zafer Çağlayan. It will be the third

agreement U.S. will sign following the ones signed with India and Brazil. That is to say, U.S. has intention to diversify bilateral relations in a new strategic dimension. On the other hand, it is not easy to settle a balance because Americans believe Turkey cannot do critical jobs in the Middle East by fighting with Israel all the time.

- Murat Yetkin is a columnist for the daily Radikal, in which this piece appeared Wednesday. It was translated into English by the Daily News staff.
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The usual tragicomedy

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Wednesday, August 18, 2010

YUSUF KANLI

HURRIYAT

The “reform” the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, parliamentary majority unilaterally undertook preserves the seats of the justice minister and his undersecretary at the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors, or HSYK, while it increases the number of elected members in a manner that might help the government expand its efficient control of the chief body that looks into the promotions, appointments and disciplinary matters (punishment) of judges and prosecutors across the country.

The minister and his undersecretary preserving their seats in the “reformed” HSYK is one of the prime reasons cited by opponents in appealing the nation to vote “no” in the upcoming referendum.

Indeed, the current structure of the HSYK has been a problematic one. Not only can the board not meet in the absence of the Justice Ministry undersecretary, who in the absence of the minister is the “natural chairman” of the HSYK, but the board neither has a secretariat of its own nor the power to order an investigation as it does not have an investigative unit of its own.

Increasing the number of seats on the board from seven to 22 or 28 or to whatever would not amount to a real reform of the board as long as the heavy influence of the political authority in its decision-making remained intact or is further enforced (under the text going to referendum it does not have a secretariat of its own) or if its secretariat is affiliated to the Justice Ministry – that’s what the law provides – and the board cannot launch an investigation on its own but could only ask the minister to open an investigation.

With the amendment which will be put to vote on Sept. 12, the HSYK is not becoming independent or being given some degree of autonomy; on the contrary it will become totally affiliated to the Justice Ministry as if it were one of the ministry’s many departments, yet a very important one, under the orders of the minister.

If the amendments are approved by the nation in the upcoming referendum, which appears heading to a cliffhanger vote, the government hopes that it will become easier for it to have the decisive say in the promotions and appointments of judges and prosecutors. What happened yesterday is indeed a product of that firm hope of the government. Just as it postponed the collective talks with the labor unions representing public employees, saying that after the referendum – should the nation approve the amendment package and in the meantime if the labor unions lend support to the amendment package and also campaign in favor of a “yes” vote – the government and the labor unions could sit down

for collective “bargaining” talks, the government announced that the appointments of some 140 key judicial and prosecution posts would be made after the referendum, “hopefully” with the revamped HSYK.

Will the public employees be offered the right to go on strike if the collective “bargaining” talks ended in disagreement? No, instead of the current practice which authorizes the government to decide single-handedly on the pay hikes for the public employees, a government-appointed “arbitration board” would make the final decision. Will there be any difference? No, the government will still make the decision, just through a board.

Similarly, will the new and enhanced group of elected HSYK members decide on those 140 or so key judicial and prosecution posts? No, it will still be the minister and his undersecretary who will make the decision. What will be the difference? If the majority of the nation votes “yes” in the referendum and the HSYK’s structure is revamped, it would become easier for the minister and his undersecretary to manipulate through various cunning methods or through political pressure to get the appointments wanted by the ministry rubberstamped by the new HSYK.

This is not the first time that the HSYK and the government have found themselves at odds over some key appointments. The reason is rather simple. The government has been in a revanchist campaign against some sections of Turkish society, including the military, judiciary, some journalists and academics and would like to keep in their seats some judges and prosecutors who are believed to have been contributing to that campaign, while the elected members of the HSYK are stressing that no one is untouchable. This fight is a natural consequence of the awkward “I am seeking a prosecutor” statement of the prime minister that preceded the Ergenekon thriller and the schizophrenic behavioral pattern of a key Istanbul prosecutor ever since.

A “no” vote will unfortunately be no remedy to this tragicomedy, as the existing text is no cure to the illness but a “yes” vote will help the AKP put the next episode of this tragicomedy on stage.

