

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD
TURKEY

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SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

SUMMARY-POLITICAL NEWS

War on terror ‘cannot be won without guns,’ says new chief of General Staff

The general set to be appointed as the new chief of General Staff on Friday said Wednesday that the fight against terrorism cannot be won without using weapons and that a “single-type” military service should be enforced. The views of the new chief of General Staff are different from his predecessors.

President Gül meets a diverse team of 20 researching the Kurdish issue

President Abdullah Gül met with Professor Vamık Volkan, and an accompanying 19-strong committee, from Ekopolitik at Tarabya Mansion Thursday, Doğan news agency reported.

After a nearly 3 hour interview, Volkan said Gül signaled the importance of dialogue, and added that the solution to the Kurdish question did not lie in fighting. He said his group operates in an apolitical position, and that both ex-members of the National Intelligence Organization, or MIT, and Kurds who had come down from the mountains are among their group, so they are in a unique position to investigate possible solutions to the problems facing Turkey.

Erdoğan urges MHP grass roots for support at referendum

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan devoted his speech during a rally in the Black Sea province of Samsun on Sunday to supporters of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), whom he called on for a “yes” vote in the Sept. 12 referendum on a constitutional amendment package, saying the opposition by the MHP administration to the package lacks plausible grounds.

SUMMARY-GEO-STRATEGIC NEWS

Turkey Aid to Pakistan

The “Freedom Fellowship Neighborhood” campaign set up by daily Hürriyet to aid Pakistani flood victims is sending 195 more pre-fabricated houses to help the South Asian country’s destitute citizens.

A train carrying humanitarian aid left Turkey for Pakistan on Tuesday to heal the wounds of the flood disaster. The train is loaded with humanitarian aid collected by Sabah newspaper, ATV channel and Turkish Red Crescent.

UN says Israel not cooperating with flotilla probe

Israel is not cooperating with the UN Human Rights Council’s probe of its deadly raid on an international aid flotilla that was trying to break the blockade of Gaza, a UN official said on Tuesday.

Turkey, Russia compete to tilt balance in the South Caucasus

The security pact clinched between Russia and Armenia, Azerbaijan’s long-time foe, on Friday, assigning Russia with the important role of securing Armenia in the event of an attack, marks a critical turning point in the security of the South Caucasus, as Turkey has also made a play in the region recently.

Turkey made a pre-emptive move just days before Russian President Dmitry Medvedev’s visit to the Armenian capital, Yerevan, on Friday, as Turkish President Abdullah Gül reiterated his country’s solidarity with Azerbaijan by signing a similar treaty with the oil-rich Muslim nation.

Vying with Russia in the South Caucasus is a new challenge for Turkey, one it has not tackled before and for which it is largely unprepared. A rare oasis of economic growth in Azerbaijan in recent years thanks to an oil windfall has offset the military balance against Armenia, as the Caspian country has heavily invested in its military might.

Turkish, Armenian youth join basketball exchange program

Two dozen Turkish and Armenian teens will take part in a sports exchange program in Turkey later this month as part of an initiative sponsored by the Sports United division of the US Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and organized by the nonprofit World Learning organization.

We hope the program inspires Armenia and Turkey to support young athletes and that these kinds of sports initiatives serve as a bridge to the future for young people of both countries," Chargé d'Affaires Doug Silliman of the US mission in Turkey said

Israel concerned over Turkey's role in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Israel is concerned about Turkey's growing engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, claiming Turkey's role in the Balkans may cause serious problems for the ethnically split Balkan country, the prime minister the Republika Srpska has said.

Milorad Dodik, the prime minister of the Republika Srpska, a semi-autonomous Serbian political entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina, said he and Israeli President Shimon Peres, with whom he met during his recent visit to Israel, "had a lot in common on all issues, particularly those relating to Turkey's growing engagement in the Balkans," as he spoke to reporters at a press conference in Banja Luka on Thursday.

'EU should also extend necessary support for permanent solution in Cyprus'

Turkey's State Minister & Chief Negotiator for EU talks Egemen Bağış said on Thursday that European Union (EU) should extend necessary support for a permanent solution in Cyprus.

SUMMARY-ECONOMIC NEWS

Istanbul animal market faces accusations of mistreatment, smuggling

From cats and dogs to tropical birds and giant turtles, Istanbul's Animal and Flower Market offers a wide variety of animals for sale – creatures that critics say are mistreated, unhealthy and perhaps even illegally trafficked.

Turkey to import 330,000 tons of duty-free EU wheat

Turkey's grain board will allow private companies to import 330,000 metric tons of duty-free European Union wheat this year as part of measures to ease price swings in the domestic market.

Istanbul Fashion Week starts

Istanbul Fashion Week began Wednesday within the scope of the Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture events.

Turkey ranks 2nd after China in "top 225 contractors" list

Turkey ranked the second in "top 225 contractors" list of Engineering News Record (ENR) magazine. Turkey, with 33 companies, is on the second line after China which topped the list with 54 companies.

Turkish firm to complete 90 bridges construction in Turkmenistan

Turkish construction company Net Yapi is about to complete construction of 90 bridges across Turkmenistan, a company executive said.

Chinese interest in Turkey growing

Chinese interest in Turkey is growing as the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Turkey and China next year draws closer.

More news featuring Turkey has started appearing in the Chinese media. National Geographic China published an interview with Turkish Culture and Tourism Minister Ertugrul Günay in its August edition.

Two Nabucco supply lines to be built at Turkey's borders

Two supply lines will be constructed at Turkey's borders with Georgia and Iraq as part of the Nabucco Natural Gas Pipeline project. During their latest meeting in the Turkish capital of Ankara, shareholders of Nabucco project approved the construction of two supply lines extending to Georgia and Iraq, officials said in a written statement on Monday.

Russia's Gazprom increases amount of gas to Turkey

Gazprom, Russian energy company, increased the amount of natural gas transfer to Turkey. Gazprom spokesman Sergei Kupriyanov said on Thursday that the transfer of natural gas to Turkey via Blue Stream was doubled to 37 million cubic meters as of yesterday. Kupriyanov noted that Gazprom increased the amount after an explosion occurred on Iran-Turkey natural gas pipeline.

Vegetable prices to remain high until end of Ramadan'

Agriculturalists' Association of Turkey (TZD) President İbrahim Yetkin has said that supermarkets, rather than wholesale markets, now have the ability to determine produce prices and that therefore customers will continue to pay high prices until the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, since supermarkets are trying to capitalize on the abnormally high demand seen at this time of year.

At a press conference on Sunday in Ankara, Yetkin said it would be wrong to attribute all the price hikes to crop failure stemming from high temperatures. "Prices will not go down during Ramadan," he said.

SUMMARY-SOCIAL NEWS

Hot weather will continue throughout Turkey for the next few days, the country's Meteorology Institute said Thursday, with temperatures expected to increase four to six degrees.

The temperatures in Istanbul will be around 33 to 34 degrees Celsius while the coastal provinces of İzmir and Antalya, two areas that attract a lot of tourism, will see 36 and 35 degrees respectively.

The rise in temperatures will also continue in the southern province of Adana, where the cotton crop has become ready for picking 10 to 15 days earlier than normal due to the heat.

POLITICAL NEWS

War on terror ‘cannot be won without guns,’ says new chief of General Staff

Thursday, August 26, 2010

ANKARA- Hürriyet Daily News

The general set to be appointed as the new chief of General Staff on Friday said Wednesday that the fight against terrorism cannot be won “without using weapons” and that a “single-type” military service should be enforced.

Gen. Işık Koşaner, speaking at the handover ceremony Wednesday, said the fight against terrorism is the job of the Interior Ministry, supported by the Turkish Land Forces Command.

Regarding the fight against terrorism, Koşaner said the struggle would continue “as long as those with guns who threaten our unity, put lives in danger, commit countless murders, prevent our country from developing and pay no attention to our laws remain in the mountains. There are no alternatives.”

While Koşaner said he agreed that the fight against terrorism should expand beyond guns, he said, “It is not possible to win [the war] without weapons.”

With reference to the legitimacy of the fight against terrorism, Koşaner said the legal responsibility belonged to law enforcement agencies tied to the Interior Ministry, supported by the Turkish Land Forces Command.

“The Land Forces Command has completed all tasks at the risk of their own lives and will continue with the same determination.”

Koşaner also addressed media reports regarding soldiers who disobey rules and orders.

“Some media outlets have targeted the Land Forces based on speculation, even though the appropriate legal action is taken against these soldiers,” he said.

According to Koşaner, soldiers remain the key to success. “There is no task a well-trained soldier cannot overcome.”

A “single-type” military service, in which everyone would serve under equal conditions, was suggested by the general to “better benefit from the educated man-power of the country for a longer period of time.”

Koşaner denied criticisms that non-commissioned officers and private soldiers do not receive sufficient training, stating that experienced personnel lead 10 weeks of basic and specialty training, followed by three weeks of orientation.

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç said he has positive feelings regarding payment for partial exemption from military service, reported Anatolia news agency late Wednesday.

“I have a positive attitude regarding paid military service. This is not a privilege. It is something practiced worldwide. And it has to be,” Arınç told journalists. “In my opinion, if it is needed and necessary, paid military service may be introduced again in Turkey, just like in the past.”

According to Arınç, the General Staff however, through the Defense Ministry, has declared that paid military service should not be considered because of the army's great need for soldiers. “Maybe the views of the new chief of General Staff will be different from his predecessors. The opinions of the national defense regarding soldier demand are important to us. I would be pleased to see a softened attitude toward paid military service.”

President Gül meets a diverse team of 20 researching the Kurdish issue

Thursday, August 26, 2010

ISTANBUL – Daily News with Wires

HURRIYAT

President Abdullah Gül met with Professor Vamık Volkan, and an accompanying 19-strong committee, from Ekopolitik at Tarabya Mansion Thursday, Doğan news agency reported.

After a nearly 3 hour interview, Volkan said Gül signaled the importance of dialogue, and added that the solution to the Kurdish question did not lie in fighting. He said his group operates in an apolitical position, and that both ex-members of the National Intelligence Organization, or MIT, and Kurds who had come down from the mountains are among their group, so they are in a unique position to investigate possible solutions to the problems facing Turkey.

