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Political Issues

KURDISH ISSUE

PKK continues illegal protests in European cities

Saturday, 12 December 2009 15:28

TIME TURK

The terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has continued its illegal demonstrations and provocative actions not only in Turkey but also in Europe

The terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has continued its illegal demonstrations and provocative actions not only in Turkey but also in Europe, protesting at the offices of international organizations and the buildings of TV stations such as the BBC and clashing with police, the Anatolia news agency reported yesterday.

PKK supporters have taken to the streets and held violent demonstrations protesting the conditions PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan faces at İmralı Prison.

Anatolia reported that after the terrorist organization invaded the central office of the European Committee for Prevention of Torture (CPT) in Strasbourg last week, Amnesty International's London office, a BBC office, the office of the European Parliament representative in Marseilles and a Swiss Television (SF) building in Zurich were the new targets for the PKK militants this week.

PKK supporters formed picket lines in front of the buildings, preventing employees from entering and leaving. They also displayed flags and posters of Öcalan and chanted slogans against the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Iran, Syria and Turkey.

Members of the PKK, which has been declared a terrorist organization by both the US and the EU, recently carried out several illegal and violent demonstrations in Turkish cities, including throwing Molotov cocktails. The İstanbul Police Department detained Twenty-five PKK members have been taken into custody and have been charged with membership in a terrorist organization, disseminating propaganda for an illegal organization and damaging public property.

PKK militants clashed with police in cities in Germany, Austria, Belgium, Italy and Switzerland after they closed thoroughfares and held illegal demonstrations. Eighty-five PKK members were detained as a result. In the aftermath of the demonstrations, anti-terrorist teams in the UK and Germany have tightened security to prevent further PKK demonstrations and have been preparing countermeasures against the organization.

Turkish PM expresses doubts over real perpetrators behind PKK attack

Saturday, 12 December 2009 10:49

TODAYSZAMAN

Speaking at a press conference on Friday, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said security forces will capture the perpetrators of the Reşadiye terrorist attack, which left seven soldiers dead.

Despite the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) claiming responsibility for a terrorist attack in the city of Tokat that left seven soldiers dead earlier this week, the prime minister has stated that there might be other unseen groups and masterminds behind the attack wishing to undermine the government's Kurdish initiative, a plan that seeks to end separatist terror by expanding the rights of the country's Kurds.

Speaking yesterday to journalists on a plane to Turkey from Mexico, where he visited government officials, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said investigators were still looking into the details of the Tokat attack. “It is not right to take it as a fact that the PKK did it just because it claimed responsibility. True, this or that branch of the terrorist organization might have been behind it. But is this the truth of it?” He noted that a renegade branch of the PKK had claimed responsibility and not its central command. He said it was too early to jump to conclusions before officials complete their investigation. Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç also expressed similar doubts yesterday. Speaking to journalists before a visit to the Kayseri Governor's Office, he said the terror attack in Tokat had been claimed by a group of the PKK that referred to itself as the “Dersimians,” adding that it was staged as an independently, not upon an order from the PKK's central decision-making mechanism. He said the callous attack had torn the hearts of every member of the nation.

“We all want the bloodshed and tears to end. We want peace to come to Turkey. We don't want to bury our martyrs anymore. We want to see terror end completely in this country,” he said. Like the prime minister, he said an investigation into the Tokat incident was already in progress.

“Who did it and why will be clarified only after the perpetrators are captured. Is there a special meaning for choosing the Reşadiye district of [the predominantly Turkish] Tokat for this attack? We'll find out at the end of the investigation. This region has been an area where many terrorist groups other than the PKK have been active. We will know who did it when the investigation is over.”

On the plane yesterday, the prime minister also spoke about recent complaints raised by the PKK and the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) about the conditions of jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan's imprisonment. He said the prison on the island of İmralı where Öcalan is serving a life sentence has better conditions than most of Turkey's F-Type prisons. “It is completely in line with EU standards, even better. Its pictures have been published in the press.

They said his window was near his ceiling, and you saw that this is not true. He now has the opportunity to see other inmates for not more than 10 hours a week.” He said the government was satisfied with the work carried out by the Justice Ministry to improve the conditions of Öcalan's imprisonment.

In his conversation with journalists, he also criticized opposition parties that disapprove of the government's Kurdish initiative, referred to as “the democratic initiative” by government officials. He said both the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) have been firmly opposed to the initiative from the start, expressing his opinion that these two parties had no desire for the bloodshed to end. He also criticized the DTP, which initially supported the initiative, but later said it would not in protest of Öcalan's allegedly poor prison conditions. The DTP was angered when the size of Öcalan's cell was reduced. The Justice Ministry says with the change, his cell has been refurbished and the reduction in the room's size has been minimal.

Erdoğan accused the MHP and CHP of using dead soldiers as an instrument for their own political gains. He said this approach was “ugly.” He also accused the two parties of not proposing or making any contributions to or constructive criticism of the Kurdish

initiative process. He said reversing the process in reaction to terrorist attacks and violent street demonstrations of PKK supporters across the country in the past week was unthinkable. "If we did such a thing, we would serve separatist terror. We would also fall to the mentality of the CHP and MHP. We would never fall into such a trap or give in to such trickery."

In response to a question about a possible meeting to be organized by the president that would bring leaders of all political parties together to talk about the Kurdish question, Erdoğan said: "Such a meeting may be organized. But our president has done this before. Not only did [these meetings] yield no results, they also featured very inappropriate behavior directed at our president. Of course, it is up to Mr. President to decide. I would not say no to such an invitation from Mr. President. But I don't believe it would yield any positive results."

He also said the government will travel to every corner of the country to explain the details of the Kurdish initiative, noting the party was busy compiling parliamentary speeches on the Kurdish initiative as well as brochures and booklets. He also said they expected to see support from the media. "We have two options," he said. "One is that terror continues. Or, we establish brotherhood. Either one or the other."

Erdoğan also responded to questions on the Council of State's rejection of an appeal by the Higher Education Council (YÖK) to eliminate the use of a lower coefficient when calculating university admission test scores of graduates of vocational and religious imam-hatip schools, leaving them at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their fellow university applicants. He said the Council of State would not be forgiven by the people for turning hundreds of thousands of young people into victims.

In response to a question on news stories reporting that prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalçınkaya had asked for records held by the Telecommunications Administration (TİB) of those phone lines that were legally wiretapped, he said this could not be possible without a court decision. "TİB has its own confidentiality rules. You can't just call them and think you can get whatever you want."

Erdoğan vows to push on with democratic initiative

Tuesday, 15 December 2009 16:29

Today's Zaman

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who spoke in Parliament on Monday during budget talks, said the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) would push on with its democratic initiative agenda and not allow "terror, supporters of terrorism, bloodsuckers. In his speech, he mostly responded to opposition parties' criticism of the government over the democratic initiative, which he swore to see through. He said his party was in no way pessimistic about the fate of the democratic initiative process, which seeks to end separatist violence by expanding the rights of Kurds in the country. "When we set out on this road, we knew what kind of obstacles, provocations and harassment we would face," he said.

He noted that they knew that those who profited from the "terror market" would do all they could to stall the process. "Let me repeat this once again: The status quo cannot remain in place. We can't send any more youths to death, knowingly. We cannot tolerate more families being torn apart. We will not allow terror, supporters of terrorism, bloodsuckers who feed on bloodshed caused by terror and vampires to fulfill their plans."

He said their solution was to fight terrorism, obstinately demanding more democracy. "What we say is initiative, unity, brotherhood, and we are saying these in a voice louder than ever."

The prime minister said there were a large number of "interest groups" against the initiative, including those who earned money from the drug trade of the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and those who earned non-financial profits using the blood of those killed in clashes. "Of course, it will not be easy. Those whose lifelines have been cut off will stand in front of this process like a wall. Those who have lost their easy money will most certainly resort to all sorts of provocation and aggravations. But this nation has the power and the will to ruin their game. My people are aware of these games being played. The nation knows who stands where and why he stands there. My people will not fall into this trap. ... We will complete this process with the permission of God and the support and prayers of our nation."

Budget talks marred by row over Kurdish initiative

Tuesday, 15 December 2009 14:40

Today's Zaman

Yesterday's parliamentary session on budgetary talks was seized as an opportunity to lambaste the ruling party over its democratic initiative when CHP leader Deniz Baykal took to the podium to outline his party's views on next year's planned budget.

The Republican People's Party (CHP) leader reiterated once more his party's opposition to the Kurdish initiative, saying it failed to prevent more killings of Turkish soldiers by terrorists. "Since the initiative was first announced, 26 soldiers have been martyred. This happened in four-and-a-half months alone.

However, only six soldiers were killed in 2002," he remarked, implying that more soldiers had been killed in the fight against terror since the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) came to power.

The AK Party government has been working on a massive democratization package since the summer, aiming to settle decades-old Turkish problems -- including the Kurdish issue -- through democratic means.

The CHP and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) have maintained staunch opposition to the idea, saying the package aims to damage national unity. Baykal also blamed the government for the killings of seven soldiers in Tokat's Reşadiye district last week. "The Tokat incident is a tragedy, but what is more tragic is the stance the government assumed afterward. They do not believe that the attack was carried out by the Kurdistan Workers' Party [PKK]. They are implying that it was not carried out by the PKK; you [the government] are not supposed to speculate. You are protecting the PKK," he said.

Many observers say the attack could be the result of cooperation between multiple terrorist organizations. The CHP leader went on to slam the government for its efforts to clear the Constitution of any statement that could indicate racism. "The notion of Turkishness entered the Constitution with the dynamics of [Turkish] history. It is irresponsible to change this through parliamentary talks," he said.

Parliament focuses on budget deficit, debts and unemployment

During yesterday's talks, deputies also evaluated Turkey's performance in managing the

global financial crisis. Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek praised the government's management of the crisis without seeking the assistance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). "The 2010 budget aims to maintain low interest rates. It allocates a greater amount for students and persons with disabilities; it allows greater benefits for civil servants and a bigger budget for education and health," Şimşek stated.

Şimşek also voiced an expectation that global economy, whose growth was pegged at 5.2 percent in 2007, would contract by 1.1 percent by the end of 2009. "We expect the Turkish economy to grow by 3.5 percent in 2010. But the IMF, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] and international financial institutions [have estimated that this figure will fall] between 3.7 and 5.5 percent," he said. The minister also said Turkey was expected to grow by 6.7 percent between 2011 and 2017 as per the OECD's latest economic outlook. "I'd like to underline that this figure is the highest after those of China and India," he remarked.

During his speech, the minister defined Turkey as among a handful of world nations that were able to minimize the negative effects of the crisis. "If interest rates are in the single digits, inflation is at the lowest level in the past 40 years and our country's credit scores are improving, and if not a single bank has gone bankrupt, then we can say that Turkey is one of the countries which was least impacted by the economic crisis," Şimşek said.

The main opposition CHP and the MHP, however, say the ruling AK Party has failed to prepare a "social budget" for 2010. An AK Party member speaking on condition of anonymity told Today's Zaman that the government was working to settle Turkey's 80-year-old problems. "This is not a social budget as we had hoped for it to be. But when criticizing us for failing to have prepared a social budget, they should indicate to us when exactly it was that they managed to prepare a successful one," he said.

The opposition also criticizes the government for choosing to pay internal and external debts by becoming indebted to third parties. The AK Party government has paid around TL 1.1 trillion since 2003, but also incurred a debt of around \$957 billion. Democratic Left Party (DSP) İzmir deputy Harun Öztürk likened the government's attempt to clear its debts to snowballs, saying: "The government's greatest mistake is to choose to pay its debts with debt. It does not seem very likely to eliminate this snowball through this method. The government will face greater trouble in the years ahead with growing budgetary deficits." Öztürk recommended the government increase public investment to overcome the financial crisis, recalling that Turkey will have to pay around \$200 billion during 2010, which he called a "year and budget to pay off debts."

The deputy chairman of the AK Party's parliamentary group, Mustafa Elitaş, responded to Öztürk's criticism and argued that Turkey had become a more prosperous country during his party's term in power. "It is unjust to turn a blind eye to economic growth and focus solely on the country's debt. Though it may appear at first sight that Turkey has a heavy load in terms of debt, today's debt per capita is lower when compared to 2002. When the AK Party was swept to power, per capita income was \$3,519 and debt per capita was \$3,450. However, per capita income rose to \$10,500 toward the end of 2008 while debt per capita increased to \$4,500," he remarked.

Elitaş also said Turkey needs to overcome psychological barriers in order to fight unemployment. "When Turkey manages to overcome internal and external obstacles before social, political and economic welfare, the Turkish economy will soar, and Turkey will discharge its debt more easily," he added.

Kurdish politics at crossroads in wake of DTP closure

Tuesday, 15 December 2009 14:39

Today's Zaman

While the closure of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) by the Constitutional Court has left Kurdish politics at a cross roads, it has also helped in crystallizing differences between moderates and hard-liners more than ever, pundits have argued.

The deputies of the now-defunct DTP and representatives of civil society groups, including the Diyarbakır Trade and Industry Chamber (DTSO), bar associations in the region and the Human Rights Association (İHD) met yesterday in Diyarbakır to convene the Democratic Society Congress, hoping to determine a roadmap for the next course of action in Kurdish politics. The representatives of the civil society organizations tried to convince the deputies to stay in Parliament despite the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is listed as a terrorist organization, having said in a statement that the decision of withdrawing from Parliament is the demand of the people and should be respected.

The same statement suggested that Kurdish politicians, even if they are affiliated with political parties other than the DTP, should return to their own soil and participate in the struggle.

The PKK also claimed that the pleas for common sense regardless of who is advocating them just means to suggest that Kurds should surrender and accept things like a sheep which is ready to be sacrificed. By stating that, the PKK tried to pre-empt the possible appeal for common sense and calm by the Democratic Society Congress.

The defunct DTP reaffirmed, over the weekend, their previously announced decision that all deputies would withdraw from parliamentary proceedings and return to their respective constituencies to campaign at grassroots level.

Discussions, however, continue among the party base over whether withdrawing from Parliament is wise, as some party members insist Parliament serves an important channel to voice Kurdish demands.

The opponents of this idea claim that the democratic channel for Kurdish politics has been blocked and if names like Ahmet Türk and Aysel Tuğluk who are known for their moderate views have been banned from politics there is not that much to do but to continue politics at grassroots level.

Within Kurdish politics there were always differences between moderate and radical viewpoints but according to many observers this difference is getting deeper now, although it is still early to say whether it will lead to a total separation:

“Especially after Reşadiye, this difference was deepened but the closure of the DTP slowed down the process. The seeds are already there but it is too early to hope for the emergence of a power within Kurdish politics which will overpower the PKK,” said sociologist Mesut Yeğen from the Middle East Technical University (METU).

One week before the Constitutional Court started to discuss the DTP situation, there was an attack in Tokat province in Reşadiye in which seven soldiers were killed. The DTP condemned the attack and claimed that it was a provocation to stop the democratization process. One day before the Constitutional Court's announcement the PKK claimed responsibility for the attack.

Many pundits are also emphasizing that the PKK is now aiming at civil war since it thinks the government's democratization initiative would have lead to its elimination. But after the closure of the DTP, they have regained their strength.

Sedat Laçiner from the International Strategic Research Foundation (USAK) underlined that the PKK is aiming at a bloody civil war:

"They are calculating that by turning streets into pools of blood the ethnic rift between Kurds and Turks will be deepen. In this way a terrorist organization which was about to be eliminated will have the chance to survive," Laçiner claimed.