No Comment

Turkish-Azerbaijani relations

HASAN KANBOLAT

President Abdullah Gül paid an official visit to Azerbaijan from Feb. 16-17, 2010, at the invitation of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. President Gül was accompanied by Energy and Natural Resources Minister and Turkish-Azerbaijani Joint Economic Commission Co-Chairman Taner Yıldız. A Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance Agreement was signed by the two countries. Gül attended the opening ceremonies for the general directorate building of the Azer-Türk Bank, of which Ziraat Bank is a

shareholder, and an iron and steel plant constructed by Turkish businessman Dağıştan Turanlı.

Turkish-Azerbaijani relations are being approached with a mentality of “one nation, two states,” as Gül puts it. Bilateral relations are improving particularly in the field of politics, security, economy and culture. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) crude oil pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipeline projects are concrete indicators of the cooperation between the two countries in the field of energy. Construction for the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line, which started in 2008, is in progress, and it is expected to be completed in 2012.

Azerbaijan is no longer the impoverished country of the 1990s. It is no longer a country in need of Turkey’s government scholarships for its students. Prosperous Azerbaijani companies have started to invest in Turkey, and Azerbaijani citizens are spending their holidays in Turkey; some have even settled here. This indicates a new dynamism that will help shape bilateral relations in the coming decades.

However, certain glitches in their relationship cannot be completely eliminated. These glitches linger as the two countries have not developed a consistent approach to relations. Although Turkey canceled visa requirements for Azerbaijani citizens, Baku continues to keep its visa requirements for Turks in place. Turkish goods are still subject to non-tariff barriers at Azerbaijani customs. A container’s average waiting time at customs is 11 days around the world, but it can be as long as 50 days at Azerbaijani customs. Turkish citizens who are married, have children and have established businesses in Azerbaijan still complain that they are unable to obtain residence or work permits.

The problems that Turkey must settle include: signing of a free trade agreement; implementing the joint industrial zone and free zone projects; Azerbaijan’s ending of visa requirements for Turkish citizens; permitting Turkish banks to operate in Azerbaijan; eliminating the long delays at Azerbaijani customs; facilitating Turkish citizens’ ability to obtain residence and work permits; increasing transportation quotas from 5,000 to 40,000; settling tax-related issues; and implementing reference prices for Turkish goods. To solve these and other problems, Foreign Trade Minister Zafer Çağlayan proposes that a group consisting of politicians and bureaucrats from both countries should be established to come up with a solution.

Azerbaijani policies have long been based on a false assumption that said “No damage will be done to us, even if we neglect Turkey.” Baku has long neglected Turkish intellectuals, bureaucrats, nongovernmental organizations, media and the Turkish general public. It has opted for the convenience of pursuing its Turkey policy via high-level talks with party leaders, government officials and the General Staff. Despite the fact that Azerbaijani territory is still occupied by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey have failed to develop a joint policy regarding Armenia or establish joint research centers. Baku denied Turkey the economic privileges it granted the Russian Federation and Iran. While occasionally raising its voice in protest of Turkey’s Armenia policy, Azerbaijan chose to ignore the close relations the Russian Federation and Iran had with Armenia.

Everyone must see that the “in the bag” policy employed between Turkey and Azerbaijan no longer applies. Ankara and Baku need a new and realistic policy. It is high time that the brotherhood-of-the-nations discourse be reflected in the policies and legal systems of both countries.

I believe that Azerbaijan's young and dynamic ambassador to Turkey, Faig Bagirov, who assumed his post in early August, will bring a new dynamism to bilateral relations. Bagirov has experience both in Turkey and the wider Middle East. He will certainly make use of his experience during his new term in office.

18 August 2010, Wednesday
TODAYS ZAMAN

Azerbaijan (1) -- a country of contrasts

AMANDA PAUL

TODAYS ZAMAN

To most people Azerbaijan conjures up images of oil wells and gas fields. For those who know it a little better, they may associate it with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. But Azerbaijan is much more than this. Known as the land of fire due to its rich energy reserves, Azerbaijan is something of a unique country. Once an important trading point on the Great Silk Road, it is a country of contrasts made up of majestic mountains, lush green forests, wonderful lakes, arid deserts and modern metropolises. Even Azerbaijanis themselves are rather unique, sharing a European, Muslim and post-Soviet heritage -- enjoying a stiff glass of vodka equally as much as a good glass of hot tea.