Adding that he had spoken with President Gül three weeks ago, Volkan said they were pleased to see that Gül had read the reports they had presented him. Ekopolitik reaches out to Turks, Kurds and people from other regions of the country and shares their findings with the public, said Volkan.

“It is forbidden to talk about politics in Ekopolitik. People simply gather to set up a laboratory,” said Volkan. He said that politicians had little chance to construct such a group given that politics, votes and the economy are real. “We do not work for the government. The [democratic] initiative exists or it does not. We didn’t speak about the referendum or politics,” said Volkan.

Asked whether they were predominantly researching the Kurdish issue, Volkan said there were a lot of aspects to the Kurdish issue. “Meetings were held with the governor, mayor, university officials and young people in Hakkari. We even sent a psychoanalyst who did research on the subject of children who throw stones,” said Volkan.

“This core group is gradually getting together. We have a new goal and everybody has different suggestions. My suggestion might not fit yours and might create different feelings within you. If we talk about this, suggestions that everybody can support are found. If these suggestions are taken, nobody is humiliated,” said Volkan.

Noting that President Gül attaches great significance to the practices of nongovernmental organizations, Volkan said that Gül is warm to the idea an expanding an inclusive research body such as Ekopolitik. After visiting Gül with a core group of 19 people, Volkan said that everybody found a chance to express himself and Gül took notes, saying that he would give support.

Among the people who participated in the interview are Professor Deniz Ülke Arıboğa, former MİT Deputy Secretary Cevat Öneş, Mete Yazar, Murat Belge, Ümit Fırat, Altan Tan, Avni Özgürel, Tarık Çelenç, Halit Yalçın, European Turkish Islam Association head Musa Serdar Çelebi, Bedrettin Gündeş, Murat Sofuoğlu, Ayşegül Elif Aslanteppe, Raif Türk, Mehmet Emre Ölmez, Ayşe Betül Çelik, İdris Ağcanoğlu and psychoanalyst Ayla Yazıcı, who has conducted numerous studies regarding the Kurdish issue.

A psychiatry professor who specializes in political psychology, Volkan was born in Cyprus in 1932. He graduated from Ankara Medical Faculty in 1956 and went to Chicago for further study and work. For 45 years, until 2002, he taught at the University of Virginia. He has completed fieldwork in psychological conflict and identity formation.

He has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and has worked in many stricken parts of the world.

Erdoğan urges MHP grass roots for support at referendum

TODAYS ZAMAN

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Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan devoted his speech during a rally in the Black Sea province of Samsun on Sunday to supporters of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), whom he called on for a “yes” vote in the Sept. 12 referendum on a constitutional amendment package, saying the opposition by the MHP administration to the package lacks plausible grounds.

“The MHP administration insists on saying ‘no’ to the reform package although it lacks any plausible reason, as if it has received some sort of ‘directive’ to do so,” he said, and asked the party grass roots not to join in the MHP administration’s mistake. Erdoğan also reminded them that MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli had called party members who announced their support for the planned changes to the Constitution “servants” and “miserable.”

Turkey will be voting on the constitutional amendment package on Sept. 12, on the 30th anniversary of the 1980 coup d’état. The existing Constitution was ratified in a referendum in 1982 after that coup. There has been growing social demand for a new constitution as the current one fails to meet today’s needs in the areas of human rights and freedoms. The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government drafted a new constitution in 2007 but failed to garner the support of the opposition parties for its approval. Undeterred, it recently prepared a list of vital amendments to the document. The opposition parties, including the MHP, the Republican People’s Party (CHP) and the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), are staunchly opposed to the planned changes to the Constitution. They believe that the AK Party intends to seize control of the judiciary with the changes.

The prime minister later traveled to Giresun, also a Black Sea province, where he lashed out at the opposition parties there, too. He said the MHP, the CHP, the BDP, the Turkish Communist Party (TKP), the Workers’ Party (İP) and the Judges and Prosecutors Association (YARSAV) are cooperating in their efforts to block public approval of the reform package in the referendum.

“And we have recently seem that the Kandil Mountains have also joined their camp. The CHP and the MHP reiterate whatever Kandil says,” he said, implying that the power influencing the opposition parties to oppose to the constitutional amendment package is the terrorist Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which has bases on the Kandil Mountains in northern Iraq.

Erdoğan spoke harshly as he responded to opposition claims that the AK Party government had come to an agreement with the terrorist PKK to ensure the support of the terrorist organization in the referendum. “You have to prove it if you make such a claim. If you cannot, then that’s dishonesty. The AK Party government has never sat at a negotiating table with the terrorist organization, and it will never do so,” he exclaimed.

24 August 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

GEO-STRATEGIC NEWS

Turkish daily helping out with Pakistani aid

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Thursday, August 26, 2010

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

The “Freedom Fellowship Neighborhood” campaign set up by daily Hürriyet to aid Pakistani flood victims is sending 195 more pre-fabricated houses to help the South Asian country’s destitute citizens.

The 195 houses are part of a 55-vehicle convoy that is transporting 651 total pre-fabricated houses for flood survivors. Already, 120 Pakistanis have been placed in 30 houses sent recently to flood-hit regions.

Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Çiçek thanked daily Hürriyet for its initiative, saying it was a good example for all.

The minister further added Wednesday that the aid efforts would continue at a fast pace in the following days.

The Turkish government has already mobilized a \$10 million contribution to the natural disaster relief.

The Turkish Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Directorate has dispatched two cargo aircraft containing two tons of medications and health supplies, two fully equipped mobile hospitals, an ambulance and a 4x4 National Medical Rescue Team vehicle. A 42-person medical team has also accompanied the supplies.

Cargo planes carrying up to 100 tons of food, 176 tents, 3,000 sleeping bags and 1,125 blankets have already landed, with the aid now in the hands of the Pakistani Red Crescent.

Pakistan’s ambassador to Turkey, Tarik Azizuddin, expressed his gratitude to the Turkish government and media for the help provided.

Commenting on Hürriyet’s initiative, Turkish Red Crescent head Tekin Küçükali said, “A ‘freedom fellowship neighborhood’ is being built. Houses are being put up.”

Turkish President Abdullah Gül meanwhile spoke with his Pakistani counterpart, Asif Ali Zardari, and delivered his condolences, offering any required aid.

Aid is being provided by many countries to flood-torn Pakistan. As of Wednesday, however, the number of people in need because of the flood had reached 4.5 million.

Inside the country, 60,000 soldiers are attempting to provide help. At the same time, however, the military is also trying to continue its fight against radical Islamist groups, who some accuse of trying to gain advantage from the chaos caused by the natural disaster.

Train leaves for Pakistan to heal flood wounds

A train carrying humanitarian aid left Turkey for Pakistan on Tuesday to heal the wounds of the flood disaster. The train is loaded with humanitarian aid collected by Sabah newspaper, ATV channel and Turkish Red Crescent.

“Pakistan has supported Turkey whenever Turkey faced a hard time whatever its (Pakistan’s) conditions were,” Turkey’s State Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Çiçek said when seeing off the train from Ankara. Çiçek said international community had not dispatched enough aid to Pakistan. Also, Pakistani Ambassador to Turkey Tariq Azizuddin said floods affected some 20 million people and killed around 2,000 others.

Azizuddin said 165,000 square meters of area was flooded, 1 million houses were demolished, and the flood left 4.6 million people homeless. According to the ambassador, 3.5 million children were under contagious disease threat, and hundreds of kilometers of highways and energy lines were inundated by floods.

25 August 2010, Wednesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

UN says Israel not cooperating with flotilla probe

Israel is not cooperating with the UN Human Rights Council's probe of its deadly raid on an international aid flotilla that was trying to break the blockade of Gaza, a UN official said on Tuesday.

A train carrying humanitarian aid left Turkey for Pakistan on Tuesday to heal the wounds of the flood disaster. The train is loaded with humanitarian aid collected by Sabah newspaper, ATV channel and Turkish Red Crescent.

has been refused entry to Israel, which claims pro-Palestinian activists on the boat were killed when they fought back against its commandos.

Turkey, on the other hand, has pledged full cooperation with the UN investigators.

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, who met on Monday with the UN team's Desmond de Silva, a former UN war crimes prosecutor, said all the information in Turkey's hands would be shared with the three-member team with maximum transparency. Davutoğlu said Israel indirectly admits that it is guilty by opposing such investigations and added that he hoped it would revise its stance.

Davutoğlu said at the meeting that the response that Israel will get from the international community will help advance peace by proving that no country is above the law.

The UN Human Rights Council team is due to present its report to the 47-nation council on Sept. 27, according to a schedule for the body's three-week autumn session, which starts on Sept. 13. The council, where members of the 57-country Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and its developing-country allies, as well as Russia, Cuba and China, have an inbuilt majority, set up the probe in June, despite strong Western reservations.

The council's decision on the investigation, on a resolution tabled by Pakistan for the OIC, was made despite the announcement by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that he was setting up an international probe. Diplomats said Ban was unhappy with the council's move, which fit a pattern of overt and indirect challenges from the majority in the body to the authority of the UN chief and of High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay.

Israel itself is holding its own investigations behind closed doors. The May 31 incident sparked a serious deterioration in already-strained links between Israel and Turkey.

Earlier this month, current UN Human Rights Council President and Thai Ambassador Sihasak Phuanketkeow said the mission of the team -- whose members he chose -- would not overlap with Ban's probe, but complement it.

25 August 2010, Wednesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN WITH WIRES İSTANBUL

Turkey to present roadmap to maintain Kyrgyzstan's stability

Turkish delegation will be visiting Kyrgyzstan this week to review latest developments there as well as to present an “action plan” to maintain stability in the strife-torn Central Asian country.

The delegation, led by Foreign Ministry Deputy Undersecretary Hakkı Akil, will be in Kyrgyzstan from Sunday through Thursday and will have talks in Bishkek before its return, according to a statement from the Foreign Ministry on Saturday. The delegation is also expected to visit the southern cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad, where ethnic clashes and riots took place last month, killing hundreds and injuring many more.