Feridun Yazar an experienced former Kurdish politician who was the chairman of the first pro-Kurdish party, the People's Labor Party (HEP), which was also shut down by the Constitutional Court, drew attention to the shift in the PKK's discourse:

"They gave up talking about democratic means and started to mention the name of Kurdistan and they urged Kurds to return. They are claiming that legal politics is over," Yazar said.

According to him there are many names within legal Kurdish politics who do not agree with the recently adopted policies of the PKK, but the problem is the PKK has the guns:

"The closure of the DTP means leaving the PKK as the only party and since they have guns their counterpart is not the government but the army. I am afraid we are entering a new era in which the guns will speak more and louder," Yazar warned.

He added that the names within Kurdish politics who are against the guns are not fewer in number but are definitely less powerful since they are not organized but acting as individuals.

"Look at the other examples in the world; can you say that all Basques supported ETA, can you say the same for the IRA, but these organizations had guns," he said. According to him the only way to open this deadlock is immediate democratization but he is not hopeful about it in the near future.

DTP excludes itself from parliamentary proceedings

Monday, 14 December 2009 12:40

Today's Zaman

Reaffirming their previously announced decision, leaders of the now-defunct Democratic Society Party (DTP) said on Sunday that all deputies would withdraw from parliamentary proceedings and return to their respective constituencies to campaign at the grass

The written statement issued by party headquarters in Ankara also dismissed speculations that a new party group may be formed in Parliament with the possible support of one independent deputy. "Discussions like these are not on our party agenda," the statement said, adding that the group had effectively withdrawn from participating in the works of Parliament. The party is also planning to appeal the Constitutional Court ruling at the European Court of Human Rights.

DTP leader Ahmet Türk over the weekend said the party would boycott Parliament and not participate in its proceedings. However, independent İstanbul deputy Ufuk Uras said he is ready to support the DTP in forming a parliamentary group again after the top court kicked two DTP deputies out of Parliament, leading to DTP's failure to meet the required 20 seats to form a group.

Discussions, however, continue among the party base over whether withdrawing from

Parliament is wise, as some party members insist Parliament serves an important channel to voice Kurdish demands.

With this in mind, decisions made by the Democratic Society Congress, which comprises many civil society organizations, will be very important. It will convene in Diyarbakır on Monday and almost all DTP deputies will be present.

The Democratic Society Congress may suggest that legal Kurdish politics should continue to be represented in Parliament, perhaps by the established but not yet active Peace and Democracy Party (BDP).

The Constitutional Court on Friday unanimously decided to close the DTP, calling it a focus of separatist activities. The court also decided to ban 37 DTP politicians, including DTP chairman Türk and deputy Aysel Tuğluk, from engaging in politics.

The DTP had 21 seats in parliament. Forming a parliamentary party in Parliament requires at least 20 deputies. The ban on the two DTP deputies will make it difficult for the rest of the deputies, who are now independent now, to form a new group.

Before the court closed the DTP, the party had stated that even if one DTP deputy in Parliament is banned, all will resign. Indeed, all already submitted their letters of resignation to Türk. But, according to the Constitution, for a deputy to resign from Parliament is not easy; the general assembly has to approve any resignation. If Parliament approves the resignations, the number of empty seats in Parliament will total 26.

Independent İstanbul deputy Uras may join them, bringing the number up to 27, just one less than 28 empty seats, a situation that requires interim elections to be held. Since the other parties do not want elections, they will not approve the resignations.

When the DTP deputies promised to resign from Parliament, they thought many of them will be banned from politics. The indictment against them called for a ban on 219 people, including eight DTP deputies.

But the possibility of forming a new parliamentary group is very likely, and this possibility has led the DTP deputies to rethink their position.

“Our group de facto withdraws from Parliament; it will not participate in its facilities,” Türk said, but did not elaborate on whether he will submit the letters of resignation of the deputies to the General Assembly.

Meanwhile, independent İstanbul deputy Uras, the former chairman of the Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP), in a written statement underlined that he believes the closure of the DTP makes a solution to the Kurdish problem by democratic means more difficult and reiterated that he will do anything to support the DTP, so long as it accords with his beliefs.

“The closure of the DTP brings the risk of further and larger clashes. It buries any hope that guns will be silenced. What we need most in Parliament is common sense and efforts to solve problems,” Uras underlined.

He also urged everyone with a sense of justice to act in accordance with the principles of democracy and peace. Another pro-Kurdish party, the BDP, was established last year but is not active. Former DTP deputies may join this party.

The DTP headquarters in Ankara are expected to be vacated and a new lease agreement signed with the BDP.

Election of new leader to determine path forward

The makeup of the BDP’s leadership will determine the course this new party will take. Moderate names such as Akin Birdal, former chairman of the Human Rights Association

(İHD), and even Uras, if he joins the party, have been mentioned, but so have the names of Emine Ayna and Hatip Dicle, both known for their radical views.

Former DTP deputies may face prison

The Constitutional Court's decision to close the DTP has led Türk and Tuğluk to lose their parliamentary immunity. The two will now have to face cases that were pending against them.

Tuğluk, along with deputies Selahattin Demirtaş, Ayna and Sabahat Tuncel, refused to attend hearings of court cases pending against them, citing parliamentary immunity.

According to the Constitution, if a person is charged with separatist activities and if the case begins before he or she is elected a deputy, the court case continues despite immunity.

During the last hearing of the cases, held in October, the court decided it would bring the deputies to court by police force. Addressing this decision, the deputies said they would resist any such move. Tuğluk has now said she will attend the hearings.

Discussions concerning banning individuals from engaging in politics continue.

Türk, speaking at a press conference over the weekend, said the bans are proof of how the Constitutional Court cannot be taken seriously.

He cited the case of Leyla Zana, who has been banned from engaging in politics but was neither a founder nor a member of the DTP.

The 37 people who were banned from politics for five years when the DTP was shut down are expected to take their case to the European court.

According to Türk, Zana's case is proof the Constitutional Court decision is politically motivated. He was also critical of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) for being silent during the process.

Türk added that the Republican People's Party (CHP) claims to be the lawyer of Ergenekon, a terrorist organization, and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) threatens others by saying "They will see the anger of the Turks," but no legal action is taken against them.

He also urged everyone to think once more about solving the Kurdish question through peaceful means. "It is a pity for the citizens of this country. I urge you from here to not neglect the problems of this country. You will be held responsible by history and the conscience of the people. Please stop taking Turkey into civil conflict and chaos," he said.

Party closure strengthens urban arm of terror

Monday, 14 December 2009 11:03

Today's Zaman

The closure of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) on charges of links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) might benefit the Kurdish Democratic Confederation (KCK), an urban arm of the PKK, experts have suggested.

Monday, 14 December 2009 11:03

The primary reason for this fear is the fact that the Constitutional Court introduced a political ban on the moderates of the DTP, who were often at odds with the KCK and its urban attacks. DTP member Orhan Miroğlu, a critic of not only his own party but also the PKK, was included in the list of people banned from political party membership of any

kind for the next five years. Selim Sadak, another moderate, was also banned from political activity.

Aysel Tuğluk, the party's former co-chairwoman, who has been criticized for questioning the possible relationship between the PKK and Ergenekon, a clandestine terrorist group nested within Turkish state hierarchy currently charged with plotting to overthrow the democratically elected government, was also banned by the court. Tuğluk was not well liked by the KCK for stating in 2008 that the Kurdish movement could develop civilian initiatives not linked to the PKK for a solution. DTP leader Ahmet Türk, also banned from politics by the court, was the number one DTP politician the KCK wanted to get rid of. In fact, in 2007 and 2008, there were attempts to overthrow Türk from party leadership. For some time, the DTP was chaired by Nurettin Demirtaş, a DTP member who doesn't have parliamentary membership. However, Türk was later re-elected as the party's leader.

Leyla Zana, a member of the now-defunct Democracy Party (DEP), a predecessor of the DTP, was also banned from politics. Observers note that she was perceived as a potential threat against the leadership of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. In addition to not being a founder or a member of the DTP, Zana also did not participate in DTP meetings or activities.

With the ruling, there is now increased risk that Kurdish politics in Turkey might fall under domination of the KCK. Some suggest that the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), the DTP's back-up party established prior to the closure decision, is already dominated by the KCK. The BDP's leader, Demir Çelik, was actually detained in September as part of an investigation into the KCK. He is also known as a critic of the DTP for its moderate politics.

The Constitutional Court's ruling, based on the indictment of the Supreme Court of Appeals Chief Prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalçınkaya, has also left untouched hard-liners inside the DTP known for their proximity to the KCK. One such person is Emine Ayna, who recently said Kurdish people wanted DTP deputies to "join the PKK in the mountains" to fight Turkey. Likewise, Kamuray Yüksek and Bayram Altun, deputy co-chairmen of the DTP, who were arrested in KCK operations, are not included on the list of people banned from political party membership. Sebahat Tuncel, who was in jail on charges of PKK membership until she was elected to Parliament in 2007, and DTP Van deputy Özdal Üçer, a central figure in KCK demonstrations in the Southeast, were left untouched by the court.

Meanwhile, PKK supporters staged protests on Friday and over the weekend across the country, stoning buildings and setting small fires. They stoned a building hosting military families in the city of Hakkari, close to the borders of Iraq and Iran. Police responded with water cannons to disperse the crowds.

In İstanbul on Saturday night, groups of protestors threw Molotov cocktails and stones at various buildings. Police had to use tear gas to disperse the protestors in Beyoğlu. The group set on fire a lamppost with a MOBESE camera that is part of the city's integrated security system. In the Gazi Mahallesi area, protestors vandalized three city busses. The Constitutional Court has shut down several Kurdish parties on similar charges in the past. The predecessor of the DTP dissolved itself in 2005. The party is the 27th to be shut down in Turkey since 1968.

MHP holds rally, calls gov't to end Kurdish initiative

Monday, 14 December 2009 12:47

Today's Zaman

Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli has called on the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government to stop its efforts to draft a democratization package to settle the Kurdish question through peaceful methods.

"You are the prime minister, the head of the legislative body, fulfill your responsibility and give up the destruction you call the 'initiative' immediately," Bahçeli told Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, speaking at a party rally that took place in Ankara's Tandoğan Square yesterday with the slogan "Long live the 1,000-year-old brotherhood, help it to survive."

Pointing to a series of demonstrations held by supporters of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) last week, Bahçeli said: "Separatism has reached the streets and bargaining has begun with traitors. Every wrong step taken by the [AK Party] government has become a new position gained by separatism."

The demonstrations were against a new prison cell for jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in the İmralı Island prison over claims that it is substandard and "threatens the health" of the terrorist chief.

Bahçeli accused Erdoğan of destroying Turkish national values, saying that his government has achieved things in the seven years it has been in power which the PKK had failed to achieve.

"You welcomed traitors and encouraged them. You invited terrorists to the negotiation table. You collaborated with İmralı [referring to Öcalan]. You embraced tribal leaders, you welcomed terrorists with a ceremony at the Habur border gate [referring to the surrender of a group of PKK terrorists at Habur in October]. You opened up our identity to debate. You questioned our unity. You tried to divide Turkey into 36 ethnic groups," Bahçeli told Erdoğan.

Holding Erdoğan responsible for the escalating tension in the country, Bahçeli called on the prime minister to read the nation's message correctly and discontinue the Kurdish initiative.

Opposition leaders like Bahçeli and Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal have increased their calls for the government to give up the Kurdish initiative after seven soldiers were killed by the PKK in the Reşadiye district of Tokat last week, described by many as a provocation aiming to halt the peace process.

"You [Erdoğan] are responsible for the security and peace of the country. It is not the brutal terrorists with whom you should take sides. You should give an account of the slain soldiers. Do not run away. It is your duty to fight terrorism. It is your duty to ensure the unity of the nation. Fulfill your responsibility and end the destruction you call the 'initiative'," said Bahçeli.

Security measures were high at the MHP rally, which was attended by 10,000 supporters. A total of 2,500 police officers were stationed in the square. Police officials said 165 buses and 53 minibuses full of people came to Ankara from other provinces to participate in the rally.

Turkey's Erdoğan criticises ban on Kurdish party

Tuesday, 15 December 2009 14:33

Today's Zaman

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan spoke out on Monday against a court ban on a Kurdish party that caused angry protests and plunged the country into political uncertainty.

The court ruling drew criticism from the European Union, dealing a new blow to Turkey's faltering hopes of EU membership.

"Our position against the closure of the DTP is clear ... We are against the closure of parties. We think individuals should be punished, not a (party) identity," Erdoğan told parliament.

The leader of the banned Democratic Society Party (DTP), closed after being found guilty of links to the terrorist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), said former party members would resign from parliament in protest.

This could open the way for by-elections, increasing political uncertainty ahead of national polls due in 2011.

In Diyarbakır, the largest city in the primarily Kurdish southeast, thousands of Kurds took to the streets, watched by riot police, for the fourth day of protests since the court disbanded the only Kurdish party in parliament.

In the town of Doğubeyazıt, angry protesters threw petrol bombs and stones at police, who fired back with tear gas and water cannon.

Clashes have erupted mainly in villages in the southeast, but also in the heart of İstanbul's shopping and entertainment district on Sunday, raising ethnic tensions.

The European Commission warned Turkey on Monday that the court verdict could deprive a substantial number of voters of representation, which it said was essential to Ankara fulfilling its democratic mandate.

The ruling AK Party wants to push reforms aimed at ending decades of conflict with Kurdish separatists by increasing the rights of Turkey's roughly 12 million Kurds.

Investors who are hardened to the emerging market's domestic turmoil were relatively untroubled by the events.

The Turkish lira and bonds weakened moderately on Monday but shares were in positive territory, boosted by news of Abu Dhabi's surprise \$10 billion bail-out of debt-stricken Dubai.

HERO'S WELCOME

DTP deputies, riding an open-top bus, received a heroes' welcome when they arrived at Diyarbakır on Monday after a flight from Ankara, as around 5,000 people flooded the streets in a largely peaceful protest against the party's closure.

The chairman of the former party, speaking in the predominantly Kurdish city, said there was no longer any reason to remain in parliament.

"As you know, we have said before there is no reason to stay in parliament if our struggle for democracy is not taken into consideration ... We will submit our resignations to the speaker of the parliament in the shortest possible time," said DTP chairman Ahmet Türk.

Other MPs speculated that they could join an alternative pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party.

Earlier in the day police fired water cannon when a group of youths pelted them with

rocks and ripped up street signs. Protesters also stoned a local office of the AK Party and several people were arrested.

Some protesters carried portraits of Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the terrorist PKK.

The Constitutional Court ordered the closure of the DTP after finding it guilty of cooperating with the PKK, branded a terrorist organisation by Washington, Brussels and Ankara

The PKK has fought for 25 years for a Kurdish homeland in southeast Turkey. Some 40,000 people have died in the violence since 1984.

Kurdish political pendulum swinging toward hard-liners

Wednesday, 16 December 2009 10:1

Today's Zaman

A campaign by civic groups and moderate factions to try to convince ex-Democratic Society Party (DTP) deputies to not resign and withdraw from Parliament apparently failed on Monday, paving the way for a more hard-line position at the expense of moderatio

The decision was announced late on Monday after the deputies of the now-defunct DTP and representatives of civil society groups met in Diyarbakır to convene the Democratic Society Congress.