Baku, the windy city, is transforming into an impressive capital. Spanking new buildings rub shoulder to shoulder with the historic remains of old Baku. Always keen to impress, Azerbaijan will soon be home to a new Guggenheim as well as the world's biggest flag, which will be larger than a football pitch. But while Baku may be a dazzling show of modern life, once outside, "old Azerbaijan" is still alive and kicking. Crazy cows wander down roads side by side with modern 4x4s and rusty old Ladas. Villagers still collect water from the thousands of mountain streams and a mouthful of golden teeth is viewed as a sign of wealth. Up in the highest peaks life remains very much as it has for centuries, with farmers making a living (and a pretty lucrative one at that) from sheep farming -- although many of them now have satellite dishes attached to their small, stone dwellings. However, as with many other former Soviet countries, transformation has not been easy. Back in 1991 Azerbaijan was an unknown country in an exotic part of the world. Its economy was in tatters and it was (and still is) at war with neighbor Armenia over the Azerbaijani province of Nagorno-Karabakh. At a time when Azerbaijan should have been focusing on nation-building, the country was brought to its knees during a war that left almost 1 million Azerbaijanis displaced as Armenia took control of the Karabakh province, going on to occupy seven surrounding regions. While thousands of Armenians were also displaced, Armenia received support and sympathy from around the world -- thanks to its massive diaspora community.

Azerbaijan, on the other hand, was portrayed as an aggressor and left to struggle. The US (which at the time would have been hard pressed to find Azerbaijan on a map, let alone begin to understand the politics of the region) placed sanctions on Azerbaijan under Section 907a of the Freedom Support Act and prohibited any kind of direct US government assistance to the Azerbaijani government. Although successive US presidents have denounced it, none have been able to get Congress to repeal it, although it was finally waived on a year-by-year basis after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. With the country falling into political turmoil and on the brink of collapse, Azerbaijan was in desperate need of a strong leader: Enter Haydar Aliyev.

The phrase “L’etat c’est moi” could have been created just for Aliyev. Although he died in 2003, he is still known as the country’s national leader -- the man who saved Azerbaijan. A former KGB chief, Aliyev picked up Azerbaijan and under his strong leadership, vision, undeniable charm and savvy approach put Azerbaijan on the road to recovery, including negotiating the “contract of the century,” which gave a Western consortium a stake in Azerbaijan’s rich energy resources with big dividends for Baku. Although far from an angel, he became a respected statesman and today he is still hero-worshipped by almost all Azerbaijanis. With his death, his son Ilham “inherited” the presidency and, while the West may criticize Azerbaijan’s somewhat slow approach towards Western-style democracy -- having something of a “managed” democracy, with elections still being some distance from being free -- there can be no doubt that he and his wife, Mehriban, are extremely popular and his leadership is supported by vast swathes of the population, which is a far cry from the situation in many other former Soviet states. Most Azerbaijanis seem to believe Ilham Aliyev is on the right track both politically and economically and that democracy will develop over time, as in neighboring Turkey. They want stability and prosperity first. Opposition leaders receive very little support and are even unable to mobilize themselves into one bloc.

Oil and gas have given Azerbaijan the luxury of being able to maintain rapid economic growth. While Azerbaijan is frequently criticized for its skyrocketing defense spending, billions have also been spent on improving the lives of the people. All over the country new roads, schools, hospitals, sports complexes, cultural centers, museums, parks, holiday resorts, etc. are springing up. However, no matter how wealthy Azerbaijan becomes, a cloud of bitterness will hang over the country until there is peace in the region and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is resolved.