The statement said the delegation and Kyrgyz officials will hold discussions regarding issues of bilateral cooperation. Among the agenda items, the statement said there will also be an “action plan” drafted by Turkey to bolster the ethnically split former Soviet republic’s efforts to maintain stability during its fragile period of transition. Further information on the content of the plan was not available.

During a visit by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu to Kazakhstan in June, he said Turkey and Kazakhstan had agreed on a joint action plan to be implemented following a referendum on June 27. “This agreement came following talks on what could be done for Kyrgyzstan in the areas of domestic politics, diplomacy, economy and security,” Davutoğlu said at the time.

Kyrgyzstan has experienced two major episodes of civil strife this year, in both the capital and in southern cities. Current Kyrgyz President Rosa Otunbayeva led anti-government riots that raged in the capital for a week and which eventually resulted in the demise of former Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev’s Western-backed government on April 7.

The interim government that came to power after the riots called for a constitutional referendum on June 27. Just days before the referendum, fierce ethnic clashes rocked the country’s south.

Otunbayeva said in late June that 2,000 people may have died in the ethnic clashes. The deaths were caused by rampaging mobs led mainly by ethnic Kyrgyz against Uzbeks. Some claim there are also dozens of ethnic Kyrgyz among the dead. An estimated 400,000 people -- nearly one-twelfth of the population -- have fled their homes to escape Kyrgyzstan’s ethnic violence.

Kazakhstan and Turkey are chairing Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), respectively.

23 August 2010, Monday

TODAY’S ZAMAN İSTANBU

Turkey, Russia compete to tilt balance in the South Caucasus

TODAYS ZAMAN

The security pact clinched between Russia and Armenia, Azerbaijan’s long-time foe, on Friday, assigning Russia with the important role of securing Armenia in the event of an attack, marks a critical turning point in the security of the South Caucasus, as Turkey has also made a play in the region recently.

Russia struck a significant deal with Armenia on Friday, primarily securing the country’s borders from outside assaults and ensuring that the overall security picture in the South Caucasus remains as grim as ever. Turkey made a pre-emptive move just days before

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's visit to the Armenian capital, Yerevan, on Friday, as Turkish President Abdullah Gül reiterated his country's solidarity with Azerbaijan by signing a similar treaty with the oil-rich Muslim nation.

Vying with Russia in the South Caucasus is a new challenge for Turkey, one it has not tackled before and for which it is largely unprepared. A rare oasis of economic growth in Azerbaijan in recent years thanks to an oil windfall has offset the military balance against Armenia, as the Caspian country has heavily invested in its military might. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said this summer that his country's military spending, at \$2.15 billion, is greater than Armenia's total budget. Despite Azerbaijan's growing presence in the region in terms of its military power, Russia has repeatedly reaffirmed its commitment to Armenia's security, which surprisingly did not bother the Azerbaijani political elite. War hawks in Azerbaijan have raised their voices, and the administration vowed to resume the war if diplomacy fails, a situation interpreted as a fact given that the country's war rhetoric matches its military muscle.

Some might have argued several years ago that Russia's superior military power was petering out in the region, but this does not ring true today. Russia fought a full-fledged armed conflict with its southern neighbor Georgia in August 2008 over the disputed Georgian territory of South Ossetia, resulting in Russian recognition of the largely unrecognized republic. In addition, in late July of this year, 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.

Turkey and Azerbaijan concluded a Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance deal on Aug. 16 during Gül's two-day visit to Azerbaijan at the invitation of his Azerbaijani counterpart, Aliyev. This came just days before agreements on a strategic partnership between Russia and Armenia during Medvedev's visit to Armenia on Aug. 19.

"The recent strategic partnership deal between the two represents a response to the Russian-Armenian agreements," Lawrence Sheets, Caucasus Project Director of the International Crisis Group, said.

In contrast, Rövşen İbrahimov, the head of the international relations department at Qafqaz University, said in an interview with Sunday's Zaman that the strategic partnership deal should not be considered a political response to the Russian-Armenian military agreement. According to İbrahimov, the deal displayed and proved the high-level strategic relations between the two countries. The expert said the most important part of the discussions was the negotiations on energy security issues, the provision of Azerbaijani gas for the Nabucco gas pipeline and the solution of the problems with Turkmenistan.

Despite the intensified cooperation of Russia with Armenia in the region to deepen security ties, Russia remains a close friend and significant 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.

"There is little question that the base extension agreement until 2049 between Moscow and Yerevan represents a strengthening of their strategic alliance," Sheets said. However, he argued, this has not been accompanied by any outward signs of a significant

deterioration in Azerbaijani-Russian relations, perhaps given the increasing commercial relations between Baku and Moscow. Speaking about the S-300 air defense systems, Sheets said it is not possible to conclude whether Russia is playing both sides of the fence -- either in order to enhance its strategic position in the Caucasus or for the sake of preserving some sort of regional balance that would represent a deterrent to both Yerevan and Baku becoming embroiled in another full-scale conflict.

Although details of the agreement between Turkey and 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 Murad 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.

Vafa Guluzade, the head of the Caspian Research Center, said he does not believe the deal is strong and that it could not be a response to the deal sealed between Russia and Armenia. He said similar deals, including military ones, should be signed between the two allies.

Russia has long attempted to isolate Georgia by surrounding it with its military presence in the Caucasus. Russia announced last week that it installed two S-300 air defense missile systems in Georgia's breakaway Abkhazia region. The Russian 102nd military base in Armenia has S-300 air defense systems but they are hardly able to cover Azerbaijani territories but do have the capability to strike eastern Turkey. Some also believe that the positioning of the military base has resulted in Georgia being surrounded. "More than Azerbaijan, the Russian-Armenian deal is directed against Turkey and NATO," Guluzade alleged.

22 August 2010, Sunday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish, Armenian youth join basketball exchange program

Two dozen Turkish and Armenian teens will take part in a sports exchange program in Turkey later this month as part of an initiative sponsored by the Sports United division of the US Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and organized by the nonprofit World Learning organization.

The participants of the program, which will take place from Aug. 19-29, will have the opportunity to be coached by former NBA player George Mureşan, according to a statement released on Friday by the US Embassy in Ankara.

The program kicks off with a one-week sports camp in the resort town of Ören, where the students and their coaches will learn about youth leadership and inter-cultural communication while participating in sports activities. The second week takes the participants to İzmir to play exhibition games, attend the first day of the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) World Championship, and take part in a neighborhood basketball clinic with Mureşan.

In January 2011, the same Turkish and Armenian program participants will travel to the United States to train and play basketball alongside their American counterparts. The United States has one of the most developed interscholastic sports programs in the world, with millions of young people representing their schools and competing in a variety of sports every year.

“We hope the program inspires Armenia and Turkey to support young athletes and that these kinds of sports initiatives serve as a bridge to the future for young people of both countries,” Chargé d’Affaires Doug Silliman of the US mission in Turkey said.

21 August 2010, Saturday

TODAY’S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Israel concerned over Turkey’s role in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Israel is concerned about Turkey’s growing engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, claiming Turkey’s role in the Balkans may cause serious problems for the ethnically split Balkan country, the prime minister the Republika Srpska has said.

Milorad Dodik, the prime minister of the Republika Srpska, a semi-autonomous Serbian political entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina, said he and Israeli President Shimon Peres, with whom he met during his recent visit to Israel, “had a lot in common on all issues, particularly those relating to Turkey’s growing engagement in the Balkans,” as he spoke to reporters at a press conference in Banja Luka on Thursday.

During his three-day visit to Israel, Dodik met with Peres, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and the Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem.

He said he discussed the role of Turkey in Bosnia and Herzegovina with Peres and expressed his uneasiness with what he calls “Turkey unilateral intervention” in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Noting that Israel strongly supports the Dayton agreement, Dodik said Israel thinks Turkey’s role in the region may cause serious problems.

Serbs in Bosnia control 49 percent of Bosnian territory, are constantly advocating for more autonomy and adamantly oppose the centralization of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Turkey has repeatedly stated its support for Bosnia and Herzegovina’s territorial integrity.

The Bosnian Serb leader on Monday also accused Turkey of interfering in Bosnian internal political affairs and of acting in favor of Bosnian Muslims. “We resent the fact that Turkey wants a unified and centralized Bosnia, favoring only one of the peoples [living in the country],” Dodik told Bosnian state radio from Israel following talks with Lieberman.

Dodik also said he had told Lieberman that the Bosnian Serb community “resented Turkey’s strong presence in Bosnia motivated only by support for the Bosnian Muslims, without any willingness to comprehend the context in which Bosnia exists.”

Turkey has been heavily involved in the reconciliation process among several nations in the Balkans in the past year, paving the way for nations in the region to enhance diplomatic exchanges and send mutual positive political messages. Turkey also says it supports Serbia’s integration into the European Union structure, a possible solution that would allow Serbia to reconcile with Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The 1992-95 Bosnian conflict left the country split into two semi-independent entities -- the Republika Srpska and the Muslim-Croat Federation -- each having its own government. They are united by weak central institutions.

20 August 2010, Friday

TODAY’S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

'EU should also extend necessary support for permanent solution in Cyprus'

Turkey's State Minister & Chief Negotiator for EU talks Egemen Bağış said on Thursday that European Union (EU) should extend necessary support for a permanent solution in Cyprus.

Bağış attended a UN meeting on Pakistan in New York.

In an exclusive interview with the Anatolia news agency, Bağış said he assessed some other issues like Cyprus and fight against terrorism as well as the recent flood disaster in Pakistan during his talks in the UN.

"I referred to determination of President Dervis Eroglu of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in maintaining the negotiations. I told them that continuation of the talks was also important for the EU. We particularly underlined that pressure on Greek Cypriot administration should grow and that the EU should extend necessary support for a lasting and fair solution," Bağış said.

Bağış said he also relayed to the ministers Turkey's expectations on fight against terrorism, adding "we have reiterated our demands that particularly some representatives of the PKK terrorist organization in Europe should be handed over to Turkish justice."

Bağış met with Pakistani Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Belgian Foreign Minister & Deputy Prime Minister Steven Vanackere, Swedish Minister for International Development Cooperation Gunilla Carlsson and German State Minister Werner Hoyer.