The civil society representatives were hoping to convince the deputies to stay in Parliament, but Emin Aktar, the chairman of the Diyarbakır Bar Association, said when they arrived the resignation letters were already signed and that they did not even have a chance to talk the deputies out of their decision.

The DTP deputies were enthusiastically welcomed by crowds at the airport in Diyarbakır. DTP Chairman Ahmet Türk, who was banned from politics for five years by the Constitutional Court, addressed the crowd and suggested that a group of experts be established to discuss ways of solving the Kurdish question. He was rebuked by the crowd, who urged the deputies to resign immediately.

“We will submit our letters of resignation to Parliament as soon as possible. Parliament was not able to handle us,” Türk said while announcing the party congress’ decision. But according to the Constitution, the individual resignations of the deputies are not enough for the resignations to be valid, as the approval of the General Assembly is required. It is not yet clear, but there is an expectation that Parliament’s deputies will not approve the resignations of the DTP deputies since this would mean 27 empty chairs in Parliament, one seat below the threshold that would trigger required interim elections according to the Constitution.

‘It was not easy for the DTP, either’

The former parliamentary group chairman of the DTP, Selahattin Demirtaş, after the announcement of the decision to resign, said it was not an easy decision to make and that they are not giving up on democratic politics, but rather that in order to force the channels of democratic politics they had decided to resign.

“Maybe this crisis can turn into an opportunity and the other political parties will really think about the necessity of changing the Constitution, the Political Parties Law and legal amendments for broader freedom of expression. We want everyone to think about the problem seriously and reassess the situation,” he told Today’s Zaman.

Demirtaş added that they will also rethink the situation and that if even friends of the DTP are critical of the party, this would mean that they were unable to express themselves fully.

He underlined that by this mass resignation they are taking a stand and do not mean to imply that they are stepping aside so the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the military will face each other in conflict.

"The state, by closing us down, tried to say, 'I want to see and deal with the PKK,' but this would mean more bloodshed; on the other hand, this is a de facto situation on the ground," he said.

He also recalled the recent street clashes over the ethnic rift and said that everybody must think and be aware of the danger.

Demirtaş said they made their decision after discussions and after everybody had a chance to speak their mind, and added that it is meaningless to talk about "moderates" and "radicals" in the DTP.

"This is a discussion to which we are not a party," he said.

The decision of the DTP deputies to resign is considered by many experts to be a crossroad in Kurdish legal politics and that it also helped in crystallizing differences between moderates and hard-liners more than ever. The determination to resign is also considered to be a victory of the hard-liners for the time being.

Before the decision was made, the outlawed PKK announced in a statement that withdrawing from Parliament was the demand of the people and should be respected.

The same statement suggested that there may not be space left for Kurds in Turkish politics, so Kurdish politicians, even if they are affiliated with political parties other than the DTP, should return to their own land and participate in the struggle. The statement went on to call for young Kurds to head to the mountains and join the PKK.

"It is true that the DTP was excluded from Parliament, they were not listened to. But still it would have been better if they were staying in Parliament," the Diyarbakır Bar Association's Aktar told Today's Zaman.

He said that Kurds are really disappointed and while they are in this mood everybody should understand the difficulty of expecting Kurds to stay calm and trust the existing system.

"In the last 15 years five pro-Kurdish political parties have been shut down by the state. It is so hard for Kurds to engage in politics," he said and added that under these circumstances it is also not relevant to talk about moderates and hardliners.

But according to Şah İsmail Bedirhanoglu, the chairman of the Southeastern Anatolia Businessmen Association (GÜNSİAD), the rift between moderates and hardliners is already there, getting deeper, and it will be reflected in the future, too.

"Maybe it does not look good now. But if we compare how the situation was 10 years ago, obviously there is progress. Despite all the shortcomings, we are freer now. The mentality of the state officials is different; under these circumstances the voice of the moderates will be heard more," he told Today's Zaman and added that the attack at Reşadiye, in Tokat, is the real beginning of this separation.

One week before the Constitutional Court ruled on the DTP closure, there was an attack in Tokat province in which seven soldiers were killed. The DTP condemned the attack and claimed that it was a provocation to stop the democratization process. One day before the Constitutional Court's announcement, the PKK claimed responsibility for the attack.

Atalay: Government to accelerate democratization initiative

Friday, 18 December 2009 14:08

Today's Zaman

Interior Minister Beşir Atalay, who is also the coordinator of a much-anticipated initiative to settle the Kurdish question, reiterated once again the determination of the government to go ahead with its plans, adding that efforts to that end would gain momentum. The minister also emphasized that security forces are in full control of the violent street protests being held to hamper the government's efforts and called for more common sense. "Our aim is to eliminate acts of terror in the country and grant broader freedoms to our citizens," he explained. Atalay's remarks came during a press conference on Thursday following a coordination meeting held on Wednesday attended by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and several state ministers. The meeting was held to re-evaluate the situation in the country in the wake of increasing tension due to a series of illegal demonstrations by supporters of the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) over the past two weeks in eastern and southeastern parts of the country. A demonstration turned violent on Tuesday after a shopkeeper opened fire on demonstrators, killing two and wounding eight.

Among the participants of the coordination meeting were Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin and Atalay. In the summer months, the government launched an initiative to solve the decades-old Kurdish question but it failed to gain the support of the opposition parties. Tension grew even higher after the closure of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) by the Constitutional Court last week, resulting in several clashes between demonstrators and civilians.

Yesterday, Atalay stressed that they are very well aware of the people encouraging the provocations. He said there was no need for panic as everything is under control. According to many experts, the PKK is trying to incite a civil war in order to force the government to declare a state of emergency in the region. "Until now 1,562 people have been detained and 363 of them have been arrested. We are very well aware of the situation and we are analyzing each incident and taking the necessary measures," he said. He also urged the press not to exaggerate these incidents and said they had complete trust in people's continuing common-sense:

"Those who are trying to provoke people forget the fact that in this country, we have been living together for 1,000 years and even in the most difficult times we did not separate, just the opposite -- we shared our happiness and worries," he said. Atalay was critical of the opposition and accused them of not acting with good intentions. He said they had expressed the content and the aim of the democratization initiative but the opposition claimed they were unknown:

"I am sorry to say that Turkey needs a responsible opposition; we are talking about brotherhood while they are talking about separation," he said. Atalay underlined that in order to talk about the measures needed to stop PKK facilities in northern Iraq, they will continue with their international efforts and the three-party meeting between Turkey, Iraq and Syria will convene next week. "The agenda of the meeting will be packed," he said.

The aim is to eliminate terror

He underlined that the basic aim of the initiative is more freedom and democracy for

everyone and the elimination of terror. “We want to create an atmosphere in which all views can be expressed without violence and terror and also eradicate all the areas which are open to abuse and would lead to separation and polarization. When violence talks ideas are silenced and we want to change that,” he said.

Atalay strongly emphasizes elimination of concept of terror

Pro-Kurdish circles are claiming that the aim of the initiative is to eliminate Kurdish politics. In a previous interview with Today’s Zaman, Selahhatin Demirtaş, the parliamentary group chairman of the defunct DTP, when questioned about why the DTP was refraining from acting like a party in the process, he said that it would be easier for the DTP to take responsibility during the democratization process if the government had sent the message that “it is taking steps for the sake of the people and the elimination of violence, not only for the elimination of the PKK.”

“How can you eliminate something? Either you kill it, or it surrenders. They are saying that their aim is to eliminate the PKK and they are asking the DTP to cooperate in this elimination process. To ask the DTP to cooperate in eliminating the PKK actually means telling the DTP to climb up to the gallows, put a noose around its own neck and kick away the stool. We are a political party, we are not an association created to support the AK Party [Justice and Development Party],” Demirtaş had said then.

During the press conference, Atalay said that they are against party closures and they said this at every opportunity. He confirmed that after the closure of the DTP he met with Ahmet Türk, the chairman of the DTP who was banned from politics by the Constitutional Court. “Political parties are indispensable. We are ready for amendments in the Constitution and in the Political Parties Law to make closures difficult but it should be done in Parliament with agreement,” he said.

He reiterated that they were planning to establish independent bodies to promote and ensure human rights. The draft bill is almost ready and will be submitted to Parliament after the budget.

Prime Minister Erdoğan vows to end terror

Friday, 18 December 2009 09:31

Today's Zaman

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has stated that the only winners from terror are weapons traffickers, pledging to stop those who feed on the blood of the country's youth. Erdoğan said Turkey is continuing its anti-terrorism efforts with the same determination as before. “Our security forces are doing what needs to be done. Our judicial system is working. But additional measures are needed in this fight. We use the most high-tech weapons there are, but if we fail to bring your democratic standards to higher levels, if we fail to eradicate poverty, we cannot rid ourselves of this curse, terrorism,” the prime minister said during a visit yesterday to Konya, where he attended ceremonies to commemorate Mevlana Jelaluddin Rumi on the 736th anniversary of the 13th-century Sufi saint's death.

Stating that his government was continuing its path under the light of Mevlana, Erdoğan said difficulties provided guidance. “Mevlana says, ‘Don’t be discouraged by a bump on your path; you will have to face many mountains.’ We think big, we target big and work in that direction.”

He said some groups were trying to perpetuate existing impasses in Turkey’s problems

instead of creating solutions. "This nation will overcome every difficulty. Nothing can keep us shackled. Nothing can stop this nation from its sacred walk. We have overcome many disasters in our history. We have, with the permission of God, overcome all of them. We can and will do it again, as long as we have our self-confidence, as long as we stand together in unity," Erdoğan said.

The prime minister also said that both Turks and Kurds have lost much in the past 30 years of the armed conflict waged by the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) against Turkey. "Only those who sell guns, mines and drugs have won. Who lost? You did, I did, our young people did, their families did, the country did, the nation did. Can a person with a conscience and reason allow this to continue? ... Of course, we will continue fighting terrorism. Today, our gendarmerie is in the mountains, our police are in urban centers, and they are fighting heroically. But we need other measures in anti-terrorism efforts. ... No matter how many troops you deploy, you cannot end terror if you don't eradicate poverty."

The prime minister also opened various facilities in a single ceremony held at the Konya Cultural Park.

CONSTITUTIONAL CLOSURE OF DTP

Turkish constitutional court bans DTP party

Saturday, 12 December 2009 10:02

TIME TURK

Turkish Constitutional Court, country's top legal authority, has decided to shut down Democratic Society Party, or DTP, on charges it has ties with the terrorist organization PKK, court's president said on Friday.

Constitutional Court President Hasim Kilic said 37 DTP executives, including DTP Chairman Ahmet Turk and MP Aysel Tugluk were banned from politics for five years. Chief Public Prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalcinkaya filed a lawsuit at the Constitutional Court on November 16, 2007, asking the closure of DTP since it allegedly became a center of actions against Turkey's inseparable unity.

Founded in 2005, the DTP has currently 21 seats at the parliament. The party won 2009 local elections in nine provinces (Diyarbakir, Batman, Hakkari, Igridir, Siirt, Sirnak, Tunceli, Bingol and Van).

Leader of outlawed DTP says problems cannot be solved by banning political parties

Saturday, 12 December 2009 13:35

TIME TURK

Leader of the outlawed Democratic Society Party (DTP) said that Turkey could not resolve problems by banning political parties, adding that problems could be resolved through dialogue and logic.

After Turkey's highest legal body, the Constitutional Court announced that it ruled to close down the DTP, Ahmet Turk told reporters, "obstruction of democratic politics will deepen hopelessness. This is a fact. Despite all these, we believe that Turkey will acquire peace one day. Turkey cannot resolve problems by banning political parties. Problems can be resolved through joint understanding, dialogue and logic."

Turk said that his political party would make a statement on Saturday.

DTP ruling draws concern both at home and abroad

Monday, 14 December 2009 10:49

Today's Zaman

The decision of Turkey's top court to close the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) has led to statements expressing concerns over the future of Turkey's ongoing efforts for democratization, which were delivered at home, in Europe and across the At The Constitutional Court announced on Friday its decision to close the main pro-Kurdish party, suggesting that it had links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is considered a terrorist organization by the European Union and the United States as well as by Turkey.

The verdict, which has plunged the country into political uncertainty and has dealt a fresh blow to Turkey's faltering bid for EU membership, threatens to undermine the drive by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AK Party) to reconcile the country's Kurds with the state and end decades of conflict between security forces and the PKK.

Within hours of the delivery of the verdict, the EU's Swedish presidency expressed concern over the decision, while noting that it would monitor further developments closely. "While strongly denouncing violence and terrorism, the presidency recalls that the dissolution of political parties is an exceptional measure that should be used with utmost restraint," the presidency said in written a statement.

"The EU has called on Turkey, as a negotiating country, to make the necessary constitutional amendments to bring its legislation on political parties in line with the recommendations by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe and relevant provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights," the statement highlighted. Also on Friday, French Green Hélène Flautre, a co-chairperson of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, called the verdict a "sabotage" of the Turkish government's recent democratization initiative drive that, among other things, will expand rights for Turkey's Kurds. The initiative, which has the backing of Western powers such as the EU and the US and Middle Eastern neighbors including Syria and Iraq, has been severely criticized at home by the nationalist opposition, which says it will undermine Turkey's national unity.

Flautre, meanwhile, urged the government to take swift action on making the necessary amendments to the country's Political Parties Law as well as on carrying out constitutional reform.

Expressing her "deep sadness," over the verdict, Dutch Christian Democrat Ria Oomen-Ruijten on Saturday joined Flautre in encouraging the government to make the related legal amendments.

"I consider this verdict an obstacle to Turkey's democratization, particularly at a time when there is a hope for a permanent resolution to the problems of citizens of Kurdish origin and there is a sincere effort for a public debate on the democratization initiative," Oomen-Ruijten, the European Parliament's rapporteur on Turkey, was quoted as saying by the Anatolia news agency. She also called on all political parties in Turkey, as well as on civil society, to "continue working for a peaceful, stable and prosperous Turkey through acting cautiously."

In Washington, despite declining to comment on the verdict, which it called “an internal matter,” the US State Department has highlighted the need for “extreme caution” in limiting fundamental freedoms. The State Department’s reaction to the issue came in the form of an answer to a question taken at a daily press briefing on Friday and was released as a written statement by the Office of the Spokesman.

“The ruling of the Constitutional Court is a matter internal to Turkey, and we would not comment on the specifics of the ruling itself. However, we believe that Turkey’s democratic system should continue to advance political freedoms for all its citizens. Measures that limit or restrain these freedoms should be exercised with extreme caution,” the statement said. “We encourage the government of Turkey to continue its efforts to ensure that all Turkish citizens fully exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. We encourage all political actors in Turkey to pursue reconciliation, reflect democratic values, and refrain from the use or encouragement of violence,” it added.

Political parties, civil society groups and intellectuals in Turkey were no less concerned. Felicity Party (SP) Deputy Chairman Şevket Kazan said only the people can shut down political parties, and not courts. Culture Minister Ertuğrul Günay said the ruling was not legal, but political. The powerful Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association (TÜSİAD) said no closure would help to alleviate or solve any problems. In a written statement released on the subject, TÜSİAD said: “It should not be ignored that while applying legislation regarding the closure of political parties, the platform for that party’s members, its views and the people it represents is being destroyed.”

“If closing parties ever helped peace and stability, Turkey would have been a rose garden by now,” said the Turkish Entrepreneurs and Business World Confederation (TÜRKNONFED) in a statement yesterday. The statement said party closures moved Turkey away from contemporary democratic principles and universal standards, noting that Turkey was choosing to suppress its problems rather than solving them. The statement called for changes to the political parties’ law and the Constitution to avoid closures in the future.