Peace talks have been going on for years, with no conclusion, and while there are four UN resolutions requesting Armenia to remove its forces, they remain on paper only. Ordinary Azerbaijanis whom I’ve spoken with seem to support the approach of the president, although they have little idea about precisely what is being negotiated with Armenia. The idea of making concessions is something inconceivable to them. The perception of Armenia is that it is a country on the brink of economic collapse, that floods of Armenians are still abandoning their homeland due to the dire economic conditions and, as one man told me, “In Yerevan they have to queue up for bread.” Nobody wants a new war; they simply want what is rightfully theirs returned.

18 August 2010, Wednesday

AKP government plans to change its Cyprus policy

EMRE USLU

Since 2004 the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has adopted a new policy to promote the peace and unity of Cyprus. For that matter the AKP supported the referendum in 2004, but unity was rejected by the Greek Cypriots with a “no” vote. Prior to the referendum, the European Union promised the Turkish side an end to the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots if the Greek Cypriots voted no and became an obstacle to unity.

Since then, the EU has not kept its promise to end the isolation of Turkish Cyprus but still requests that Turkey open its ports to Greek Cyprus and recognize it as an EU country.

Furthermore, Greek Cyprus has been blocking chapters that would bring Turkey closer to the EU.

Turkish leaders are frustrated with the attitude adopted by the EU and Greek Cyprus. Thus, they are seriously reconsidering their position and thinking about changing their current policies. The first signal came from Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. In a statement made in May, Davutoğlu underlined that Turkey would open all of its ports to Greek Cyprus if the world and the EU opened two ports and an airport to Turkish Cyprus. It was clear that Turkey was using this position as a bargaining chip, yet neither Greek Cyprus nor the EU agreed to Davutoğlu's suggestion.

Now reliable sources are saying the AKP government is reconsidering its position and thinking about altering it by the end of September or the beginning of October. Sources close to Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Çiçek confirm that Turkey is preparing to launch a new diplomatic initiative towards the international recognition of Turkish Cyprus. The reason the AKP may be planning to alter its policy is because of their frustration with the EU. Çiçek, on more than one occasion, has himself mentioned that they are seriously considering launching such an initiative. When I asked Hüseyin Çelik, AK Party deputy chairman, about such a possibility, he neither denied nor confirmed anything. Instead, he stated, "Turkey will not be the one leaving the negotiating table; yet, it appears that things cannot go on like this forever." By this statement Mr. Çelik referred to the deadlock and signaled a possible change.

Furthermore, Çelik referred to what Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had said during the fourth traditional iftar (fast-breaking) dinner at his party's headquarters in the Turkish capital on Thursday organized by AK Party Deputy Chairman Ömer Çelik. Numerous ministers, representatives of the media, foreign envoys to Turkey -- except for Israeli Ambassador Gaby Levy -- and religious leaders of different faiths attended the dinner. During the gathering, Erdoğan urged the EU to adopt a constructive and determined approach to solving the Cyprus issue. "We want a just and lasting solution to the Cyprus issue by year's end," he said. "Efforts to solve it can't continue forever."

On a separate occasion, Turkey's chief European Union negotiator, Egemen Bağış, reiterated the Turkish call for the EU to stay loyal to its commitments. "We are expecting the European Union to meet its obligations. The joint drive of Turkey and the EU for a common future is a mutual promise based on agreements, conventions and anonymously voted EU resolutions," Bağış said in a letter he sent to British daily The Times. He also said Turkey as a country had been taking steps to normalize its relations with Armenia and that it had extended support to ongoing settlement talks in Cyprus.

Foreign observers say it would be a grave mistake for Turkey to adopt such policy and that it would backfire. Yet Turkish diplomatic sources seem to think Turkey will be left no option if the Greek Cypriots continue to block Turkey's path to the EU. Diplomatic circles in Ankara believe that while Turkey is promoting negotiations, it must also continue to prepare the groundwork for possible diplomatic recognition of Turkish Cyprus. The purpose of this strategy would be to put pressure on the Greek side to come to a reasonable agreement. As a first step, it would be enough to promote allowing the Turkish side to have recognized "observer" status in international organizations. Sources told me that depending on the negotiation situation the AKP leadership is planning a new approach that will make the traditionalist leader of Turkish Cyprus, Derviş Eroğlu, very happy.