20 August 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

ECONOMIC NEWS

Istanbul animal market faces accusations of mistreatment, smuggling

Tuesday, August 24, 2010

MEHVEŞ KONUK

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

From cats and dogs to tropical birds and giant turtles, Istanbul's Animal and Flower Market offers a wide variety of animals for sale – creatures that critics say are mistreated, unhealthy and perhaps even illegally trafficked.

The 20-shop complex between the New Mosque and the Spice Bazaar in the Eminönü district draws many customers willing to overlook the smell of dirty cages for the cheap prices and convenient location. Some of them end up regretting having done so.

Commenting on an online forum, a poster nicknamed Zapake wrote that a dog he bought at the animal market had contracted canine distemper and died. He blamed the vendor who sold him the dog, saying that conditions there are unhealthy for the animals and the shop owners do not know how to vaccinate the pets properly.

"Whenever I consulted [the vendor] about my dog's health problem, he told me to stop feeding it anything but dog food and eventually it would eat and get better," Zapake wrote. "His ignorance killed my dog."

Such incidents are unsurprising, said Birgün Rona, the president of the Foundation for Animal Protection. "Because the space is so cramped, most dogs and cats get diseases and die a week after they are purchased," Rona told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review on Monday, adding that the smuggling of undocumented, unhealthy animals from Hungary, Bulgaria and Ukraine is also a problem.

Three years ago, Turkish newswires reported a case where six terrier puppies were discovered hidden inside the glove compartment of a car at the Turkish-Bulgarian border. Since small puppies are easier to hide in suitcases and bags, Rona said, they are often taken away for sale before they can get key nutrients from their mother's milk.

"Smuggling attempts where dogs were brought in suitcases are a thing of the past now," said Mustafa Kocabaş of the market's Güneş Pet Shop. He added that the dogs he sells come from the provinces of Antalya, Isparta and Kütahya and all have certificates.

"There used to be smuggled animals for sale at the market but not anymore," said a worker at the Akın Pet Shop, who did not want to give his name. Shop owner Zeki Kamaş said most of the animals he sells were bred in Turkey and those that are imported were brought in legally.

An official with the Istanbul Provincial Administration of Agriculture who declined to give his name said the office checks out all complaints and fines shops that are not in compliance with the law. He said accusations of animal smuggling, common four or five years ago, had not been made recently, but that complaints were "endless" about unlicensed shops, stores with no veterinarian and animals being kept in small cages. Shopkeepers often display the cages of dogs and cats in front of their stores no matter how hot or cold the weather, and some allegedly limit the animals' intake of food and water so they do not create too much waste. Neighboring cages may hold poultry or pet birds, some of which have fungi on their beaks and are surrounded by filth.

The cramped upstairs rooms in the market hold more exotic finds, such as giant turtles and snakes, or a rather disheveled blue-and-gold macaw on sale for 2,700 Turkish Liras. Such species may well be victims of the growing illegal international trade in animals, which accounts for an estimated one-third of the global wild-animal sales of \$25 billion a year, according to RENCTAS, Portugal's national network to fight animal trafficking. Sema Mandev, president of the Association to Protect Nature and Animals, said more than 200 animals are smuggled into Turkey each year through Istanbul's Atatürk Airport. Veterinarian Murat Arslan, the executive director for the Association of Istanbul Veterinarians, claimed that only 5 percent of animals sold in the city's pet shops are legal, and just 20 percent of all pet shops in Istanbul have permits.

The press office of the Customs Bureau for Anti-Smuggling declined to answer questions over the phone on Monday.

According to John Sellar, a senior enforcement officer at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, or CITES, Secretariat, which regulates legal trade in wildlife and domestic animals, Eastern Europe is considered a weak point for enforcement. He said because it is extremely difficult to legally import an exotic bird, say, into the European Union from Africa or South America, smugglers usually first bring the animal into a bordering, non-EU country such as Turkey, which does not share the common customs legislations of the European bloc.

Though the CITES Secretariat surveys every country that has signed the convention, Sellar said he did not want to comment specifically on Turkey's compliance or lack thereof because he had no recent statistics or claims about animal smuggling in Turkey.

Turkey to import 330,000 tons of duty-free EU wheat

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Thursday, August 26, 2010

ISTANBUL – Bloomberg
HURRIYAT

Turkey's grain board will allow private companies to import 330,000 metric tons of duty-free European Union wheat this year as part of measures to ease price swings in the domestic market.

The licenses cover 230,000 tons of milling wheat and 100,000 tons of durum, the Ankara-based board, known as TMO, said Thursday in a statement on its website. The board is also considering other measures, it said, without specifying what.

“Although our annual production and stockpiles are sufficient for our country's needs, private companies will be allowed to use an import contingency that is awarded to the TMO every year,” the board said in the statement on Thursday. “The move will contribute to stability in the local market.”

Wheat traded in Chicago, a global benchmark, as much as doubled since June as Russia's worst drought in at least a half century, flooding in Canada and parched fields in Kazakhstan and the European Union ruined crops. While Russia already banned, Ukraine has postponed a decision to restrict sales.

Turkey's wheat stockpiles stand at 2.23 million tons, more than the 2 million tons announced Aug. 10, the TMO said Aug. 19.

Turkey is expected to export 4 million tons of wheat in the 12 months ending in June 2011, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported this month, raising its previous estimate of 3.1 million tons. The country exported almost 4.4 million tons in the previous 12-month period.

Istanbul Fashion Week starts

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Wednesday, August 25, 2010

ISTANBUL - Anatolia News Agency

HURRIYAT

Istanbul Fashion Week began Wednesday within the scope of the Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture events.

Turkish State Minister Zafer Çağlayan attended the joint news conference at the opening ceremony. He said the ministry wanted to make Istanbul, often noted as a center of finance and informatics, also a center of fashion. The ready wear and textile sector is one of the most important factors in promoting Turkey in the world, he said.

Running from Wednesday to Saturday, IFW will host fashion shows of renowned brands as well as individual and mixed fashion shows from specific designers. Designers Bahar Korcan, Arzu Kaprol, Özlem Suer, Hatice Gokçe, Mehtap Elaidi, Gamze Saracoğlu, Deniz Mercan, Atıl Kutoğlu, Ozgur Masur, Simay Bülbül, Özlem Kaya, Günseli Turkey and Bora Aksu will hold individual fashion shows during the week.

The IFW is organized by the Fashion Designers Association, the United Brands Association, the Istanbul Fashion Academy and Collection Premiere Istanbul.

Turkey ranks 2nd after China in "top 225 contractors" list

Turkey ranked the second in "top 225 contractors" list of Engineering News Record (ENR) magazine.

Thursday, 26 August 2010 17:57

WORLD BULLETIN

Turkey ranked the second in "top 225 contractors" list of Engineering News Record (ENR) magazine.

Turkey, with 33 companies, is on the second line after China which topped the list with 54 companies.

ENR prepared the list according to the business volume of the companies in foreign countries.

Turkey was also in last year's list with 31 companies, while China again topped the list with 50 companies in 2009.

Turkey's Contractors Union Chairman Erdal Eren said on Thursday that despite the global economic crisis and rising competition, Turkey kept its place on the second rank, and furthermore it increased the number of contractors when compared to the last year's list.

The countries and the number of companies in the list are as follows;

COUNTRIES 2010 2009 2008

CHINA 54 50 51

TURKEY 33 31 23

ITALY 22 26 22

U.S. 20 25 35

JAPAN 13 15 16

S.KOREA 12 13 11

SPAIN 11 11 11

FRANCE 5 5 5

BRITAIN 4 5 4

GERMANY 4 4 5

OTHER 47 40 42

Enka, Gama, Ronisans, Ant Yapi, STFA, Tekfen, TAV, Polimeks, Yuksel, Nurol, Kayi, Onur, Cengiz, Yapi Merkezi, Baytur, Guris, Dogus, Yasar Ozkan, GAP, Betatek, Cukurova, Yenigun, Rasen, Summa, Atlas, Makyol, Alarko, Metag, IC Ibrahim Cecen, Eser Taahhut, Limak, TML, Oztas are the 33 Turkish companies which entered 2010 list.

Turkish firm to complete 90 bridges construction in Turkmenistan

Turkish construction company Net Yapi is about to complete construction of 90 bridges across Turkmenistan, a company executive said.

Saturday, 21 August 2010 16:43

WORLD BULLETIN

Turkish construction company Net Yapi, a NATA Group company, is about to complete construction of 90 bridges across Turkmenistan, a company executive said Saturday.

Net Yapi had won a tender to build highway bridges worth \$287.5 million in different parts of the country in two years. The bridges include country's longest with a length of 320 meters.

The company has almost come the end to conclude the construction of concrete reinforced bridges and a steel suspension bridge, NATA Group's CEO Cuneyt Ozdemir said.

The steel suspension bridge will be the first of its kind in Turkmenistan, Ozdemir said, adding that Turkmenistan government has praised their works on bridge projects. "By the help of latest technologies we are using, we want to give these buildings to Turkmenistan as a gift which they could use for centuries," Ozdemir said. The steel suspension bridge stretches over Karakum Canal, the longest and largest irrigation waterway in the world.

AA

Chinese interest in Turkey growing

Chinese interest in Turkey is growing as the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Turkey and China next year draws closer.

Tuesday, 24 August 2010 12:24

WORLD BULLETIN

Chinese interest in Turkey is growing as the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Turkey and China next year draws closer.

More news featuring Turkey has started appearing in the Chinese media. National Geographic China published an interview with Turkish Culture and Tourism Minister Ertugrul Günay in its August edition.

In his interview Gunay invited to Istanbul Ma Weido, one of the world's most renown collectors owning five private museums in China.

Ma Weido who accepted the invitation will soon pay a visit to Turkey accompanied by a team from National Geographic China which will publish a special edition dedicated to Turkey.

Chinese Media's interest in Turkey is not restricted to National Geographic China. Business newspaper, Hua Shang Weekly also published Gunay's views on tourism urban development, environmental polices. The paper said Turkey's successful polices in these areas were taken as example in China.