Rights group Özgür-Der in a statement released on Sunday referred to the DTP’s closure as an “announcement of the policy of insisting on a non-settlement” of the Kurdish question. The statement said the “defenders of the status quo” would be trying to glorify the court ruling saying “rule of law,” however, it asserted that in actuality the ruling was a political and ideological one.

Social Democratic People’s Party (SHP) leader Hüseyin Ergün said the DTP’s closure would harm Turkish democracy and the government’s ongoing democratic initiative efforts. He also said that the SHP saw the closure as a purely political ruling. Ergün said the Constitutional Court should not make political decisions, adding that this particular ruling delayed social peace further.

EU negotiator Egemen Bağış also criticized the ruling, saying instead of shutting down parties, courts should hold irresponsible politicians accountable for actions that might go against the law. He also called for changing the legislation to prevent closures in the future.

Various business organizations including the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association (MÜSİAD), the Turkish Young Businessmen’s Confederation (TÜGİK), the Association of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (KOBİDER), many other deputies of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and

the Republican People's Party (CHP), heads of the Turkey Party (TP) and the Rights and Freedoms Party (HAK PAR) and many civil society organizations including bar associations released messages protesting the court's ruling.

EU criticizes DTP but warns closure could affect representation

Tuesday, 15 December 2009 14:35

Today's Zaman

The European Commission warned on Monday that a ban by Turkey's Constitutional Court on the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) could deprive a substantial portion of Turkish voters of representation.

While critical of the party's failure to separate itself from the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), classified as a terrorist organization by the EU and the United States, the commission said providing political representation to citizens was essential to Turkey fulfilling its democratic mandate. "The commission regrets that the DTP has continuously refused to clearly distance itself from the PKK and to condemn terrorism," Amadeu Altafaj Tardio, a spokesman for the European Union's executive commission, told a news conference.

"On the other hand, the decision of the Constitutional Court might deprive a significant segment of Turkish voters from political representation, a necessary condition for the successful outcome of the democratic opening," he said.

The court voted on Friday to disband the DTP, dealing a fresh blow to Turkey's hopes of joining the 27-country EU. It found the DTP guilty of cooperating with the PKK. The verdict plunged the country into political unrest, with deputies from the party threatening to quit Parliament, a move that could force new elections in Kurdish districts. The DTP is the only Kurdish party represented in Turkey's Parliament.

The European Union's Swedish presidency expressed concern on Friday over the court decision and said it would continue to monitor further developments closely.

"While strongly denouncing violence and terrorism, the presidency recalls that the dissolution of political parties is an exceptional measure that should be used with utmost restraint," the presidency said in a statement.

EU-member France on Monday issued a separate statement on the issue, highlighting its "commitment to pluralism and [the] importance of democratic debate within a parliamentary framework."

Paris will closely follow the results that may stem from the Constitutional Court's verdict, the statement by the French Foreign Ministry said, adding: "France condemns terrorism under all circumstances. It voices the importance of the democratic initiative launched by the government and encourages all parties to proceed on this path."

Members Of Banned Dtp To Go On Politics In New Party

Friday, 18 December 2009 15:26

TIME TURK

Members of the outlawed Democratic Society Party (DTP) will go on their political life in a new party, a former member said on Friday.

Ahmet Turk, the chairman of the disbanded DTP, told reporters that members of the banned DTP decided to continue their political life under the auspices of the Peace and

Democracy Party (BDP).

The Constitutional Court ruled on December 11 to outlaw the DTP on charges it has ties with the terrorist organization PKK.

Turk said democratic powers, intellectuals, authors and academic circles had underlined importance of being represented at the parliament in that process.

(Head terrorist Abdullah) "Ocalan had a meeting with his lawyers on Wednesday, and Ocalan told his lawyers that it was not right to leave the parliament ground and continue this struggle, Turk also said.

Earlier on Friday, BDP chairman Demir Celik called on the members of the outlawed DTP to continue their political life and struggle in their party.

BDP was established in 2008.

MHP to support DTP deputies' resignation, Bahçeli says

Friday, 18 December 2009 09:33

Today's Zaman

The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) will vote in favor of accepting the resignations of deputies from the banned pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli announced on Thursday.

Bahçeli stated that the MHP will vote to accept the now-defunct DTP's deputies' request to resign from their positions in Parliament.

The Constitutional Court ruled on Dec. 11 to outlaw the DTP over charges that it has ties with the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). After this ruling, DTP deputies said on Monday after a meeting in Diyarbakır that they would resign from Parliament and appeal to the country's citizens directly.

"We consider unilateral resignation a preference," Bahçeli noted at a press conference held in Ankara yesterday.

Bahçeli said he respected their decision; however, he pointed to Article 84 of the Constitution, which requires Parliament's ratification of lawmakers' resignations.

Article 84 of the Turkish Constitution regulates the loss of parliamentary membership and says: "The loss of membership of a deputy who has resigned shall be decided upon by the plenary of the Turkish Grand National Assembly after the Bureau of the Turkish Grand National Assembly attests to the validity of the resignation. The loss of membership, through a final judicial sentence or deprivation of legal capacity, shall take effect after the final court decision in the matter has been communicated to the plenary of the Turkish Grand National Assembly."

When asked about a meeting held by President Abdullah Gül to convene the party leaders with the aim of continuing the Kurdish initiative process, the MHP leader said he considered the planned meeting as coming too late, at the point that the Kurdish initiative has started to cause polarization in society. "No invitation has been sent to me yet, but if it comes, I will not participate in this meeting" he added.

VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS

Alevis rally against Öymen's Dersim remark in İstanbul

Monday, 14 December 2009 11:46

Today's Zaman

The Federation of Tunceli Associations organized a rally yesterday in İstanbul's Kadıköy district with the motto of "Dersim 38 Massacre," a clear reference to the state's harsh repression of the Dersim Rebellion in the early years of the republic.

Despite the rainy weather, a considerable number of Alevi attended the rally to voice their criticism against main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) Bursa deputy Onur Öymen's remarks on Nov. 10 advocating the bloody move of the state against the Dersim Rebellion. Öymen implied that a 1937 rebellion of Alevi in the city of Tunceli, then known as Dersim, was a terrorist revolt.

"Let's open the archives and give the account of Dersim" and "Dersim is our honor, we'll protect it" read some of the banners at the rally. Protestors carried pictures of the leader of the rebellion, Seyit Rıza, who was executed, and of Öymen portrayed as Hitler. Police took tight security precautions during the rally. Öymen has not apologized for his remarks, and the party administration has stood by him, resulting in growing anger from Alevi communities at home as well as Alevi groups who have migrated to European countries.

Escalating street violence sparks fear, anxiety countrywide

Tuesday, 15 December 2009 14:30

Today's Zaman

Political tensions have spilled over onto the streets across Turkey in the wake of the closure of Turkey's main pro-Kurdish party for links with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) as nationalist groups confronted Kurdish protestors, sometimes using violence. Clashes erupted in İstanbul's busy Beyoğlu district on Sunday as around 200 Kurds protesting at the closure of a leading Kurdish party clashed with Turkish nationalists and police. There was tension between Turkish and Kurdish groups in other cities as well, leading commentators to compare the images and express concern and fear about further violence.

Protesters hurled stones and explosive devices at shops, cars and businesses in Beyoğlu, the heart of the shopping and entertainment district of Turkey's biggest city, before a group of knife-wielding Turkish nationalists gathered and tried to attack them. Riot police separated the groups and dispersed the protestors in what was the third day of violent street protest since Turkey's highest court ruled to dissolve the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), dealing a blow to government efforts to end decades of separatist violence.

Meanwhile, nationalists who pulled guns on the protestors were identified on the city's security cameras and detained yesterday by the police. Three individuals caught on camera were detained by the Beyoğlu Police Department's anti-terror teams. All three were released after testifying to prosecutors.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also spoke of the Beyoğlu violence yesterday. He said it was wrong to exaggerate local incidents. "We can overcome this as long as our nation stands in unity. As long as [political party] leaders speaking at rallies do their best to increase tension in the [Kurdish initiative] process, we will have these difficulties. But we will overcome them with our people, not with those leaders." He said while it was true that there were occasional disturbances in some areas, it was not right for the media to air these images over and over again in a way that exaggerates the extent of what really

happened.

Late on Sunday police had closed the street leading to the main DTP office in the Bahçelievler district of İstanbul, and a police armored vehicle stood guard. In İstanbul's Sancaktepe area, two city buses heading to their terminal after dropping off passengers were stoned by DTP supporters protesting the party's closure. In the southeast of Turkey, the focus of most violent protest since the ruling, demonstrators hurled fire bombs and rocks at riot police in the town of Yüksekova. Police fired shots into the air to disperse the crowds. Several protesters were arrested.

'Does the PKK want civil war?'

According to Sedat Laçiner, head of the International Strategic Research Organization (USAK/ISRO), the street clashes are the result of conscious efforts to announce martial law in the Southeast. Laçiner also criticized the DTP for the party's failure to take the initiative into its own hands and instead rely on the PKK's jailed leader, Abdullah Öcalan, for guidance and directives. Laçiner said he suspected the PKK and possibly even those circles that attempted to overthrow the government could be behind the recent aggravation. Attempts to unseat the government have been indicated by military documents that are now included as evidence in the trial of a group called Ergenekon, which includes suspected members of a junta inside the military as well as civilians from a wide range of backgrounds. He claimed that these groups were trying to mastermind a civil war. "I don't know if Öcalan is involved," he wrote in an article published on the USAK Web site yesterday, "but it is obvious that there are two distinct groups behind this. In a situation where Öcalan would be ready to do anything, he is asked to get out of jail, the PKK used both his situation and Turkey's desire to democratize." According to Laçiner, as the process of democratization unwound, those groups closer to the PKK inside the DTP stepped in, and did all they could to make sure the party was closed and that chaos rules on the street.

He said the PKK was seeking a civil war to revive itself. "As long as there is bloodshed on the street, in İstanbul, Diyarbakır and so on, they will not even have to attack targets." Meanwhile, the former deputy chairman of the now-defunct DTP's parliamentary group, Selahattin Demirtaş, a Diyarbakır deputy, accused the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) of provoking Turkish nationalists. He said they weren't against democratically expressing reactions but that they were against every reaction that went beyond this. "Calls from us to prevent incidents from turning into violence are not enough. The CHP and the MHP are provoking people instead of calling for calm. They need to call for calm in a serious and consistent manner." Demirtaş said the use of weapons on the street might result in serious consequences.

Meanwhile, MHP Beyoğlu District Chairman Osman Gür said the individuals who attacked protestors with knives in Sunday's clashes were not affiliated with the MHP, even though they were making the "grey wolf" hand sign. He said the fight was not political and that Idealists -- members of MHP-affiliated youth clubs -- were not part of the clashes. He said the Beyoğlu conflict initially stemmed from a disagreement between citizens of Roma and Kurdish origin.

Gür said: "We would never do anything that could leave this country in a difficult position. We also constantly warn our friends against such actions." Meanwhile, in Doğubeyazıt, a district of the eastern province of Van, stores did not open yesterday due to a planned demonstration of the DTP. An area shopkeeper who asked to remain

anonymous said: “The DTP has been telling us to keep our shutters closed for days. We had to shut down to avoid trouble.” A similar protest was held in the Çukurca district of Hakkari.

Calls for calm

The head of a Diyarbakır-based group called the Peace Commissions, Metin Özşanlı, called on protestors and others reacting to them to be calm. “It is easy to fight, but not that easy to make up. Please, everyone be calm and do not become pawns in a game set up by others.” He said as long as common sense prevails, Turkey would overcome any conflict.

Former Welfare Party (RP) Van deputy Fethullah Erbaş said some of the isolated incidents that occurred in the Kurdish-dominated provinces of the East and the Southeast should not be attributed to the entire region. “When such events occur in the west, people are afraid because the number of Kurds living in western cities is five times that of those in the East. The biggest responsibility here lies with political party leaders. Everyone should do their best to reign in their voters’ base. People should not pour on to the streets. Even when armed conflict was at its peak, we didn’t have Turkish-Kurdish clashes.” The head of the Hakkari Chamber of Trade and Industry said there were attempts to divide the public into two camps. He said Turks and Kurds were inseparable, noting that political party leaders had to be responsible in these times.

DTP closure

The Constitutional Court on Friday unanimously decided to close the DTP, calling it a focus of separatist activities. The court also decided to ban 37 DTP politicians, including DTP chairman Türk and deputy Aysel Tuğluk, from engaging in politics.

The DTP had 21 seats in Parliament. Forming a parliamentary party in Parliament requires at least 20 deputies. The ban on the two DTP deputies will make it difficult for the rest of the deputies, who are now independent, to form a new group.

Storekeeper opens fire on Muş demonstrators: two shot dead

Wednesday, 16 December 2009 09:3

Today's Zaman

Two died and seven were wounded in the Bulanık district of Muş yesterday when a store owner opened fire on demonstrators protesting the closure of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP).

The Bulanık district turned into a war zone yesterday when demonstrators marching down 700. Yıl Street started stoning businesses and banks. Meanwhile, Turan Bilen, the owner of a haberdashery, whose store was also attacked and his car set on fire, opened fire on the crowd. Two of the demonstrators were hit and killed by bullets from Bilen's automatic rifle, while seven others were wounded. Those injured were hospitalized immediately. Bilen was detained after the incident. Muş Deputy Governor Ali Edip Budan said a group was demonstrating using the closure of the DTP as an excuse. He said a store owner who refused to shut his shop during the demonstration got into an argument with the demonstrators.

“The incident happened between a store owner who would not close his shop and the demonstrators. Two citizens have died in the incident,” he said. Budan also stated that more police officers from Bitlis were coming to the city as reinforcements. The names of those killed were announced as Nejmi Oral and Kemal Aycan.

Illegal demonstrations continued in Bulanık throughout the day, with protestors setting vehicles parked on the city's streets on fire and throwing Molotov cocktails. Also yesterday, a terrorist planning an attack in an urban neighborhood in the southeastern province of Mardin was captured. The police seized C4 explosives and three hand grenades.

The incidents in Muş yesterday were a continuation of reactions to the Constitutional Court's Friday ruling to shut down the DTP over links with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

As violence escalates on the streets, intellectuals and politicians including members of the now-defunct DTP have been calling for calm. The former deputy chairman of the now-defunct DTP's parliamentary group, Selahattin Demirtaş, a Diyarbakır deputy, accused the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) of provoking Turkish nationalists. He said they weren't against people expressing their reactions democratically but that they were against every reaction that went beyond this. "Calls from us to prevent incidents from turning into violence are not enough. The CHP and the MHP are provoking people instead of calling for calm. They need to call for calm in a serious and consistent manner." Demirtaş said the use of weapons on the street might result in serious consequences.

I was paid to draw my gun'

A person identified as T.G., who pointed a gun at a group of people demonstrating against the closure of the Democratic Society Party (DTP) on Sunday in İstanbul's Dolapdere district, has claimed that he was given money to draw his gun on the protestors by people whom he does not know. Following a police investigation, three people pictured in newspapers carrying guns were brought to the Beyoğlu Police Station for interrogation. Two of the suspects were released due to a lack of evidence; however, one of the suspects, identified as S.Ü., remained in custody. The suspect was charged with illegal use of electricity and sent to court. Responding to questions of reporters, T.G., who went to the courthouse to support his friend S.Ü., said: "They gave me money. If you also pay me TL 500, I will do what you want me to do, too. I am a garbage man who cleans the streets. They gave me money and ordered me to shoot." T.G.'s statement to the media led police officers to reconsider his testimony to the police, during which he said he feared for his life. "They [the protestors in Dolapdere] would have hurt us, so we fought back by all means available," he had said to the police.