17 August 2010, Tuesday
TODAYS ZAMAN

Non-Muslims and the referendum

ABDULLAH BUZKURAT

Despite all the shortcomings and challenges we are faced with in Turkey, change is gradually but firmly taking hold in the social, political and economic fabric of the country.

Like it or not, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) deserves much of the credit for that, as it has been the only political actor pushing for change in this country. Yet, at times, one cannot resist the frustrating feeling that the government could and should have done much more in its eight years of rule.

historic mass on Sunday at the Sümela Monastery in the Black Sea coastal province of Trabzon was the first in our young republican history and a taboo-breaking event. Three-thousand Orthodox Christians, from Turkey and abroad, flocked to the ancient monastery to attend the ceremony, conducted by Fener Greek Patriarch Bartholomew, a Turkish citizen.

As democratization makes inroads into the daily lives of the Turkish people, resulting in a more confident society that does not shy away from confronting its own past, the ultra-nationalists and isolationists in Turkey are having a hard time mobilizing xenophobic anti-minority feelings. In sharp contrast to almost a decade ago, when most media outlets were feeding nationalistic fervor, the front pages of dailies yesterday took a positive tone about the ceremony at the Sümela Monastery.

I believe in giving credit where credit is due. Granted, the United States and the European Union have been pushing Turkey to grant rights to its minorities and non-Muslim religious communities, but that in itself was not enough to get governments to act on these demands in the past. It took the AK Party government to allow a church service to be held once a year at Sümela in a gradual loosening of restrictions on religious expression.

Another breakthrough decision adopted by this government matters a great deal to the Armenian community in Turkey, as well as to Armenians abroad. A religious service scheduled to be held at the 10th century Armenian Akdamar Church in Lake Van on Sept. 19 is a significant event marking the reconciliation of Turks with their own past. The church, regarded as one of the finest architectural examples of ancient Armenian civilization in Turkey, reopened in 2007 as a museum following a \$1.5 million restoration fund allocated by the Turkish government.

The government is also providing political cover and support for an ongoing legal case called Sledgehammer over a comprehensive military plot targeting minorities and religious communities in an attempt to foment chaos in society and create an embarrassment for the government abroad so that they can launch a coup. The indictment, accepted by the courts, unveils overwhelming evidence on schemes to, amongst other things, confiscate the accounts and assets held by minorities. Another plot, called the Cage plan, that was exposed earlier, sought to undermine the government's credibility by staging various attacks and organizing assassinations of non-Muslim minority leaders.

Against this background, it is quite understandable that minority groups and non-Muslim religious communities in Turkey are planning to say “yes” to the constitutional changes in the upcoming national referendum on Sept 12. They understand very well that these government-endorsed reforms will further solidify the rights of citizens, including non-Muslims, and ensure constitutionally protected rights for everybody living on Turkish soil. Though the changes are not comprehensive and only cover 26 articles, when adopted, they will offer expanded remedies to citizens for rights violations, including an ombudsman office and the individual right to petition the Constitutional Court.

The Bugün daily on Sunday ran an excellent article surveying minorities and non-Muslim communities on how they view the referendum. It followed an earlier Today’s Zaman article that appeared last month. Greek Orthodox Patriarchate spokesman Dositheos Anagnostopoulos was quoted as saying he believed the constitutional changes would further democratize the country. He said as a Turkish citizen he would vote “yes” in the referendum and that this was the view of the patriarchate, as well.

Turkish-Armenian newspaper Agos Editor-in-Chief Etyen Mahçupyan is also among those who advocate constitutional changes. Mahçupyan, whose name was on the hit list in the Sledgehammer coup plan, said he would vote for the changes. “The reforms may not be enough, but they are important when you look at our past in this country,” he said. According to Ara Koçunyan, editor-in-chief of the Armenian daily Jamanak, published in İstanbul, non-Muslim minorities have benefited from the government’s reforms.