China's most read newspaper China Daily also featured news about Turkey. It published news features about "the Turkish Day" held recently in Shanghai Expo, and the performance of Turkish dance company "Anadolu Atesi/Anatolian Fire".

Turkey's Culture and Tourism Councillor in China Ilknur Yigit said the rise in number of news about Turkey appearing in the Chinese media helped the Chinese people get to know Turkey better. She said the Chinese media started publishing more news about Turkey because of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Turkey and China was drawing closer.

AA

Two Nabucco supply lines to be built at Turkey's borders

Two supply lines will be constructed at Turkey's borders with Georgia and Iraq as part of the Nabucco Natural Gas Pipeline project.

Monday, 23 August 2010 15:39

WORLD BULLETIN

Two supply lines will be constructed at Turkey's borders with Georgia and Iraq as part of the Nabucco Natural Gas Pipeline project.

During their latest meeting in the Turkish capital of Ankara, shareholders of Nabucco

project approved the construction of two supply lines extending to Georgia and Iraq, officials said in a written statement on Monday.

The route planned for the new supply lines will provide alternative supply resources for the Nabucco pipeline which will receive gas from Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Iraq, the statement said.

Shareholders approved the start of the engineering work for the two supply lines, officials said, adding construction of a third supply line at the Turkish-Iranian border was not considered at the moment due to the current conjuncture in the region.

The Nabucco pipeline is a joint project undertaken by Austria, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary, which will carry the Caspian natural gas to Austria through territories of participating countries. The project aims to reduce Europe's energy dependence on Russia.

Shareholders of Nabucco Project are Botas (Turkey), Bulgarian Energy Holding (Bulgaria), MOL (Hungary), OMV (Austria), RWE (Germany) and Transgaz (Romania).

Russia's Gazprom increases amount of gas to Turkey

Gazprom, Russian energy company, increased the amount of natural gas transfer to Turkey.

Thursday, 26 August 2010 17:16

WORLD BULLETIN

Gazprom, Russian energy company, increased the amount of natural gas transfer to Turkey.

Gazprom spokesman Sergei Kupriyanov said on Thursday that the transfer of natural gas to Turkey via Blue Stream was doubled to 37 million cubic meters as of yesterday.

Kupriyanov noted that Gazprom increased the amount after an explosion occurred on Iran-Turkey natural gas pipeline.

Noting that there was a rise in Gazprom's natural gas transfer to Turkey, Kupriyanov said that this situation showed that Turkish economy was rapidly recovering after global economic crisis.

Kupriyanov added that the explosion in Iran-Turkey natural gas pipeline increased Turkey's natural gas demand from Russia.

On August 24, terrorists staged an attack on Iran-Turkey natural gas pipeline near Catalpinar village of Eleskirt town in Turkey's eastern province of Agri. The natural gas transfer halted due to the explosion.

Vegetable prices to remain high until end of Ramadan'

Agriculturalists' Association of Turkey (TZD) President İbrahim Yetkin has said that supermarkets, rather than wholesale markets, now have the ability to determine produce prices and that therefore customers will continue to pay high prices until the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, since supermarkets are trying to capitalize on the abnormally high demand seen at this time of year.

At a press conference on Sunday in Ankara, Yetkin said it would be wrong to attribute all the price hikes to crop failure stemming from high temperatures. "Prices will not go down during Ramadan," he said.

He stressed that Turkey is the fifth largest vegetable and fruit producer in the world, with an annual volume of 45 million tons, but that 70 percent of this amount comes from

outside normal market channels. He explained that the remaining 30 percent that goes through wholesale markets is not enough to decrease prices in the country.

Regarding plant diseases farmers have encountered this season, he said Turkey's tomato production totals 10 million tons a year, half of which is exported, and that it is under threat from the tomato moth. Yetkin called on the authorities to take the necessary measures.

Yetkin also commented on high meat prices for which the government has imported thousands of heads of cattle. He said imported meat is sold at state-owned Meat and Fish Institution (EBK) stores at much lower prices. Yetkin added that even though people are flocking to EBK stores to do their shopping, it is not enough to bring down prices elsewhere because EBK stores cannot meet the demand entirely.

24 August 2010, Tuesday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

SOCIAL NEWS

Turkey expecting hotter temperatures for weekend

Thursday, August 26, 2010

ISTANBUL – Daily News with Wires

HURRIYAT

Hot weather will continue throughout Turkey for the next few days, the country's Meteorology Institute said Thursday, with temperatures expected to increase four to six degrees.

The temperatures in Istanbul will be around 33 to 34 degrees Celsius while the coastal provinces of İzmir and Antalya, two areas that attract a lot of tourism, will see 36 and 35 degrees respectively.

The rise in temperatures will also continue in the southern province of Adana, where the cotton crop has become ready for picking 10 to 15 days earlier than normal due to the heat.

Adana will simmer under anticipated temperatures of 37 to 38 degrees while the nearby province of Kahramanmaraş will roast with temperatures expected to hit 42 degrees.

Although much of the nation will be bathed in sunshine, rain is expected for much of the eastern Black Sea region, with the institute expecting heavy rains in the provinces of Trabzon, Rize and Artvin's district of Hopa, according to Anatolia news agency.

The coming rain will present a risk of flooding, landslides, and lightning, meaning people should exercise caution, according to the institute.

COMMENTARY

From the Bosphorus: Straight - Fashionable Istanbul is no exaggeration

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Wednesday, August 25, 2010

HURRIYAT

In an oft-told tale of journalism, the New York Journal published a problematic story in 1897. It reported that the famous wit and writer, Mark Twain, had died. Surprised to learn this when the story caught up to him at his hotel in London, Twain penned a quick telegram back to the newspaper: "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated."

Which is how we might summarize the state of reporting on Turkey's textile industry, including our own not infrequent reports of the sector's pending demise. To paraphrase Twain, we may have jumped the gun on this industrial obituary.

Yes, it has been surpassed by automotive sales as the lead driver of exports. And yes, its role as an employer is diminished. And yes, many firms are struggling amid an anemic global economy and the rising clout of manufacturers in India, China and elsewhere. But a better conceptualization of what is in fact transpiring is a transformation, and a very healthy one at that. Our evidence for this is our own 12-page special fashion edition of our weekly "City Brief" that went out to most readers yesterday. (We apologize to readers in the Aegean region, for the complexities of printing logistics prevented our production of the supplement on our presses in İzmir.)

Our colorful and lively supplement focused largely on the creativity, the glamor and the growing success of Turkish designers such as Hüseyin Çaçlayan, Simay Bülbül, Sudi Etüz and others now respected around the world. Our reporters Hatice Utkun, Tuba Parlak and Fulya Çimen focused on utility, the sources of inspiration in Istanbul and the aesthetic and allure of the cutting-edge fashion that will all be on the Istanbul catwalk in the coming days.

But behind all of this is the growing maturity and sophistication of an economic nature. Turkey is, in short, climbing up the value chain of a global industry. Making denim jeans and exporting them on the cheap for a global brand to label and capture the lion's share of profit may have made sense in the early days of growth in the textile sector. But it is long past time for Turkish manufacturers to graduate from the low-wage, low-margin model of enterprise. This means fashion. Now in its third year, this transformation is being demonstrated by the brainchild of four organizations: The Istanbul Textile and Apparel Exporters Association, the Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture Agency, the Fashion Designers Association and the United Brands Association.

It may be too early to announce the demise of the dominance of Milan, Paris or New York. So we won't. But we do believe – with no exaggeration – that Turkey is well on its way to becoming a vibrant competitor. This is a success in its own right. But it is also a victory for economic foresight, a step toward greater prosperity in which all of Turkey can share. We congratulate the organizers of Istanbul Fashion Week 2010.

Greece should mediate between Turkey and Israel

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Tuesday, August 24, 2010

BURAK BEKDİL

HURRIYAT

Sadly, years-long Turkish efforts to mediate for a happy ending in the Arab-Israeli conflict have ended up with Turkey and Israel in a 21st-century cold war that is colder than its 20th-century version. This has left Ankara (along with Hamas) uninvited to direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine – with Egypt and Jordan readying to be present at the dinner table. But we should not give up hopes for successful mediating efforts in our region.

Fixing this though would be the most exemplary single piece of almost-Nobel Peace Prize-winning initiative and a spectacularly illustrative showdown supporting interfaith dialogue both wrapped in one nice gift box: Greece mediating between Turkey and Israel.

Put it in the language that might appeal better to the fans of the Alliance of Civilizations fairy tale: A Christian nation acting as an honest broker between a Muslim and a Jewish nation. Fabulous! In the unwanted event that all three are bogged down in bigger disputes we can always think of a Hindu or a Shinto nation to mediate between the three. And if all four got into trouble we will have to think about an atheist nation to mediate.

But there is a mathematical logic for optimism: 1- Turkey's foreign policy centers on the idea of having zero problems with neighbors, 2- Greece is a neighbor, 3- Turkey will therefore have zero problems with Greece, 4- (meanwhile) Greece is excelling in improving its relations with Israel, 5- In this part of the world, the enemy of your enemy is your friend, 6- Hence the opposite is also true: the friend of your friend is your friend, and 7- Turkey and Israel can rediscover the virtues of peace and friendship thanks to a common friend.

Someone from the impressive Turkish organization Lackeys Without Frontiers should remind Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu of this theory. No doubt, Mr. Zero-Problems-With-Neighbors would appreciate the merits of Greek mediation between former friends Israel and Turkey.

But I was totally surprised recently to see some important men in suits and ties sweating in an air-conditioned office room not because of the Ankara heat but because of the Greek-Israeli engagement. Gentlemen, I asked them, why all the grooming over that? Is Greece not our neighbor and friend? Do we not have zero problems with Greece? What's wrong if Greeks and Israelis get closer and closer? I stopped after pairs of angry eyes looked at me and someone finally said, "We have more than enough troubles here." I decided not to proceed with my seven-point theory explaining the mathematical logic for optimism over flourishing Greek-Israeli relations.