Ayla Akat and Pervin Buldan, two other DTP deputies, also called for calm. Both deputies warned against the use of violence in demonstrations.

Numan Kurtulmuş, the head of the Felicity Party (SP), has underlined that precautions must be taken to establish a peaceful atmosphere in the country, saying: "Everybody must act with common sense. Both Turks and Kurds should avoid violent acts." He also stated that Turkey, with its great potential to grow, is wasting its resources on fighting terrorism.

The deputy chairman of the Grand Unity Party (BBP), Mustafa Destici, also made a statement calling for calm. "People should call security forces when aggressive demonstrations are taking place instead of intervening themselves," he said. He also warned against automatically declaring every Kurdish person a member of the terrorist PKK. "Everyone should make an effort to understand the other side. The only way to rein in these incidents is for politicians to repeatedly call on people to remain calm," said

Diyarbakır Chamber of Commerce and Industry Chairman Galip Ensarioğlu. He also called attention to the role of NGOs, which he thinks should guide people in this process. Yasin Aktay, an instructor from Konya University, pointed out that in a chaotic atmosphere that is being fomented by deliberate efforts and provocations, terrorists have the opportunity to make their voices heard.

The incidents in Muş follow clashes in İstanbul's busy Beyoğlu district on Sunday between about 200 Kurds and Turkish nationalists as well as the police. Protesters hurled stones and explosive devices at shops, cars and businesses in Beyoğlu, the heart of the shopping and entertainment district of Turkey's biggest city, before a group of knife-wielding Turkish nationalists gathered and tried to attack them.

There has been tension between Turkish and Kurdish groups in other cities as well, leading commentators to compare the images and express concern and fear about further violence.

Demonstrations final PKK trump card against initiative

Thursday, 17 December 2009 16:17

Today's Zaman

Many shopkeepers in the Bulanık district of eastern Muş province chose not to open their places of business after a series of violent demonstrations in the district.

A series of violent demonstrations against the closure of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) in eastern and southeastern parts of Turkey are believed to be part of a plan devised by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) aimed at intimidating the ruling party to prevent it from going ahead with a massive democratization package and forcing the government to declare a state of emergency in the region.

Security and terrorism analysts have increased their calls for common sense after two protestors died and seven others were wounded in the Bulanık district of Muş on Tuesday when a store owner opened fire on DTP demonstrators. "The PKK is playing its trump card now that it is being rooted out. The terrorist organization is focused on violent demonstrations in cities. What is behind these demonstrations is the Kurdish Democratic Confederation [KCK]," stated Aytekin Geleri, a security and terrorism expert. The KCK is the urban arm of the terrorist PKK.

For the past two weeks, Turkey has been rattled by street protests, which first aimed to criticize moving jailed PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, to a new prison cell but later turned to protests over the closure of the DTP. "Both the KCK and deep powers within the state are warning the state and saying they are not finished yet," Geleri added.

The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government began its determined effort to settle the Kurdish question peacefully and without resorting to military means in the summer. The move is aimed at thawing the ice between the state and Kurdish citizens in Turkey.

"Street demonstrations aim to upset efforts for a civilian solution to the Kurdish question and the normalization of relations in society. They can also be interpreted as efforts to prompt the declaration of a state of emergency," remarked Ertan Beşe, an academic at the Police Academy. The demonstrations in eastern Turkey turned bloody on Tuesday when protestors marching down a main street in Muş started stoning businesses and banks.

The owner of a haberdashery, whose store was attacked and his car set on fire, opened

fire on the crowd. Two protestors were killed while seven others were wounded. “People are trying to punish the provocateurs themselves. However, we should be acting with common sense now more than ever. The powers behind the incidents are seeking new political and social policies. They are working to lay the foundations for these policies. The stance we will adopt in the face of acts of provocation will determine the fate of these policies,” Beşe added.

According to İdris Bal, chairman of the Ankara Global Research Center, Turkey is once again experiencing what it did in the past. “The PKK is on the streets to provoke citizens. People have started to think that every protestor is a member of the PKK. This is very dangerous. Security forces should find an adequate way to deal with protestors who harm shopkeepers and citizens,” he noted.

Muş killings boost fears over state of emergency

The killings of two protestors in eastern Muş by an anxious shopkeeper may stand as a turning point and strengthen the hand of those who want a state of emergency to be declared in the region, experts said.

On Tuesday, several thousand people gathered during a demonstration in the Bulanık district to protest against the closure of the DTP by the Constitutional Court. Some shopkeepers shut their businesses to protect their property from the violent demonstrators. The owners of the businesses that remained open, however, failed to protect their premises as the crowd attacked them with stones. One of the shopkeepers, Turan Bilen, opened fire on the crowd with a Kalashnikov when protestors threw stones at the windows of his haberdashery and set fire to his vehicle. Two of the protestors were killed and seven others were wounded in the shooting. After the incident, many prominent figures in eastern and southeastern Turkey called for common sense in order to prevent further incidents in the region.

Sabahattin Göçmen, chairman of the Muş Bar Association, claimed that there are some shady aspects to the incident. “The police were informed that some shops had not closed, but they did not take any security measures for the shops that were open. Secondly, the authorities are not sure from which direction the shots came. Thirdly, there was at least an hour between the first shooting, which killed one person, and the second shooting, which killed the other person,” Göçmen told Today’s Zaman.

Göçmen also claimed that Bilen’s weapon was one of many given to village guards in the city. The village guard system was established in 1985 to fight against terrorism and involves the state arming villagers.

Sırrı Sakık, the Muş deputy of the now-defunct DTP, also claimed that officials in his party had issued warnings before the demonstration about Bilen, who was known for his acts of provocation in the past. “This person has a Kalashnikov; he was always provocative, and we think he would not have dared to act in this way if he had no backing,” Sakık stated.

Meanwhile, the Bugün daily, in a front page story, claimed that the leader of the KCK, Sabri Ok, had ordered the terrorist group to use every opportunity to hold violent demonstrations. According to Bugün, the police circulated information to every city and warned local organizations that the aim of the KCK was to create further chaos and situations in which the security forces clashed with the people.

The KCK and Ok’s name are mentioned in many events related to the file on Ergenekon, a criminal network allegedly aiming to overthrow the government by creating chaos.

Another expert, Sedat Laçiner from the International Strategic Research Organization (USAK), said that the PKK, which is unhappy about the government's democratization initiative, is aiming to improve its hand in bargaining by organizing bloody events. Laçiner also added that dark forces usually work toward the declaration of emergency law or even martial law. He said the PKK was seeking a civil war to revive itself. "As long as there is bloodshed on the streets, in İstanbul, Diyarbakır and so on, they will not even have to attack any targets. But all these things are part of the efforts for preparing for emergency rule," Laçiner told Today's Zaman.

Violent protestors help those seeking martial law'

Friday, 18 December 2009 16:49

Today's Zaman

Justice and Development Party (AK Party) Adana deputy Mir Dengir Fırat has said perpetrators of violent street clashes were serving the cause of those demanding martial law in Turkey's Southeast.

Supporters of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) have violently demonstrated in the streets since the closure of the party by the Constitutional Court over charges of "ethnic separatism" last Friday. The demonstrators have torched vehicles, thrown stones at shop windows and engaged in clashes with nationalist groups. In the most violent incident, which took place in the eastern province of Muş on Tuesday, a storekeeper shot two dead and injured six others after his store was attacked by demonstrators.

Fırat said those participating in violent demonstrations and damaging public buildings and stores were committing an act of "tyranny," adding: "It is tyranny to force the poor salesmen to pull down the shutters of their stores. It is like executing that person. Those who throw stones and Molotov cocktails in the streets are serving circles who are working to bring about martial law. No one has any right to do this."

Indicating that his government is very determined to push ahead with a democratization initiative it launched in the summer to resolve Turkey's long-standing Kurdish problem, Fırat said, "If a monster is pawing at you when you begin strangling it, this means you are proceeding on the right path."

As for opposition to the government's democratization project, he said opposition forces were mobilizing in the streets in order to block the democratization initiative.

"A very deep structure, I can call them extensions of Ergenekon [a shadowy crime network which has alleged links within the state]. There are interesting coalitions. We see that some groups who have opposite ideologies are acting in cooperation," said Fırat while describing the opponents of the initiative and their attitudes.

OTHER POLITICAL NEWS

Turkish gov't focuses on democracy

Wednesday, 16 December 2009 09:2

Today's Zaman

The government has set its main priority for next year as carrying through with its democratization package, which includes addressing the problems of the country's Kurds, Alevis and Roma despite the social and political backlash it has had to face from n

The government has set its main priority for next year as carrying through with its democratization package, which includes addressing the problems of the country's Kurds, Alevis and Roma despite the social and political backlash it has had to face from nationalist groups, particularly regarding its moves to find a settlement for Turkey's decades-old Kurdish problem. In fact, the government plans to start the year with some historic steps to tackle the Kurdish question.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who returned from a visit to the US and Mexico on Sunday, sat down with senior officials from his Justice and Development Party (AK Party), including Deputy Prime Ministers Cemil Çiçek and Bülent Arınç, for a comprehensive discussion of the government's strategy for 2010.

Two recent phenomena -- frequent protests by Kurdish demonstrators who accuse the government of lowering the living conditions of the Kurdistan Workers' Party's (PKK) jailed leader, Abdullah Öcalan, and the closure of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) -- have now worked to dishearten the government but, conversely, have strengthened its determination to pursue its goals concerning the Kurdish initiative. Erdoğan's message was loud and clear when he reiterated the government's position during parliamentary budget deliberations on Monday.

He said the democratization package was a project of national unity and that they would not backpedal on the initiative. "Let me repeat this once again: The status quo cannot remain in place. We can't send any more youths knowingly to their deaths. We cannot tolerate more families being torn apart. We will not allow terror, supporters of terrorism, bloodsuckers who feed on bloodshed caused by terror and vampires to fulfill their plans," he said during Monday's budget talks.

The chairman of the AK Party's parliamentary group, Suat Kılıç, also told Today's Zaman the government was more than determined. "We are taking our steps for democratization for the nation, not for the opposition or the terrorist organization [PKK]. The only other party in this process is the nation. Our people want these steps to be taken," he said.

He said once the deliberations on the budget are over -- which should be by Dec. 24 according to parliamentary bylaws -- the government will start taking steps for democratization. The first move will be to reintroduce a bill that will put an end to the frequent trying of minors as adults under Turkey's anti-terror laws. This law is referred to as the "law for kids throwing stones" as most of its victims have been youngsters manipulated by adults to throw stones at security forces in PKK demonstrations. Once the bill is passed, courts will not be able to try these young people as adults. The next step is to bring back 5,000 people from the Makhmour camp -- a refugee camp run by the UN in northern Iraq and whose population comprises Turkish Kurds who left their homes due to years of armed violence. After these moves, the government will organize a Roma workshop to address the problems faced by Roma people in Turkey. In addition to this, the government will hold two more Alevi workshops, ending in a total of seven, and prepare a plan to solve the Alevis' problems.

Makhmour and Kandil

Also in the new year, the government will stage a military operation in northern Iraq to minimize the PKK presence in the region. Interior Minister Beşir Atalay will revisit Baghdad and Arbil at the end of the current month to put into motion once again a tri-

party mechanism -- formed by Turkey, Iraq and the US -- established against the PKK. Representatives of these countries and of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) of northern Iraq will come together to decide on a roadmap to root out the PKK completely from Iraq. In addition to Atalay, representatives of the General Staff, the National Intelligence Organization (MİT) and the National Police Department will join in these meetings. Details about the evacuation of some refugees in Makhmour will also be taken up. Turkey aims to bring back half of them, while the remaining refugees might be given Iraqi citizenship.

The government's second step will be to work with Syria against Syrian members of the PKK in northern Iraq. Syria announced earlier that it might declare a general amnesty to bring its citizens back; however, Turkish intelligence sources suggest that PKK militants are not all that keen on returning.

After bringing back residents from Makhmour, Turkey will also try to take action to bring back those in the PKK's ranks from the terrorist group's bases in the Kandil Mountains of northern Iraq. According to intelligence unit estimates, 3,500 to 4,000 terrorists are based in Kandil, of whom 1,500 are from Syria. A plan to bring them back home will also be discussed at the meeting.

Turkey's biggest target in the new period is to capture some of the PKK's higher-ranking individuals. Most of them are ready to lay down their arms, but they want the US to guarantee their future. However, Turkey wants these people to be turned in to the security forces here. The US had once proposed settling these individuals in third countries, an idea that Turkey rejects. Turkey fears that the organization will always have the ability to resurrect itself unless its leadership is completely eliminated.

Following the bill on the stone-throwers, the government will also change broadcasting legislation to allow private stations to air programs in Kurdish. The Higher Education Council (YÖK) will also speed up its projects to set up Kurdish institutes in academic institutions. In addition, the government has plans to reinstate the Kurdish place names of towns and districts that were changed to Turkish in the Republican era.

The government will in addition change the Law on Political Parties to allow the use of languages other than Turkish at political rallies. A commission to fight discrimination is also to be set up under the Prime Ministry as part of the government's democratization efforts.

Erdoğan: Islamophobia crime against humanity

Friday, 18 December 2009 13:28

Today's Zaman

Islamophobia is a crime against humanity just like anti-Semitism, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said, while calling on the international community for recognition of this crime.

Erdoğan's remarks came at a meeting with Syrian media held earlier this week, the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported. The meeting was apparently held on the occasion of an upcoming official visit by Erdoğan to Damascus, which is scheduled for Tuesday.

"Islam means peace, and it cannot tolerate terrorism. We reject all attempts to link Islam with terrorism," Erdoğan was quoted as saying by SANA. The agency noted that Erdoğan

also called on the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Arab League and all concerned parties to present a unified front to help end Islamophobia.

Geo Strategic Issues

"Israel would risk 'earthquake' with misuse of Turkish airspace"

Saturday, 12 December 2009 10:46

TODAY'S ZAMAN

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has stated that Turkey would by no means let Israel misuse Turkish airspace to carry out intelligence and surveillance missions of a neighboring country, in strongly worded remarks this week.

Bilateral relations between once-close regional allies Israel and Turkey hit a low point last winter following an Israeli offensive in Gaza that left more than 1,400 Palestinians dead. Erdoğan walked out of a World Economic Forum (WEF) session in January after a heated exchange with Israeli President Shimon Peres, and Turkish-mediated talks between Israel and Syria collapsed after Ankara and Damascus said peace talks could not proceed in the Israeli-Syrian track as war raged on in Palestine. Relations continued to deteriorate after Turkey canceled a military exercise in October in which Israeli pilots were to participate and after Turkey's state-run TV aired a dramatic series that portrayed Israeli soldiers as bloodthirsty, cruel and repressive.

Turkey and Israel's military cooperation agreements include allowing Israeli jets to use Turkish airspace for training.

If Israel were to misuse Turkish airspace to conduct reconnaissance operations on Iran, Ankara's reaction would resemble an "earthquake," Erdoğan recently said in an interview when asked about claims that Israel had used Turkey's airspace for purposes of espionage.