“We need to say ‘yes’ on Sept. 12. Saying ‘no’ would give hope to coup supporters,” argued Mihail Vasiliadis, editor-in-chief of Apoyevmatini, a weekly Greek newspaper serving the 2,500-strong Greek community in İstanbul. Zeki Basatemir, a member of the board of directors of the Syriac Catholic Church Foundation in Turkey, said they will vote “yes” on the referendum because this is the first time they’ve found politicians in the government interested in their problems. Assyrian community spokesman Yusuf Bektaş said his personal vote on the changes will be “yes” as well.

The best summary provided on the perspective of Turkey’s minorities was given by Kezban Hatemi, an attorney specializing in minority rights, who said the “not enough, but yes” campaign launched by civil society groups also reflects the views of non-Muslim minorities in Turkey. She said that what they are expecting from the government as the next step is a brand new civilian constitution that will broaden individual rights and freedoms.

I think an overwhelming majority of Turks are also asking the same from the government: The next step is a brand new constitution.

17 August 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The ban on face-covering veils from the West to the East (1)

ALI BULAC

TODAYS ZAMAN

Certain countries in Europe have started to talk about banning face-covering veils. In France, where the ban is fiercely defended, it was approved by the French Parliament with a vote of 336 to one. The ban will take effect in September.

France previously imposed a headscarf ban on high school students in 2004. According to some reports, there are around 2,000 Muslim women in France who cover their face with

a veil when they leave their homes. Other countries are laying the social and psychological groundwork for similar bans. For example, British MP Philip Hollobone wants Britain to ban the face-covering veil as well.

Those who defend the ban say the veil makes a woman's face unrecognizable in public spaces. Of course, this is an "understandable" reason. Islamic law permits women to uncover their face when engaging social and economic relations that involve rights and obligations or in cases where there is suspicion of a crime. For example, even according to classical Islamic jurists, when a business owner is accepting a return he has the right to ask a woman to lift her veil in order to avoid accepting a return from someone he never sold anything to. But this does not require a general ban on face-covering veils.

The excuses that people who defend the ban put forward are all artificial and lack legal basis. These people have other hidden reasons. Generally and categorically, those in favor of the ban do not want to accept that Muslims, and particularly Muslim women who adhere to the veil obligation, have a basic right or acceptable freedom to express themselves according to their own traditions in Western social and public life. But neither official muftis nor the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) can decide if a burqa or face-covering veil is a religious obligation. It is up to the woman who believes with all her heart that the burqa or veil is a part of her religion. Apologetically, official muftis and the OIC secretary-general want to remove the face-covering veil, the chador and the burqa from religion.

The reason behind this is that, according to the established definition of a person in the cultural subconscious of the West, a woman cannot participate in social life if she covers herself, especially her face, and if she wears a burqa or chador like women in Afghanistan then there is absolutely no way that can be considered an approved freedom. An important indication that the excuses for the ban are bogus is a report prepared in the midst of these debates by Germany's intelligence agency, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, which is seeking to ban the half-century-old Islamic Community of the National Vision (IGMG).

In its 2009 report, the agency describes the IGMG as an organization that is against the integration of immigrants into western democracies.

The annual report discusses the activities of groups that are believed to be in favor of violence and against the German constitution. The IGMG is assessed broadly in the report every year.

In this year's report, the agency notes that the ICMG observes a broad and legal strategy but uses this to create living spaces in Germany that are appropriate for Islamic law.

According to the report, the ICMG could in this way encourage the formation of parallel societies that live separately from German society and start a process of radicalization (Taraf daily, June 22, 2010). Basically what the report is saying is that even if the IGMG is functioning legally it should be banned because it does not conform to German values and lifestyles.

That is where the problem stems from. The western mentality cannot accept people and lifestyles that are different from its concept of human nature and its lifestyle. It tries to assimilate all differences by way of social assimilation (assimilation, modernization, westernization, etc.) and political projects and tries to get rid of groups that resist assimilation either by alienating or banning them. In France, some people even want the Quran banned on grounds that it has precepts that are against the values of the republic.

There is an alarming “enmity against Islam” hidden in the subconscious of the West. Recall that when Serbs were slaughtering Muslims Jean Baudrillard had said that if one day Europe came to the conviction that it could not assimilate the Muslims living in Europe, then the world could see the same kind of carnage on the streets of Paris or London as well.

13 August 2010, Friday