I am still curious about the pessimism I sensed in the air-conditioned office room. I recalled the first meeting earlier this year of the Turkish-Greek Strategic Cooperation Council, a gathering of prime ministers and several Cabinet ministers from both sides of the Aegean that took place in Athens. Should we not be content if our strategic partners are cooperating with our former strategic partners? Would that not be good for peace in our region?

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Mr. Davutoğlu should be happy if there is a 40-percent increase in Israeli tourist arrivals in Greece, which is suffering from a punishing financial crisis and where the tourist industry accounts for 20 percent of total employment. They should be happy if additional Greek-Israeli joint military exercises are on the agenda and Israeli manufacturers can be an alternative source of weapons systems of decisive operational importance – and that's a long way from the days when Israel did not even have a resident defense attaché in Athens.

They should be happy if Greece could become an alternative market for advanced technology defense products and if Greece, through Cyprus, could become a natural bridge connecting Israel to the EU or if Greek and Jewish lobbying groups in Washington explored opportunities for joint lobbying activity – all for peace in our region!

With all these nice prospects in my mind I remain curious about the gloomy mood in that official building. Before leaving the air-conditioned but very hot room I asked the sweating men a few more questions: What did you expect? That the world would stop and watch you in admiration when you ally with Iran, Syria, Hamas and Hezbollah while provoking confrontation with Israel whenever possible? That you would have a seat at

the dinner table for the start of direct talks between Israel and Palestine? That you seriously thought Turkey was powerful enough alone to drag Israel into absolute isolation? I left after a few boring minutes of silence in the room. I think I was kind enough to remember to wish my friends good luck.

What changes for Turkey?

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Tuesday, August 24, 2010

SAMI KOHEN

HURRIYAT

What is the meaning of the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq for Turkey? What will change with this new situation?

First let me remind you, as I wrote before, that the pullout does not end the U.S. existence in Iraq. Fifty-thousand-something troops will remain in the country to train and raise the Iraqi Army and police force by the end of 2011. And after that, not only the military existence but also the political and economic influence of the U.S. will continue in Iraq. In this case, the new situation in Iraq is not expected to cause any change for Turkey in the short-run.

Points Turkey gives importance to in its Iraq policy are the protection of territorial integrity and national identity of Iraq, i.e. no separation, an end to violence and terror and political stability.

Will these be achieved in the new atmosphere? A psychological effect of the troops' departure and escalating insurgent activities are possible.

In a violent atmosphere, if an Arab-Kurd struggle begins in addition to a Sunni-Shiite conflict, this could indeed pull Iraq into serious chaos.

Optimistic forecast

Beside these developments in Iraq, there are two other issues Turkey is paying attention to. Both are about the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and northern Iraq. First, how will the U.S. pullout affect Turkey-U.S. cooperation against the PKK – particular in the intelligence area? Cooperation should continue and the U.S. should keep promises made. Besides, the issue has become the most critical element of Turkey-U.S. relations.

Secondly, how will bilateral relations with the Regional Kurdish Administration in northern Iraq develop following the withdrawal? Turkey, without doubt, expects the Massoud Barzani administration in the north of Iraq to maintain the cooperation recently reached in the fight against the PKK.

In the short run, the pullout of U.S. troops from Iraq shouldn't have a negative impact on this particular issue. On the contrary, in the long run what is important is that Kurds in northern Iraq will need Turkey more. And that may improve ties between Ankara and Arbil.

However, if a Kurdish-Arab encounter occurs in the aftermath of the pullout in Iraq, and especially if the Peshmerga stands against the Iraqi soldiers, a serious danger will emerge. This is undesirable for Turkey because Turcomans living in the area will be in the cross-fire. Besides, the "Kirkuk bomb" will explode.

Worst-case scenario

This is the worst-case scenario. If it happens in several capitals, primarily Washington, and in the northwest of Mosul, the deployment of a United Nations peace force for the protection of peace and security is also being discussed.

In short, the U.S. withdrawing troops from Iraq will continue to exist in different ways. Still, this could cause new dangers and a new situation in the country. That requires Ankara to follow a more balanced and careful policy than ever.

- Sami Kohen is a columnist for the daily Milliyet, in which this piece appeared Saturday. It was translated into English by the Daily News staff.
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Bad arguments for a ‘no’

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Tuesday, August 24, 2010

JOOST LAGENDIJK

HURRIYAT

Each time I write positively about the constitutional amendments package that will be voted on Sept. 12, I get a lot of negative reactions. Let me try and respond to the arguments used again and again by readers who are convinced that Turks should vote “no” in less than three weeks.

Firstly, there is the set of objections that highlights all the mistakes made by the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, and its leader in the recent past. They range from nonsensical remarks about Muslims and genocide in Sudan to intimidating the Doğan Media Group and the Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association, or TÜSIAD. The point is not whether all these allegations against the ruling party are true or not. Most of them are and I have criticized the government publicly on each and every one of them. The question is whether past mistakes by the AKP constitute such a good argument against the proposals that will be voted on Sept. 12. The referendum on changes to the Constitution is not a general election in which citizens are asked to judge the performance of the ruling party. On the contrary: voters are asked to say “yes” or “no” to a specific set of amendments that have nothing to do with Sudanese dictators or authoritarian reflexes of the prime minister. If you do not want to make that distinction, than there is, to be honest, no reason to continue debating. If you are of the opinion that the AKP is a profoundly dangerous party and its leader is a tyrant and that nothing good can come out of them, than stop coming up with ill-informed arguments against some of the amendments and just say: I hate the AKP and everything they say and that is why I will vote “no” on Sept. 12. This is exactly what the main opposition party wants you to do, hoping to profit from the deep polarization in society.

The second, often-used argument really drives me crazy because I see history repeating itself, potentially with the same disastrous results. Why, people ask, should I vote in favor of a package that is so limited and does not contain changes on issues that are very important to me? I will vote against this weak proposal and as a result, the government will be forced to come up with a much more comprehensive set of amendments or, even better, a totally new constitution. Funny enough, one can see that argument being used both by hardcore Marxists, known for their maximalist demands on every issue and by representatives of the old bourgeoisie, known for their attachment to a state-protected

capitalism. It is not the first time in history that, as the French say, les extremes se touchent, the most militant opponents in a debate agree on their core objection. I feel so strongly about this because it is exactly the same way of reasoning that was used by the opponents of the European Constitution in 2005. Then, the maximalists won the argument and triggered a serious crisis in Europe. After three years of horse trading, a new treaty was presented, and in the end adopted, that was worse than the one turned down in the first place. I fear that, again, the outcome of a negative vote in the upcoming referendum will not be an improved proposal or a new constitution soon but a long period of confusion and tension. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has repeatedly promised in the last couple of weeks that the present, indeed limited proposal is only the first step on the road to a fully new constitution after the 2011 elections. I am convinced that all those who want a new constitution are well advised to vote “yes” on Sept. 12. A win then, will strengthen the forces of reform in Turkey, be they from a conservative, liberal or leftist background. A defeat will be grist on the mill of those who want to postpone fundamental changes indefinitely or who are happy to leave the basics of an undemocratic constitution in place.

Reading the reactions to my columns, I sometimes get depressed because it seems nobody is listening to each other and opinions are cast in stone. Still, 5-10 percent of voters still has not made up its mind. Let’s hope that some of them use the remaining time till the referendum to hold the bad arguments against the light and realize that this is not a vote of confidence for the ruling party and that cautious steps often produce better results than bold jumps of faith.

A bit closer to the axis of evil?

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Tuesday, August 24, 2010

MUSTAFA AKYOL

HURRIYAT

The Turkish government is set to take Iran out of its official list of 'countries considered threats to national security.' But what does this really mean? Is it yet another Islamist scheme?

You might have heard the breaking news: The Turkish government is set to redefine its official list of “countries considered threats to national security.” And one of the countries that will not be on that list anymore is – lo and behold – the Islamic Republic of Iran.

But what does this mean? Is Turkey now a bit closer to the famous “axis of evil”?

Apparently, that is what some people think. At least the dozens of comments that kept pouring into the mailboxes of the Daily News since yesterday were saying exactly that. I heard the usual criticisms and alarmisms about Turkey’s worrying “shift to Islamism,” and her regrettable descent into “darkness.”

Yet I really see no such thing in this matter – and let me explain to you why.

Enemies everywhere

First of all, the countries that will be excluded from the “threats to national security” list include not just Iran, but also Greece, Russia and Iraq. And the last time I checked, the

first two among these were not shariah-thumping, women-stoning Islamist theocracies. Better relations with Athens and Moscow, in other words, hardly look like an Islamist scheme. It only sounds good.

Better relations with the third country on the list, Iraq, also sounds comforting, for it shows that Turkey's decades-old Kurdophobia is passing. The trouble with Iraq since 2003 arose mainly from the Turkish aversion to Iraqi Kurdistan – which is euphemistically called here “northern Iraq,” simply to avoid the K-word. Some hotheads in Ankara even wanted to bomb and occupy the autonomous region to pre-empt Kurdish separatism at home.

But the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, government has been more dovish and dialogue-oriented on that front – as it has been in most other places. Thanks to that approach, Turkey has established good relations and cooperation with Iraqi Kurds in the past two years. That's why, it seems, Iraq ceased to be a “threat to national security” — something that I, as a Turk, can only be happy with.

In fact, this whole change in the national security paradigm looks quite positive to me. The old paradigm was based on a paranoid mindset that saw the world as full of enemies. This was the basis of not just foreign policy but also “national education.” I, like every other Turkish kid, learned in school that we are a country “surrounded by seas from three sides, and by enemies from four sides.” Every single neighbor was involved in a plot to occupy or “divide” our beloved motherland.

In the perilous context of the Cold War, these fears were perhaps partly realistic. But they were also useful propaganda for the authoritarian regime at home. The political system was dominated by the military, which needed constant fear to justify its grip on society. The more Turks feared, the more they would hesitate to democratize.

So, it is not an accident that the recent ascendance of civilian power in domestic politics coincides with a less paranoid and less militarist attitude in foreign policy. The new civilian elite simply thinks within a more civil mindset. “What makes your borders safe is not the number of your tanks,” says Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. “What makes them safe is the volume of mutual trade and investment with your neighbors.”