During an interview with Egyptian journalist Fahmi Huwaidi published this week, Erdoğan firmly denied that any such Israeli violation had occurred. The prime minister warned, however, that the consequences would be dire if Israel attempted such a move. "[Israel] will receive a response equal to that of an earthquake," Erdoğan was quoted as saying by the English-language Jerusalem Post. Urging Israel's leaders to refrain from "using the relationship they have with [Turkey] as a card to wage aggression on a third party," he underlined that Ankara would not be a neutral party and stand aside with its arms folded.

In September 2007, Israel used Turkey's airspace for a bombing run in neighboring Syria, leading to serious anger in Ankara. Israel has not disclosed details on the air strike, which some analysts speculated may have targeted a nascent nuclear reactor. Syria had denied possessing such a facility. The discovery in Turkey of fuel tanks that had apparently been dumped by returning Israeli warplanes had strained ties between the Jewish state and its only Muslim ally in the region. Ankara had demanded an explanation from Israel after it was embarrassed by the discovery of the jettisoned fuel tanks in its territory in the aftermath of the raid.

At the time Turkish officials were also astonished by newspaper reports alleging that Turkey had prior notice of the raid and allowed its airspace to be used by the Israeli jets. Turkey firmly said it would never allow its territory to be used for an act "hostile to the security of Syria."

Erdoğan, meanwhile, has stated that he is not planning to attend next year's meeting of

the WEF in Davos.

"I will not participate in [the] Davos [meeting] this year," Erdoğan announced during a question-and-answer session with Turkish journalists on Friday during his flight from Mexico to Turkey as he wrapped up two separate official visits, first to Washington, D.C., and then to Mexico City.

"Maybe we will let a few of our colleagues participate," Erdoğan added, indicating that some members of the Cabinet would likely attend the WEF meeting, scheduled for Jan. 27-31.

"Yes, it is continuing for me," Erdoğan responded when asked whether his boycott of the WEF meetings is ongoing.

Turkey's Prime Minister to travel to Syria

Sunday, 13 December 2009 12:54

TIME TURK

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan will pay a formal visit to Syria between December 22 and 23, 2009.

A statement by Turkish Foreign Ministry said that Erdogan would participate in the first meeting of prime ministers of Turkey-Syria High Level Strategic Cooperation in Damascus.

Turkish and Syrian authorities will sign a series of agreements, protocols and memorandums of understanding during Erdogan's visit

"Turkish-Croatian cooperation backbone of stability in Balkans"

Sunday, 13 December 2009 12:59

TIME TURK

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said Turkish-Croatian cooperation was the backbone of stability in the Balkans.

Davutoglu, who is on an official trip to Croatia, held a joint press conference with his Croatian counterpart Gordan Jandrokovic following a private meeting.

Davutoglu said Turkey attached great importance to integration of countries in the region with NATO and European bodies.

He said the two countries decided to work together for protection of stability and territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

"Our ministries will constantly be in touch, and work together for Bosnia-Herzegovina to take the place it deserves in the international community," said Davutoglu.

Davutoglu said bilateral relations, regional issues, relations with EU, NATO and UN were discussed in his meetings with Croatian officials.

In his part, Jandrokovic said countries extending support to Bosnia-Herzegovina should also respect its territorial integrity, and support its membership to EU and NATO.

He said they agreed to boost the current trade volume of USD 450 million up to 1 billion. Later Davutoglu, attended a dinner in his honor by Jandrokovic.

Davutoglu will proceed to Dubrovnik before travelling to Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina to attend the Ministerial Meeting on Alliance of Civilizations Southeast Europe Strategy.

Turkish Foreign Minister In Bosnia-Herzegovina

Monday, 14 December 2009 14:57

TIME TURK

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu arrived in Bosnia-Herzegovina on Sunday to attend a Ministerial Meeting on Alliance of Civilizations Southeast Europe Strategy.

Representatives of 14 countries and several international organizations will attend the meeting of Alliance of Civilizations.

Davutoglu held several talks in Sarajevo within the scope of the meeting.

He met with Bosnia-Herzegovina's Presidency member Haris Silajdzic as well as main Bosnian party leader Sulejman Tihic. Davutoglu told them that Bosnia-Herzegovina was very important for Turkey.

Fm Davutoglu In Sarajevo

Monday, 14 December 2009 14:38

TIME TURK

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu attended Monday a Ministerial Meeting on Alliance of Civilizations Southeast Europe Strategy in Sarajevo.

I am honored to attend such a meeting and address the participants. I believe that the high level participation would add momentum to the (Alliance of Civilizations) initiative, Davutoglu said.

With this meeting, the Alliance of Civilizations initiative has reached a new level. The Alliance keeps growing, Davutoglu noted.

Reminding that during the Alliance's meeting in Istanbul in April a decision was taken to establish regional strategies, Davutoglu said that he was pleased with the establishment of the first regional strategy in Southeast Europe.

The Balkans needed such an initiative and deserved such an initiative as it is a region with rich history and culture, Davutoglu stressed.

What happened in the past 20 years should be kept in mind so that similar incidents do not repeat. As such, we must speed up regional initiatives, Davutoglu said.

The Balkans must be accepted as a central region. Globalization has made the Balkans an important center. The Balkans have the necessary human resources, cultural heritage and vision in order to become the center of interest in Southeast Europe, Davutoglu said.

As Turkey, we have contributed to the establishment of a Regional Strategy for Sarajevo and Southeast Europe. The region is important for Turkey not merely for historical reasons but also due to the status quo, Davutoglu said

Turkey is attached to the Alliance of Civilizations initiative. We can not ignore radicalism and polarization in the world in recent times. We were disappointed with a Swiss decision to ban new minarets, Davutoglu said.

It was a wrong step to hold a referendum on basic religious rights (in Switzerland). I hope that this mistake would be compensated. Widening of human rights, basic rights and freedoms should not push countries to hold referendums, Davutoglu said.

Giving an example on freedoms, Davutoglu said that an Ottoman law dating back to 1463 preserved the rights of Bosnian Christians and that it was one of the oldest laws on religious freedoms.

Davutoglu concluded his speech with a Bosnian proverb: "There can not be coffee without a cigarette and there can not be a mosque without a minaret".

Egyptian President Due In Turkey

Monday, 14 December 2009 13:43

TIME TURK

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak will come to Turkey on a working visit.

Mubarak will be in Turkey on Tuesday and he will have a meeting with Turkish President Abdullah Gul.

Bilateral relations and developments in the Middle East will be high on the agenda during Mubarak's visit to Turkey.

Mubarak will leave Turkey on Thursday.

Egyptian President Receives Turkish Deputy Premier

Wednesday, 16 December 2009 13:1

TIME TURK

The president of Egypt received the deputy prime minister of Turkey in Ankara on Wednesday.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak had a meeting with Turkey's State Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan at the Sheraton Ankara.

Mubarak and Babacan discussed commercial relations and economic issues in their meeting.

Also, Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu met his Egyptian counterpart Ahmed Aboul Gheit over breakfast at the Sheraton Hotel.

Mubarak is actually paying a working visit to Ankara.

Mubarak to arrive in Turkey today for second visit this year

Tuesday, 15 December 2009 14:37

Today's Zaman

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak is expected to arrive in Turkey today for a three-day working visit, which will mark his fifth visit to this country since he took over as president in 1981 and the second presidential visit from Egypt to Turkey this year.

Mubarak, who left Cairo on Sunday, had talks with French President Nicolas Sarkozy at Paris' Elysée Palace on Monday ahead of his arrival in Turkey. He is scheduled to have talks with both President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Bilateral relations and developments in the Middle East as well as regional and international affairs that are the subject of close interest by the two countries will be discussed by Mubarak and Gül, a brief written statement from Gül's office said Monday. There was no official statement from either Egyptian or Turkish officials concerning the venue of the visit, but since it's described as a working visit rather than an official visit, talks are likely to take place in İstanbul.

Mubarak's most recent visit to Turkey took place in February, amid diplomatic efforts for a more durable truce in the Palestinian territories and preparations for an aid conference on the Gaza Strip -- the conference to which Turkish leaders frequently refer when they

blame the international community for failing to honor the promises given at the conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, since the human tragedy in Gaza is still ongoing. Turkey, a NATO member and a candidate for European Union membership, has in recent years focused on boosting its political and economic cooperation with Middle Eastern countries and has sought to establish itself as a broker in regional conflicts.

Ankara's rising activity has led to the Arab media's questions as to whether Turkey's close interest in the Middle East was a matter of leadership within the region. Focusing on such questions, some of the Arab media sometimes compare the abilities of Turkey and Egypt in regards to their ability to deliver peace initiatives; some even pose it as a question of democracy and stability, showing Turkey as a model.

Yet, both Ankara and Cairo have insistently ruled out such arguments, saying they are not competitors but partners in the region. Ankara gave as an example its sincere and active support of Egypt's role in launching active efforts to resolve differences between Palestinian groups.

In remarks aired on the English-language Russia Today TV channel last week, Prime Minister Erdoğan firmly denied that he was trying to be the leader of the Islamic world, saying he had no intention at all of taking on such a role.

"I haven't tried to be a leader of the Islamic world," Erdoğan responded when asked about his and his ruling Justice and Development Party's (AK Party) multidimensional foreign policy and suggestions that such a policy has been leading the country toward becoming the leader of the Islamic world.

"I've never tried to achieve that. These kinds of things don't happen just because someone wishes for this or that mission. We believe in being of optimal service for our people. Of course, we want to establish equal relations with other countries, because there is a problem of inequality in the world," he went on to say, according to the Anatolia news agency.

Still, following Erdoğan's visit last week to Washington, where he met with US President Barack Obama and held talks at several think tanks focusing on the dynamics and principles of Turkey's foreign policy, a prominent expert in Middle Eastern affairs writing for The Washington Times put its spotlight on this policy and its probable implications.

"While the prime minister's discourse on Israel's actions in the Palestinian territories was received with stupor by Israeli diplomats, Arab diplomats were more than pleased," Claude Salhani said in a Sunday article.

"'He said what Arab leaders should be saying but don't dare say,' said an Arab diplomat who asked not to be identified. The diplomat told this reporter that the Turkish prime minister's speech was 'courageous,'" the article by Salhani, the editor of the Middle East Times and author of "While the Arab World Slept: The Impact of the Bush Years on the Middle East," said.

During Mubarak's visit here, Egypt's ongoing efforts to broker a deal between Hamas, which runs the Gaza Strip, and Israel for the release the captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in exchange for Israel freeing of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners are likely to be at the center of discussions.

In addition to that, the global dispute surrounding Iran's controversial nuclear program; the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean, which was launched in Paris in July 2008 following intense efforts by France's Sarkozy; Egypt's support of Greek Cyprus'

plans to open the Mediterranean for oil exploration despite objections from its northern neighbor Turkey and the estranged Turkish Cypriots; and bilateral economic relations are expected to cover the agenda of the talks.

Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak visits Turkey after France

Wednesday, 16 December 2009 16:4

Today's Zaman

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak arrived in Ankara on Tuesday for a three-day working visit, marking his fifth visit to this country since he took over as president in 1981 and the second presidential visit from Egypt to Turkey this year.

Ahead of his arrival in Turkey, Mubarak was in Paris where he had talks focusing on the Middle East peace process with French President Nicolas Sarkozy, whose interest in becoming a key player in the process has been known for a while.

In Paris on Monday, Mubarak and Sarkozy expressed grave concern about the Middle East peace process and said they hoped to restart Palestinian-Israeli peace talks soon.

Sarkozy emphasized the need "to re-launch the Palestine-Israel negotiations and to obtain resolution in 2010," a statement released by the Elysée Palace said.

Turkey, a NATO member and a candidate for European Union membership, has in recent years focused on boosting its political and economic cooperation with Middle Eastern countries and has sought to establish itself as a broker in regional conflicts.

Sarkozy's attempts to establish France as a key player in the Middle East are considered to be at the expense of Turkey, a country which has a growing reputation for being a credible mediator in the Middle East. Thus, when he attempted to bring Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Syrian President al-Assad together in Paris in November, al-Assad said France could help the peace efforts by pressuring Israel to return to Turkish-mediated talks. Netanyahu, on the other hand, signaled his readiness for a French role in talks with Syria.

At the time, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said he did not think al-Assad would accept a French role in mediating with Israel. "Now France is trying to take up the role we had," Erdoğan said. "I'm not sure what kind of stance Bashar al-Assad will take, but from what I've heard from him, they're not going to accept something like this." Erdoğan also said Turkey was ready to resume mediating talks between Israel and Syria, but added that Israel does not trust Turkey.

Turkish Prime Minister Due To Syria

Thursday, 17 December 2009 13:41

TIME TURK

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan will pay a formal visit to Syria on December 22 and 23.

Prime Minister Erdogan will visit Syria upon invitation by Syrian Prime Minister Muhammad Naji al-Utri and attend the first prime ministerial meeting of Turkey-Syria High Level Strategic Cooperation Council.

Erdogan will hold bilateral talks in Syria on December 22.

Turkish and Syrian authorities will sign a series of protocols and agreements on December 23.

Australian Speaker Visits Turkish Parliament

Thursday, 17 December 2009 13:39

TIME TURK

The speaker of Australian House of Representatives visited the Turkish parliament on Thursday.

Speaker Harry Jenkins had a meeting with Murat Mercan, chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Turkish Parliament, in the capital, Ankara.

During the meeting, Mercan said Turkey and Australia were two countries geographically far away from each other, but there had always been friendship and cooperation between the two countries.

Mercan said Jenkins' visit would boost the friendship between the two countries.

Also, Jenkins said that the incidents that had occurred between the two countries 95 years ago (during the World War I) had turned into a close friendship.

On Wednesday, Jenkins attended a luncheon hosted in his honor by Turkish Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali Sahin. Prior to the luncheon, the two speakers had a tete-a-tete meeting.

Turkey's President Abdullah Gul also received Jenkins.

Turkish President Arrives in Denmark

Thursday, 17 December 2009

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkish President Abdullah Gul arrived in Denmark on Thursday.

Gul will take part in the summit of the heads of state and government of the 15th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP15) in Copenhagen.

He will meet with Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri on the sidelines of the summit and attend a dinner to be hosted by Queen Margrethe II of Denmark.

Turkish Environment Minister Veysel Eroglu is accompanying Gul on his visit to Denmark.

Clinton calls Sarksyian over his warning to Turkey

Monday, 14 December 2009 12:29

Todays Zaman

It has emerged that US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton telephoned Armenian President Serzh Sarksyian last Thursday only hours after the Armenian leader threatened to annul the protocols signed by Ankara and Yerevan in October for the normalization of re Following a White House meeting with US President Barack Obama last Monday, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said progress in ongoing efforts at normalization between Armenia and Turkey was related to progress concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In Yerevan on Thursday, in an apparent response to Erdoğan's remarks, Sarksyian explicitly threatened to walk away from its landmark agreements with Turkey if Ankara continues to make their implementation conditional on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Armenian media, citing Sarksyian's press office as a source, reported that Clinton initiated a telephone conversation late on Thursday to brief the Armenian leader on Obama's talks with Erdoğan last Monday.

"During the phone conversation, Secretary of State Clinton once again emphasized that the United States will continue with its consistent support for a speedy normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey without preconditions," the presidential office said in a statement. It also cited Sarksyian as reaffirming Yerevan's readiness to press ahead with the normalization process and expressing hope that "the Turkish side will display similar readiness and responsibility," Armenian media reported, noting that there was no word on whether the two touched upon the Armenian threats to walk away from the deal.