The improved relations between Iran and Turkey should be seen within this context. Although Prime Minister Erdoğan has added some emotional expressions of Muslim solidarity to it as topping – which was a mistake – the Ankara-Tehran rapprochement is mainly a pragmatic policy based on national interests.

In response, you can tell me how horrible the Iranian regime is, and what a big shame for Turkey to be its friend. Well, I am no fan of that regime either. But I also wonder why we don't hear the same criticism when it comes to America's decades-long friendship with Saudi Arabia or Egypt – both of which are really neither more democratic nor more humane than Iran.

If “realpolitik” works for America, in other words, why should it not work for Turkey as well?

A history lesson

As for Iran's controversial nuclear program, I share the concerns of the international community. The Turkish government does so, too. But the question is how to respond to that challenge. The U.N. Security Council obviously opted for sanctions. Israel and some of her best friends in the U.S. are much bolder, with a clear and present desire for a “pre-emptive” attack.

That's where Ankara begs to differ. And she does so out of a lesson from recent history. It was only seven years ago when the U.S. descended on another Muslim neighbor of Turkey with another "weapons of mass destruction" hype. Ankara insisted that such a "pre-emptive" war would be neither rightful nor helpful. But Washington needed no advice and only asked for Turks to be a "loyal ally" by joining the campaign. Turkey kindly said, "No."

And, well, she turned out to be right. The Iraq War proved to be a disaster, and Turks realized that they did the right thing by standing aside.

Today, the same Turks are hearing the same drums of war that they heard seven years ago. And they are asking that popular American question: Will they ever learn?

-Richer but suffering from illiteracy

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Wednesday, August 25, 2010

HURRIYAT

During the first years after her establishment, the young Turkish Republic was fighting poverty, malnutrition and ignorance. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who had transformed himself from a military leader to a thought leader, put special emphasis on education, especially that of women. The people who left their guns behind and started working on the immense problems on the road to becoming a modern society did their best to lay a foundation for a Westernized society. That's why the people who gave their lives for this ideal are called the "Generation of the Republic," because it was not the victories on the battlefield but their tireless efforts that cemented the secular and Westernized outlook on basic institutions such as education and the judiciary.

The Ottoman Empire, in all its glory, had never tried to educate her people. Historians like İlber Ortaylı claim that before the Republic was founded, the literacy rate was not more than 1 percent. Ortaylı says that writing was something that could only be learned if you were in the palace.

The Generation of the Republic tried to change this, and they succeeded. With the change of the alphabet, Turkish people started to learn how to read and write for the first time after centuries of complete ignorance.

Unfortunately the following generations have failed to keep up this effort. After the initial success of the education reforms Turkey has only gone down a slope. The Turkish alphabet was accepted at 1928. After 72 years, Turkey is 133rd when it comes to literacy in the world rankings. I find this very disturbing because Turkey is among the G20. So we are a rich but uneducated country, which is not good for us and the world. I believe that there is a responsibility to be richer than most countries, a responsibility that includes spreading literacy in the country.

According to UNICEF, the net secondary school attendance of women in Turkey is only 43 percent. According to UNESCO, only 88.7 percent of the population is literate. Youth literacy is more than 90 percent in the 15-24 age group, which is an improvement, but still millions of people below the 99-100 percent literacy levels of the developed world. The women suffer the most. There are 4,742,000 women who don't know how to read and write in Turkey – 84 percent of the illiterate are women.

Literacy is low, but the impact of education is even lower. The OECD Program for International Student Assessment, or PISA, answers these questions and more, through its

surveys of 15-year-olds in the principal industrialized countries. Every three years, it assesses to what extent students near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills essential for full participation in society. According to both the 2006 and 2009 surveys Turkey ranks one from the bottom in math and science education. I don't want to get into the detailed statistics because they are really shameful. All I want to say is that out of the millions of students in Turkey who pass classes with flying colors, only a handful can understand a basic scientific argument that students from other countries learn years before.

There must be action taken, and information and computer technology can help. Just as many universities such as MIT upload their classes to YouTube, Turkish institutions can design courses adjusted for e-learning and at least give a chance to those students who are willing give an extra effort to get on par with the rest of the World. Otherwise we will another rich but uneducated Middle Eastern country.

Cypriot Turks' final resort: Wake up or die!

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Wednesday, August 25, 2010

METİN MÜNİR

HURRIYAT

As a matter of fact the problem in northern Cyprus is political not economic. An incapable government and a sluggish political system operate in Cyprus today. Furthermore, there are alternatives to neither, and this has been the case for a long time. The structure has created an economy based on donations as Turkish Cypriots have turned into beggars. The economy in the northern Cyprus survives through Turkey's support.

This is the reality that has created a single focal point; which is to increase aid from Turkey and for Turkey to have a say in its distribution.

More clearly though, politics in northern Cyprus has simply been built on unearned income which poisons both politics and the economy.

In the current system neither private sector, nor planning and programming, nor dreams exist. For most people, politics and trade unions are what is important, to earn bigger shares from Ankara and to spend without earning or producing anything.

With this, Turkey is actually harming Turkish Cypriots because money keeps this corrupted system with no future alive.

As long as money is transferred to northern Cyprus, unless the Cypriot system hits the bottom, Turkish Cypriots will not try to come up with formulas for salvation. Politicians in office representing the state today will set obstacles before the entire finance discipline and reform programs Turkey imposes.

Under these circumstances, it is futile to seek negotiations with Greek Cypriots. For if an agreement is reached, even by chance, and if a federal state is established, Greek Cypriots will leave their Turkish cohabiters way behind.

The internal dynamics of northern Cyprus

In the south, there is a European Union member country which is well-organized, institutionalized, sober and prosperous. In the north, there is an economy which is still in the intensive care unit, so to speak. Other than prostitution and gambling sector, there is nothing in the north that can compete with the economy operated by the Greek Cypriots.

Obviously, considering the internal dynamics northern Cyprus cannot make any reforms and set-up a market economy to rise on its own two feet.

Political parties will never take measures to set the economy on a healthy ground and get involved in cooperation voluntarily.

They don't have the power.

In this case, Turkey will either keep paying northern Cyprus' bills or withdraw support to teach them a lesson, or push Turkish Cypriots into the corner for self-healing.

The most realistic approach

The best strategy would be to leave northern Cyprus alone to its fate. But I don't think Ankara will do that. Then, the most realistic approach is the latter.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan should create some time and sit together with party leaders in northern Cyprus. He should convince them to support the protocol signed between Turkey and northern Cyprus a few months ago. Necessary reforms should be done with political and economic support in addition to the assistance of all political parties in northern Cyprus.

I don't think anyone else can do this.

If Turkish Cypriots are not given a wake-up call, their fate is known: either being wiped out by immigrants from Turkey or by Greek Cypriots.

Metin Münir is a columnist for the daily Milliyet, in which this piece appeared Saturday. It was translated into English by the Daily News staff.

The visa issue has become a ping pong game between Turkey and the EU

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Wednesday, August 25, 2010

BARÇIN YİNAŇ

HURRIYAT

When it comes to visa issues, the procedures of certain European Union countries force the limits of rationality. Suppose as a Turkish diplomat you are appointed to an EU capital. You have a mother that you would like to bring along. You have small kids and you'd like your mother to take care of them until you find your way around in the new city. Or simply you love your mother and would like to have her live with you. Then get ready to for the tortuous exercise of getting a list of documents, like your birth certificate. The host country has no problem of letting you live, work and enjoy the diplomatic privileges since you are a holder of a red passport. But if you decide to bring along your mother, the statement of a diplomat that will at times be responsible for some of the most critical issues on bilateral relations, is not enough. You have to prove that you were born to the person you claim to be your mother. You also have to prove that your mother is not a terrorist so you are also asked to provide her criminal record. That's the way a Turkish diplomat is treated. Think of the ordeal of a simple citizen who wants to go to Europe. Currently, there is a small window of opportunity that will make life a little bit easier for Turks wanting to travel to Europe. The judgment last year of the European Court of Justice that found Turkey's complaints of visa restrictions right, and the EU's decision to lift the visa ban on some non – EU countries like Serbia has strengthened the hand of Turkey.

The European Commission, negotiating with Turkey on behalf of the 27 members, asked the fulfillment of basically two conditions during the talks conducted on visa matters: the use of biometric passports and the acceptance of the readmission agreement.

The first condition has been fulfilled since Turks started using biometric passports.

As for the second condition, it has been on the agenda for years. Considering Turkey is one of the main transit points in illegal migration, the EU has been insisting on an agreement that will enable European countries to send back to Turkey illegal migrants that used Turkish territory to cross into Europe. Successive Turkish governments have been resisting the idea for the heavy economic burden that readmitting illegal migrants would bring on the shoulder of the state.

Yet in order to obtain a positive outcome on the visa matters, the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, decided to give its green light to start working on the agreement. But following years of bitter experience that thought Turkish governments that the EU has not the best record to keep its promises when it comes especially to Turkey, the AKP asked the Commission to come up with a road map on the visa matter. The Commission said, “I have a mandate to negotiate the readmission agreement but I don’t have a mandate on providing a road map on visa matters.”

Then the Turkish offered a formula: “Let’s negotiate the agreement and get it ready for signature. At that point you will then go to the Council of Ministers, the executive body of the EU to get the roadmap.” The offer was accepted and following lengthy negotiations, the two sides agreed on the text of the agreement. The Commission submitted the text to the 27 nations, last June. But as some members like Germany and Greece, said they needed time to examine the text, the Commission could not get a roadmap on visa matters. The bloc’s interior ministers will meet again in October. Most probably the Commission will ask the Turkish side to sign the agreement so that it will be easier to get a roadmap.

It will be up to the ruling AKP to decide on how to “move forward.” It might insist on having a concrete roadmap to sign the agreement. Or as it is the election period, it might sign the agreement to speed up the process of having a roadmap from Europe, which it could use during electoral campaign. But in contrast to Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu’s call for a total lifting of the visa requirements, the EU will likely offer a gradual visa facilitation scheme, whereby at the beginning only a group of people will enjoy visa free travel, like students, businessmen, and artists.

Meanwhile, the EU is also insisting on the establishment of an integrated border management policy. This in turn is a highly complicated issue. From the Health Ministry to Coast guards to the Gendarmerie Customs office, there is an unbelievable number of state institutions that some way or other have some authority on border management. And none will be willing to yield their power. It will be an almost impossible mission for the Interior Ministry to establish an integrated border management policy without antagonizing interested parties. It will take strong political will to force, for instance, the army to give up part of its responsibilities on the border, beyond protecting it from hostile elements. Obviously it will be naive to expect the AKP to open new fronts of contention, especially when it will be uncertain of obtaining the desired outcome from the EU.

Last sultan gets a modern makeover

Over the past eight years, Erdogan has reminded Arabs that despite a very rough history, Turkish influence, and the Ottoman legacy as a whole, is not as bad as Arab history has labeled it.

Tuesday, 24 August 2010 09:20

By Sami Moubayed

WORLD BULLETIN

For the past year, sporadic articles have appeared in the Arabic press debating the life and policies of Sultan Abdulhamid II, the last absolute monarch of the Ottoman Empire, who ruled from 1876 until forced to abdicate in 1909.

For decades after the collapse of the empire, especially when Arab republics were in their infancy, Abdulhamid II was blamed for much of the difficulties that crippled Arab provinces of the empire, especially Ottoman Syria.

In TV soap operas or novels he was always portrayed as an autocratic despot who managed a wide array of corrupt Arab officials and a massive network of spies who reported directly to him behind the high walls of his Yildiz Palace in Istanbul. But a more balanced appraisal of his actions and legacy is emerging as Arab scholars revisit that period of their modern history.

In recent articles, plenty of light has been shed on the sultan's refusal to sell land in Palestine to Zionists, prior to World War II. After turning down the offer, Abdulhamid famously refused to meet Mizray Qrasow, the Jewish banker who had offered to pay off the Empire's debts and build a navy in exchange for the right to buy land in Palestine. Abdulhamid - according to the Arab and Turkish version of events - told one of his aides, "Tell those impolite Jews that I am not going to carry the historical shame of selling holy land to the Jews and betraying the responsibility and trust of my people!"

Once seen as the source of all things evil, Abdulhamid is now revealed as a farsighted ruler who suffered his throne because of his defiance of Zionist ambitions in Palestine. The passing of time has enabled scholars to quietly take a long hard look at their history away from emotional bolts of Arab nationalism. The warming of Arab ties under Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a man who very clearly is proud of his Ottoman past, has also contributed to this revisionist history.

On August 11, a mega-Arab TV drama depicting the life and career of Abdulhamid began airing on Arab satellite networks. *Suqut al-Khilafa* (Fall of the Caliphate) paints a rosy picture of the sultan and is a far cry from a 1994 epic, *Ukhwat al-Turab* (Brothers of Soil) which focused on the hardships, famine, torture, and arrests of the Ottoman Empire during World War I.

The handwriting for positive treatment has been on the wall for years. Two years ago, popular Turkish soap operas, with handsome men and attractive women, broke into Arabic TV, dubbed into Syrian dialect, bringing down decades of Arab stereotypes against Turks. Now comes *Suqut al-Khilafa*, an Egyptian work produced by Iraqis starring the popular Syrian actor Abbas al-Nouri as Abdulhamid. The Ottoman sultan is

now portrayed as a warm, firm, charming and dedicated Muslim nationalist who had tremendous care for all his subjects, be they Ottoman Turks or Ottoman Arabs.

Meanwhile, Arab and Turkish scholars are debating - at forums and in private discussions - the past 10 years of the Ottoman Empire, reasoning that neither the Ottomans were 100% correct in how they dealt with the Arabs during World War II, and nor were the Arabs.

The warming of political ties between the Arab world and Turkey have indeed begun to reap serious cultural engagement. In addition to boosting trade with the Arab world and coordinating policies vis-a-vis Palestine, Turkey has lifted visa requirements with six Arab countries, being Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunis and Jordan. Erdogan best described it saying that a "regional Schengen" system, similar to the agreement signed between European countries in Luxembourg in 1985, was now in operation.

Effectively, this makes Turkey and Arab countries closer to how they had been under the Ottoman Empire than ever before since its collapse in 1918. Over the past eight years, Erdogan has reminded Arabs that despite a very rough history - during the final decade of the Empire and ever since - Turkish influence, and the Ottoman legacy as a whole, is not as bad as Arab history has labeled it.

Erdogan has said repeatedly that he feels defending Turkish national interests is no different from defending those of Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, given their common geography, history, social, religious and cultural proximity. Many of the finest buildings in Damascus and Beirut, after all, were constructed during the Ottoman era, and the Syrian capital's great bazaar, al-Hamidiya, is named after Sultan Abdulhamid's predecessor, Abdulhamid I.

So were many of the codes, laws of commerce and aspects of civil administration, which lasted well into the 20th century. The Ottoman influence on Arab language, heritage, music, and cuisine, cannot be ignored - despite years of attempts to write off any Ottoman influence as destructive to Arab culture.

With one or two exceptions, all those who lived the era of Abdulhamid II have passed on. But due to his commanding personality much is still known. The sultan's son-in-law briefly served as prime minister of Syria in the mid-1920s, while members of his immediate family continued to commute back and forth to Damascus well into the 1960s.

Many family members of the sultan's entourage, the Abids, the Azms, the Yusefs, went on to dominate Syrian politics up to 1963. Seeing the sultan on screen has sparked off a healthy historical debate on where to place Abdulhamid II on the spectrum of Arab and Muslim history. His image reminds both his admirers and critics that, whether they like it or not, Arab countries and Turkey are inseparable.

Sami Moubayed is editor-in-chief of Forward Magazine.

Asia Times Online

Why is al-Qaeda threatening Turkey?

ORHAN KAMEL CENGIZ

In this column, on Sept. 11, 2009, I published an article titled “On Sept. 11, Armenian massacres, butterflies, the caliphate and the EU.” I would like to quote a few paragraphs from that piece.

If Turkey can recover its memory, if Turkey maintains peace with its Muslim identity on the one hand and its long history with Christians on the other, I believe this country will hold the key to the 21st century. ...

“What would you think if I offered you the thought that there is a strong link between the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the heinous attacks on the twin towers in New York? I call this the suspended butterfly effect. The classic butterfly effect theory holds that if a butterfly flaps its wings in China, it will set off a tornado in California. The historical butterfly effect also worked like that: The wind created by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire unfortunately turned into a tornado in New York in 2001. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the abolishment of the caliphate (the central religious and moral authority for all Muslims) created a huge vacuum in the Muslim world, a vacuum from which the whole world still suffers.

“Would it be possible

for Osama bin Laden to issue a fatwa for jihad if the Muslim world had a caliphate that had the hearts and minds of all Muslims and was also loyal to democratic values? With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Muslims lost a central authority, and today the whole world suffers because of this lack of a central Muslim authority that would dare tell bin Laden that he misinterprets the Quran and that Islam is a religion of peace, not the kind of war he masterminds.

“Not only the lack of a caliphate, but also the collapse of the Ottoman Empire had a huge impact on the Muslim world. The vacuum left by the Ottoman Empire was filled with endless wars and conflicts.”

After this introduction we can start to discuss a peculiar phenomenon that is happening today.

Al-Qaeda threatens Turkey

The second in command of al-Qaeda, Mr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, has “warned” Turkey twice in just a month, first at the end of July and second this last Sunday. He accuses Turkey of collaborating with Israel, sending troops to Afghanistan, etc. Quite interestingly, these warnings came after the flotilla incident that caused a serious showdown between Turkey and Israel.

It is quite obvious that the sympathy in the Muslim world for Turkey sparked by the flotilla incident has seriously bothered al-Qaeda. I think with these statements we can only see the tip of the iceberg. I believe the discontent of al-Qaeda with Turkey and its threats will grow and become bolder with every passing day. I believe al-Qaeda now sees Turkey as a kind of obstacle in its global jihad strategy, and this perspective will only be strengthened in the near future.

Alluring Turkey

With all the authoritarian and repressive regimes in the Middle East, which lack the support of their people, things have been quite easy for al-Qaeda. From its perspective, for Muslims there are only two powers: their corrupt governments on the one hand, and the Israeli and Western powers, which are trying to dominate the region, on the other. In this world being a Muslim only means to suffer humiliation, repression, being seen as a backward person and being victim of Israeli and Western aggression.

The new Turkey, which has just left behind Kemalist isolationist policies in international politics and has started to pay greater attention to the Middle East and the Muslim world, is a threat for al-Qaeda, since it has the potential to upset all balances in the region. It is like that for a couple of reasons. First and foremost, Turkey represents hope that a Muslim country can have a fully functioning democracy and good relations with the West without losing its identity or sacrificing its honor. In spite of suffering some embarrassing limitations, like the ban on headscarves at universities, Turkey proves that there is no conflict between modernity and being a Muslim or having a secular system and living up to the expectations of one's religion.

Al-Qaeda has threatened some Muslim countries before, saying they are puppets of Western powers and so on. In this sense it is quite interesting to witness that its threat to Turkey comes after the country proved that it is merely pursuing its own agenda in the Middle East. Al-Qaeda leaders make many references to the Ottoman Empire, but I believe their allergy to Turkey mainly stems from the very fact that Turkey has the potential to fill the gap left in the Muslim world by the disappearance of the Ottoman Empire.

Kemalist Turkey rejected its Ottoman heritage and cut all relations with the Muslim world, but with devout Muslims in power the new Turkey has resurrected these relations once again. If this process continues, Turkey will inevitably be the leading voice and the role model for the entire Muslim world. This is, of course, not a world that al-Qaeda yearns for.

Consequently, the latest threats to Turkey are not momentary or conjectural maneuvers by al-Qaeda, but just the beginning of a long battle with the new Turkey. Al-Qaeda, with its understanding of global strategy, knows quite well what this new Turkey means for the region. I hope its strategic vision can also be shared by our European friends who simply try to exclude Turkey from the EU using unsophisticated and baseless arguments.

20 August 2010

Today's zaman