Turkey, Croatia agree to join forces for Bosnia and Herzegovina

Monday, 14 December 2009 12:06

Today's Zaman

Turkey and Croatia have agreed to intensify contacts to draw up and implement common policies regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is plagued by simmering tensions over governance and power-sharing issues.

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu paid an official visit to Croatia on Saturday and had talks with the country's president, prime minister and foreign minister focusing on the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina. If Bosnia and Herzegovina's consent is also given, then Turkey, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina could hold trilateral discussions on the issue in a similar way to what Turkey, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have been doing for a while, Davutoğlu said.

In time, these two trilateral processes may be united and a quadrilateral process for talks on the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina may then emerge, Davutoğlu also said.

In October, Davutoğlu paid consecutive visits to Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, reflecting Turkey's intense interest in the region, an interest that is being further cemented by Ankara's ongoing chairmanship-in-office of the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP).

Also in October, a trilateral meeting of the foreign ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Turkey was hosted in Istanbul by Davutoğlu. On the sidelines of a SEECP ministerial-level meeting, Davutoğlu brought together Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic and his Bosnian counterpart, Sven Alkalaj.

In Zagreb, Davutoğlu said the embassies of Turkey and Croatia in Sarajevo have been informed that the two countries would from now on coordinate their efforts regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Speaking at a joint press conference following his talks with Croatian Foreign Minister Gordan Jandrokovic, Davutoğlu stated that the Turkey and Croatia's cooperation over Bosnia and Herzegovina had played an important role in the 1990s for maintaining stability and peace in the region, adding that today's situation requires such cooperation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Not only do Turkey and Croatia have histories in common, their perspectives for the future are also common, Davutoğlu said, in an apparent reference to the two countries' bids for becoming members of the European Union. Turkey considers Croatia as a

neighbor despite having no borders with this country, he added.

During a conversation with a small group of journalists accompanying him during the visit, Davutoğlu underlined the importance Turkey attaches to Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership in NATO, saying that such membership would secure this country's borders. NATO entry will also be helpful in reaching reconciliation on constitutional reforms and the state's structure among different segments of the society.

In early December, NATO said it was not yet ready for Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership, while it took another step toward expanding in southeastern Europe by putting Montenegro on the path to membership.

The transatlantic military alliance, which waged two bombing campaigns in the Balkans as Yugoslavia disintegrated in the 1990s, said Bosnia is handicapped by political strife between its Serbian and Muslim-Croatian factions.

During the same NATO meeting, Turkey exerted intensified diplomatic efforts to persuade NATO to offer a Membership Action Plan (MAP) -- an essential stepping stone toward membership in the alliance -- to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Davutoğlu then introduced a draft that proposes giving a MAP to Bosnia and Herzegovina on the condition that the Balkan country continues its reforms.

"A mistake in the process should be avoided on the issue of Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose people have been subject to much trauma and need psychological support. Instead of the approach of 'first the stick, then the carrot,' the approach of 'first the carrot, then the stick' should be assumed," Davutoğlu was quoted by the Anatolia news agency as telling his NATO counterparts during meetings seeking support for the draft. In an interview with the BBC, Davutoğlu underlined that Bosnians feel left out by the EU, which has recently extended visa-free travel to Serbia and Montenegro. "If they now feel isolated from the support of NATO, it will be a big problem," Davutoğlu said.

Three Balkan states -- Slovenia, Croatia and Albania -- joined NATO after the wars of the 1990s. A fourth, the Republic of Macedonia, has been offered membership once it resolves a dispute with Greece over its name. No timetable was set for Montenegro to join or for Bosnia to be declared eligible.

As of Sunday, following his visit to the Croatian coastal resort of Dubrovnik, Davutoğlu departed for Sarajevo where he was scheduled to attend a ministers' meeting of the Alliance of Civilizations' Regional Strategy for Southeast Europe scheduled for Sunday and Monday.

While in Sarajevo, Davutoğlu is also expected to attend a new trilateral meeting with his counterparts from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.

Turkey, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina hold trilateral talks

Tuesday, 15 December 2009 14:36

Today's Zaman

Sarajevo hosted a third trilateral meeting between the foreign ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Turkey on Monday. The ministers decided on the venue of their next gathering and vowed to meet more regularly from now on.

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu arrived in Sarajevo on Sunday evening in order to attend a ministers' meeting of the Alliance of Civilizations' Regional Strategy for Southeast Europe, which was held on Sunday and Monday. Davutoğlu used the occasion to hold a trilateral meeting with Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic and his Bosnian

counterpart, Sven Alkalaj.

Speaking to reporters along with his Bosnian and Serbian counterparts following the meeting, Davutoğlu expressed satisfaction over their meeting, underlining Serbia's and Turkey's joint support for maintenance of the national unity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He also announced that he would gather with his two counterparts in Belgrade for the next trilateral meeting.

In October, on the sidelines of a ministerial-level meeting of the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECF), the chairmanship-in-office of which is held by Turkey, Davutoğlu brought together Jeremic and Alkalaj for the first of such trilateral meetings. In November, the three held the second such trilateral meeting in İstanbul.

For his part, speaking following the meeting in Sarajevo, Alkalaj said the cooperation among the three countries would continue, while Jeremic said they have planned to hold monthly meetings on a regular basis. Underlining the three actors' commitment to preservation of territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jeremic also noted his country's support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's bid to become a member of international organizations such as the European Union.

While in Sarajevo, Davutoğlu held separate talks with three members of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency, which rotates every eight months among three members -- Bosniak, Serbian and Croatian.

During talks with Croatian Zeljko Komsic, Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) Haris Silajdzic and Serbian Nebojsa Radmanovic, Davutoğlu gave the same message to the leaders, urging reconciliation amongst each other.

Davutoğlu, meanwhile, in a speech delivered at the meeting of the Alliance of Civilizations' Regional Strategy for Southeast Europe, touched upon the crisis over Switzerland's minaret ban.

In late October, Swiss voters approved a constitutional ban on minarets in a referendum which was condemned by human rights defenders and Muslim groups in Switzerland and abroad, including in Turkey.

Davutoğlu said he hoped this "mistake" would be repaired by Switzerland, as he, as a non-smoker, used a Bosniak proverb which says, "No coffee without a cigarette, no mosque without a minaret."

President Gül lays foundation of Turkish university in Albania

Monday, 14 December 2009 12:15

Today's Zaman

President Abdullah Gül participated in a ceremony to mark the laying of the foundations of Apoke University in the capital, Tirana, during his official trip to Albania on Saturday. State ministers Zafer Çağlayan and Selma Aliye Kavaf and Industry and Trade Minister Nihat Ergün also attended the foundation-laying ceremony with President Gül and visited the Turgut Özal Educational Facility founded in 1993, also located in the capital.

Addressing students and teachers at the Turkish high school, President Gül thanked them for their warmth and hospitality. Gül said that friendship stemmed from history between the two nations and gave Turkish schools as an example of that friendship. "These schools are the best gifts from Turkish businessmen to Albania," Gül said.

The construction of Apoke University, which will have the capacity for 4,000 students, is expected to be completed in stages over five years. The university will occupy a plot of 60 acres.

President Gül has official meetings

During Gül's meeting with Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha, the development of relations, particularly with a focus on trade and economic relations and increasing Turkish investments in Albania were discussed, the Albanian Prime Ministry Press Center reported on Friday.

The statement stressed the importance of Gül's visit and said it had made a significant contribution to the advancement of bilateral relations. "We are resolute about developing relations between the two countries, two governments and two nations," Gül was quoted as saying during his meeting with the Albanian prime minister.

President Gül said it was pleasing to see the extraordinary developments in Albania and the reforms the Albanian government was making. He said Albania's NATO membership bid was extremely important and that Turkey will continue its support for Albania's integration in the EU. Turkish investments in Albania have currently reached \$860 million compared with \$150 million in 2005.

During his visit, President Gül also participated in the inaugural ceremony of the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center in Tirana. The center was built as part of a program to promote Turkey, Turkish culture and language abroad under the aegis of the Yunus Emre Foundation. The first center of its kind was opened in Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina in October. Turkey plans to open Yunus Emre Cultural Centers in Kazakhstan, Macedonia, Spain, Germany, France and Egypt in the near future.

Following Gül's meeting with Parliament Speaker Yozefina Topalli, the Albanian People's Assembly Press Center also released a statement noting that the importance of bilateral relations with Turkey is "beyond the strategic partnership."

"Albania has a political desire to develop cooperation with its traditional ally Turkey," Topalli said, according to the statement. Topalli also reportedly said Albania has always seen the Turkish nation and the Turkish government as supporting Albania.

Nationalist Movement Party set to seek close ties with China, Russia

Tuesday, 15 December 2009 14:41

Today's Zaman

A new program and bylaws prepared for the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) suggest that the opposition party will part ways entirely with Turkey's ambition to become a full European Union member and will seek to establish close ties with China and Russia. The program and bylaws were drafted shortly after the party's Ninth Ordinary General Congress on Nov. 8 and are aimed at gaining the party a new view regarding foreign policy. In accordance with its new program, the MHP is planning to open 36 bureaus abroad. The new program and bylaws have not yet been sent to the party's provincial branches. The new bylaws are seemingly aimed at clearing all obstacles before MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli's perpetual election to the party chairmanship.

Former MHP bylaws prevented an individual from being elected to party leadership more than five times.

Among the countries where the party is planning to open a bureau are the United States,

Argentina, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, China, Morocco, Indonesia, South Africa, India, Israel, Japan, Qatar, Kazakhstan, Egypt and Greece. The MHP also hopes to increase the number of its bureaus in Germany to 30.

The new MHP program underlines that the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) has been the victim of coordinated attacks which have resulted in damage to its reputation. According to the program, the dignity and reputation of the armed forces will be protected, and not only terrorists but also those who view terrorist organizations in a “different perspective” will be fought.

“The MHP will carry out an efficient struggle on all legal grounds and within the whole country together with the country’s security forces to root out terrorism. During the fight against terror, those guilty and innocent will be differentiated and the struggle will be conducted with methods of the state governed by the rule of law in a determined manner. All views in praise of terror and terrorists, viewing terrorists as representatives of citizens, giving voice to demands of terrorists, posing threat to the country’s territorial integrity, carrying out politics of separatism and fomenting provocations based on individuals’ ethnicities and religions will be evaluated as activities which support terror,” reads the party program.

‘We are not in dire need of the EU’

The new MHP program also asserts that Turkey does not need to become a member of the EU, and states that the party will review the country’s relations with the union once it is swept to power.

“The characteristics, grounds and framework of relations between Turkey and the EU should be redefined. Turkey’s relations with the union should not be seen as ‘fate’ or ‘a problem of identity.’ No matter what the result is, we are not obliged to be swept around the EU’s orbit,” states the program.

The program also suggests that Turkey should reconsider its relations with the US, adding the party will devise joint economic projects to boost Turkey’s regional cooperation with Russia, China and Iran. Dwelling on the government’s ongoing efforts to thaw the ice with neighboring Armenia, the MHP program states: “Turkey should develop friendly ties with its neighbors. ... The solution of existing problems between Turkey and its neighbors through lawful, just and permanent means by protecting the rights and interests of Turkey is a top priority for the national foreign policy.”

Headscarf, Alevis mentioned in MHP program for first time

The MHP has for the first time mentioned in its program that it will work to pave the path for headscarf freedom in institutions of education. It is illegal in Turkey to enter university campuses while wearing the Islamic headscarf. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) passed legislation in 2008 to allow covered students to attend university classes with headscarves on, but the legislation was overturned by the Constitutional Court upon an appeal by the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP).

“Our party believes that every individual has the right to access to education and that this right cannot be prevented by any means,” reads the party program.

The MHP, however, is totally opposed to the idea of allowing schooling in languages of minority groups, saying, “It is a common principle for our party to acknowledge Turkish as the language of education on all levels.”

In addition, the party focuses on Turkey’s Alevi problem in its program, also for first

time in its history. According to the party program, the state cannot turn a blind eye to its citizens' beliefs. The MHP regards the peaceful coexistence of all religions as a guarantee for national unity, secularism, territorial integrity and freedom of religion.

The AK Party has been working to settle the state's problems with its Alevi population for a long time. Alevis demand that their places of worship (cemevis) be officially recognized by the state and argue that schools should offer courses on Alevism.

Iran says Turkey defends its rights in nuclear dispute

Wednesday, 16 December 2009 10:4

Today's Zaman

Iran has praised Turkey's efforts to find a peaceful resolution to a dispute over its contentious nuclear program but appears to insist that it does not want Ankara to mediate to resolve its disagreement with Western countries.

"Friendly countries including Turkey are invaluable in vouching for the righteousness of the Iranian people. We welcome these efforts," Ramin Mehmanparast, a spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, was quoted as saying by the Anatolia news agency on Monday when asked about prospects for Turkish mediation between Iran and the West to resolve the nuclear dispute. "Turkey is our friend. It has always defended the rights of the Iranian people," he added.

Iran says its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, but the West is suspicious that Tehran seeks to develop nuclear weapons. Tensions further escalated recently after Iran turned down a compromise plan offered by UN's nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Turkey says it is against nuclear weapons but rejects the idea of sanctions on Iran, calling for a solution through dialogue instead. US President Barack Obama said after Dec. 7 talks with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that Turkey could help efforts to move Iran in the direction of compromise. But in subsequent statements, Iranian officials dismissed possible Turkish mediation, saying Tehran's position was clear and did not need to be interpreted by a third country.

Mehmanparast said Iran hoped that efforts by friendly countries would convince Western countries that the sole aim of the Iranian people is to pursue their rights. "These efforts are positive. We hope they will be effective," he said. The spokesman also said his country was determined to pursue its nuclear program.

Arab-Turkish forum calls on Israel to halt settlements

Thursday, 17 December 2009 16:46

Today's Zaman

A forum of six Arab states plus Turkey has urged Israel to halt all settlement activity so Mideast peace negotiations can resume, while also calling on Israel to abide by previously signed agreements with the Palestinian side, to put an end to its illegal Damascus on Tuesday hosted the second meeting of foreign ministers of the Turkish-Arab Cooperation Forum. While Turkey was represented by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, the foreign ministers of Iraq, Libya, Qatar, Somalia, Sudan and Syria and Amr Moussa, the secretary-general of the 22-nation Arab League, also participated in the meeting.

The joint call by Arab states and Turkey came in a final communiqué released following

the meeting. The communiqué emphasized that the seven countries had a shared vision for safeguarding and protecting security, stability and prosperity in the Middle East through a just and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict involving its three Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese tracks in line with relevant UN resolutions. It stressed the significant role of the European Union in the Middle East peace process, calling for the adoption of dialogue, opening up to others and constructive involvement as a method for achieving peace, security and stability in the region and the entire world.

Israel announced a 10-month halt in most West Bank construction late last month in an attempt to restart peace talks. The Palestinians say the settlement freeze falls short because it does not include East Jerusalem or 3,000 homes already under construction in the West Bank.

A comprehensive peace deal can be reached between Israel and the Palestinians within six months if Israel completely freezes its settlement construction, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said in an interview published on Wednesday.

Viva Palestina' Gaza aid convoy reaches Turkey

Thursday, 17 December 2009 16:42

Today's Zaman

After a 10-day journey from London, the Viva Palestina convoy, carrying people from all walks of life and aid for Gazans with the aim of ending the years-long embargo imposed by Israel, reached Turkey on Wednesday.

In a press conference at İstanbul's Feshane, the organizer of the Turkey leg of the trip, Bülent Yıldırım, chair of the Human Rights Foundation (İHH), said they will enter Gaza despite the Israeli-controlled embargo. Turks came to Feshane to meet the convoy carrying Palestinian flags. Several Jewish religious scholars also participated in the meeting to protest Israel's war crimes in Gaza. Hanging Palestinian flags on their necks and wearing cards on their chests saying "No to Israel," the scholars condemned Israel's current policy in Gaza.

Supporters called on President Abdullah Gül to ask Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who was in Turkey yesterday, to open the Rafah border gate and end Gaza's isolation. The Rafah border gate is the only entrance to Gaza from the outside world, and according to the Egyptian-Israeli agreement, Egypt keeps its side closed. "There are elderly sick people and children in the convoy. The convoy serves only humanity," Yıldırım said. British Member of Parliament George Galloway, who organized the European leg of the trip, also condemned Israel for its embargo and called on Arab nations to lend their support to the Palestinian cause.

The 80-car convoy is composed of cars from Britain, France, Italy, Greece, the US, Turkey and Arab countries. Forty-seven vehicles will also join the convoy in Mersin. The convoy will attempt to enter Gaza on Dec. 27, the first anniversary of Israel's assault on Gaza.

US rules out shift in Turkey's commitment to Western alliance

Thursday, 17 December 2009 18:23

Today's Zaman

Suggesting that Turkey has turned its back on its allies within NATO and in Europe,

particularly at a time when Turkish and US leaders recently had a lengthy meeting during which they discussed a series of global matters, is an incorrect perception, a sen
The remarks by Philip Gordon, assistant secretary of state for Europe and Eurasian affairs, came at a hearing at the US House of Representatives on Tuesday. The hearing, held by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs' Subcommittee on Europe, was on "The Lisbon Treaty: Implications for Future Relations Between the European Union and the United States."

During the hearing, Rep. Robert Wexler (D-Fla.), also co-chairman of the US Congressional Caucus on US-Turkish Relations and Turkish Americans, recalled that numerous articles have recently suggested that NATO member Turkey is turning away from the West.

"For me, it's very clear that Turkey is assuming a regional policy. If someone would [have] come up five years ago and say that Turkey would drive a great rapprochement process with Armenia or would implement a democratization process concerning its Kurdish population, few among us would have believed that. In my opinion, the benefits of Turkey conducting equal relations with its neighbors for the US and the West outweigh its harms," Wexler was quoted as saying by the Anatolia news agency Wexler then asked Gordon about his view of claims of a shift in Turkey's foreign policy orientation. Firstly noting that he had also read those articles about Turkey's foreign policy, Gordon said that Turkey has been playing "a more active role in its region and seeking a very important role."

Ankara and Washington may have different views on certain issues, Gordon said, adding that US President Barack Obama and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan discussed a series of issues including the two countries' approaches to Iran, Israel and Syria during their Dec. 7 meeting at the White House.

"I believe that thinking that Turkey has turned its back to its decades-long cooperation with NATO, the US and Europe is an incorrect perception," Gordon was quoted as saying by Anatolia. Highlighting that the meeting between Obama and Erdoğan took a few hours, he said, "This is not a sign showing that a country is moving away from the US." It is also not possible to say that Turkey, which is continuing its bid to become a member of the EU, is moving away from Europe, he said. "However, it is a fact that Turkey is continuing to be a close partner for us with its [...] big and important cooperation on a regional and global scale."

Following his meeting with Erdoğan earlier this month, Obama voiced his appreciation of the role played by Turkey in contributing to the maintenance of global peace.

Erdoğan's visit was also used as an opportunity to diversify the strong political and military cooperation between the two allies with the launch of an initiative aimed at boosting trade and investment ties. The launch of the initiative has been widely considered to be another concrete sign of the mutual desire to make the model partnership more substantial.

Commentaries in Turkish newspapers widely described the White House meeting as a meeting that strengthened Erdoğan's political position inside Turkey due to Obama's clear remarks in support of the Erdoğan government's democratization initiative and of Turkey's fight against terrorism.

Turkey's Gul to visit Jerusalem, Israel says

Friday, 18 December 2009 21:13

WORLD BULLETIN

Turkish President Gul will visit Israel, a statement by Israeli President Peres's office said. Turkish President Abdullah Gul will visit Israel, a statement by Israeli President Shimon Peres's office said on Friday.

The two leaders met at the U.N. climate summit in Copenhagen on Friday and the statement, issued in Jerusalem, said they had resolved "to restore Israel-Turkey relations to their stable, positive past". It did not say when the visit might take place.

Relations between the two regional powers have soured since Israel launched an three-week offensive in the Gaza Strip, killing 1434 Palestinians, a third of them children, last December.

Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan has repeatedly criticised the Israeli war, even having a public shouting match with Peres during a panel discussion in Switzerland in January.

Last month Erdogan singled out Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for failing to trust Ankara in Turkey's peace mediation efforts with Syria, unlike his predecessor Ehud Olmert.

Turkey, NATO's only Muslim member, last year facilitated contacts that focused on Syrian demands for a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights -- which Israel captured in 1967 and annexed -

Turkish firms urged to seize opportunity in Greece

Friday, December 18, 2009

ISTANBUL – Anatolia News Agency

Turkish investors should seize the opportunity generated by the crisis in Greece and invest in the country, said Selim Egeli, the head of the Turkish-Greek Business Council. "Just like Greek banks entered the Turkish market, now it is the Turkish banks' turn to the same," said Egeli, who said he doubts the crisis will grow immensely.

"There is a general notion that the crisis grew quickly to an extreme level. However, if you ask me Greece will take similar measures to the ones Turkey took during its 2001 banking crisis and go for savings by diminishing in size," he said.

If Turkey chooses to increase its exports to Greece 5 percent, the country's export level to Greece, which stands at \$3.5 to \$4 billion, would rise to an annual \$8 billion, said Egeli.

"I believe we can reach that figure in a year-and-a-half."

When it comes to the finance industry, Egeli said: "Turkish banks can acquire banks in Greece or establish partnerships and increase their operations in the market."

In tourism, by joining forces, both countries could benefit much more from the industry. Printing joint brochures to distribute to tourists is a way to do that, according to Egeli.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Space heating sector takes a hit from new regulation

Monday, 14 December 2009 09:48

Today's Zaman

Natural Gas Equipment Manufacturers and Businessmen's Association (DOSİDER) President Celalettin Çelik has stated that the Energy Performance of Buildings (BEP) regulation will negatively affect Turkey's combination boiler industry.

Çelik, speaking to the Anatolia news agency, highlighted that the Ministry of Public Works and Settlement is still working on drafting the regulation, which would require the use of central heating systems in buildings with a floor plan greater than 1,000 square meters, therefore nearly eliminating the use of combination boilers in such buildings.

Çelik, while noting that the ministry will take into consideration the suggestions of DOSİDER, said, "We first want to state that we think the BEP regulation is a great step forward for regulating energy efficiency in buildings." He added that although this is a great initiative by the ministry, its requirement for buildings with a usable space greater than 1,000 square meters would put undue stress on the space heating sector in Turkey, especially for combination boiler producers.

"We think that the 1,000 square meter limit is not in line with the realities of the heating needs of buildings in Turkey. ... We think that taking into account heating needs rather than the space would be more appropriate. We recommend that the central heating requirement should be in place for buildings which consume more than 350 kilowatts of energy for space heating."

He stated that the regulation in its current state would restrict the options available for consumers and put producers in a difficult situation and urged the ministry to consider DOSİDER's recommendations when drafting the regulation.

"The regulation in its current state will negatively affect combination boiler production and sales," stated Çelik, adding that all nine combination boiler producers who are members of DOSİDER believed that the regulation in its current state would "have a very negative effect on the future of the sector. They all hope that the institutions involved will consider this."

Speaking about the current state of the combination boiler sector, Çelik stated that nearly 650,000 boilers had been sold in 2008, but that this number had taken a projected 30 percent dive in 2009 as an estimated 450,000 boilers will have been sold by the end of the year. He noted that out of the 650,000 units sold, half of them had been exported abroad to the European Union, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Turkic nations.

Banks expect recovery in 2010, cautious about government targets

Tuesday, 15 December 2009 14:43

Today's Zaman

Türkiye İş Bankası and ING Bank have released their December reviews of the Turkish economy, noting that there will be a slow but gradual recovery in 2010 if government goals for inflation and fiscal spending are met.

In bulletins released yesterday by the Türkiye İş Bankası Economic Research Group and ING Turkey's Treasury Group's Economic Research Department, the two banks reviewed recent economic and political developments in Turkey amid signs that a recovery from the global economic crisis that began last year is imminent.

İş Bankası's bulletin noted that the fiscal deficit is soaking up credit resources in the economy, therefore pushing the private sector out of national debt markets. Additionally, the bulletin requested that the government stick to its Medium-Term Program goal of

gradually lowering the budget deficit, thereby removing any upward pressure the high fiscal deficit may have on interest rates.

On the topic of the recent release of data regarding industrial production, capacity and trade figures, the bulletin noted that they had recovered after decreasing significantly during the crisis. "Along with these improvements in the economy, there are signs -- such as the regression of the consumer confidence index and expectations that the recovery of the global economy will be slow -- that point to a slow and gradual recovery of the Turkish economy," the bulletin stated.

"On the other hand, improvements in global risk outlooks, along with expectations the central bank will keep interest rates low for an extended period of time, will lead to an increase in the credit available in the market. This increase, however, will be gradual because of the low investment levels of the real sector and increasing unemployment rates," the bulletin said.

The bulletin from ING Bank Chief Economist Sengül Dağdeviren noted her bank's expectations for 2010 and stated that the government needs to be transparent about its progress on economic goals, adding that it should reveal any difficulties it is having sooner rather than later so as to avoid shocking markets.

The bulletin, taking Greece's recent fiscal difficulties as an example, noted that the governments' difficulties, if they exist, need to be revealed sooner rather than later in order to more easily manage them. "In the case of Turkey, the Medium-Term Program revealed in September has high goals, but the government needs to give confidence to markets that it will be able to meet these goals," the bulletin noted.

On the topic of expectations for the 2010 budget, Dağdeviren noted that barring unexpectedly high growth in 2010, the government's expectations for 2010 revenues are very optimistic. She added that if taxes are to be adjusted to meet these goals, they should be adjusted as soon as possible in order to manage any inflationary pressures that may come about.

The increase in inflation witnessed in November would most likely continue until the second half of 2010, the bulletin noted, adding that the 5 percent inflation target revealed for 2012 would likely have a +/- 2 percent point uncertainty margin, creating pressure for monetary policy to continue to focus on the growth rate rather than inflation. Dağdeviren noted that they expected the central bank to start increasing interest rates near the end of 2010.

On the political developments within the nation and their effects on the economy, the bulletin highlighted that regardless of how much political developments come to the forefront of the public agenda, they are far from creating economic costs.

Construction equipment sees 75 percent rise in November

Tuesday, 15 December 2009 14:42

Today's Zaman

In another sign of recovery from the global financial crisis, the Turkish heavy construction equipment sector enjoyed a 75 percent growth in sales in November over the same month of last year, Turkish Construction Equipment Distributors and Producers Union

In a written statement released yesterday, the union announced that the sector contracted by some 40 percent in the first 11 months of the year. While firms operating in the sector

managed to sell only 3,177 units in the first 11 months of 2009, this figure was 5,303 in the same period of last year. Fighting the negative impact of the crisis throughout the year, the sector began to witness the first the signs of recovery in October 2009 when the number of pieces of heavy construction equipment sold increased from 220 in October 2008 to 324. The rise continued in November, when sales figures rose by 75 percent compared to same month of last year, increasing from 194 in November 2008 to 339. İMDER Chairman Rızanur Meral noted in the statement that sales are promising for the future of the sector. According to Meral, the current growth rates are not satisfactory for the sector; however, he remarked that they are considering these figures as just the beginning of a rapid recovery. "We hope 2010 will be a better year than 2009. We are expecting a growth rate of 10 to 15 percent in the year ahead," he said. With an 8 percent contraction in the sector, Far Eastern countries suffered the least from the financial crisis, and Turkey has become the only country outside that region that has managed to see a recovery in the sector. Meral stated that the world heavy construction equipment market has yet to see a recovery reflected in its figures. He remarked that Turkish construction firms undertaking projects in North African and Middle Eastern countries will also be a benefit to the development of the sector, which has a great potential for growth.

Turkish Air Carrier Says Number Of Passengers Rose By 10.3 Percent

Wednesday, 16 December 2009 13:1

TIME TURK

Turkey's biggest air carrier company has said the number of its passengers increased by 10.3 percent in the first eleven months of this year.

Turkish Airlines (THY) said Wednesday in a statement that it carried some 23 million passengers in January-November period from a 20.8 million passengers over the same last year. The company said its occupancy rate dropped 3.4 points down to 71.1 percent.

Eureko To Shift Major Investments To Turkey

Wednesday, 16 December 2009 13:1

TIME TURK

Dutch insurance company Eureko plans to shift its major investments to Turkey from several countries, Turkish foreign trade minister said on Wednesday.

"Eureko will bring its investments to Turkey in 2010," Zafer Caglayan told reporters during his visit to the Netherlands.

Eureko B.V., the largest insurance group in the Netherlands, is already active in Turkish market. The Dutch firm acquired, from Garanti Bank in Turkey, 80 percent of the shares of Eureko Sigorta, a life insurance company.

"I met with top executives of the firm. They told me that Eureko would totally leave those countries and shift investments to Turkey. The company wants to grow in Turkey," Caglayan said.

However, he did not elaborate on the matter.

In addition, Caglayan said he met with executives of BAM, another Dutch company operating in engineering and construction industries with 9 billion Euro annual turnover. He said BAM was willing to operate in Turkish market and it was interested in

construction of the third bridge on Istanbul Strait.

Vodafone Turkey To Have Turnover Around 1.8 Bln USD

Wednesday, 16 December 2009 13:1

TIME TURK

Vodafone Turkey would have a turnover around 1.8 billion USD by the end of 2009, a company executive said on Wednesday.

Serpil Timuray, chairperson of the Executive Board of Vodafone Turkey, told reporters that the company would have a year-end turnover around 2.7 billion Turkish liras (TL), equal to 1.8 billion USD.

"We had 14.9 million subscribers between April and June, and this figure climbed to 15.6 million between July and September," Timuray said.

Timuray said that this was equal to 1.1 points rise over the previous quarter, and 24.5 percent market share.

British-based mobile operator Vodafone acquired Turkey's Telsim in May 2006.

Vodafone was the first GSM operator set up in Britain, and made the first mobile conversation in Britain on January 1, 1985.

As of March 30, 2009, Vodafone is the biggest mobile company in the world, operates in five continents and 31 countries and has almost 315.3 million customers.

Turkish contractor takes on largest mall in Africa

Friday, 18 December 2009 09:43

Today's Zaman

Investments on the heels of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit in November to Libya have come to fruition, with shopping mall construction expert Renaissance Construction undertaking a \$2 billion project to construct the largest mall in Africa.

The elimination of visa requirements and payments on debts owed by Libya to Turkish construction firms, along with \$125 billion in promised investment in the construction sector by the Libyan government, are leading to an influx of Turkish firms into the North African nation. Renaissance Construction, the second-largest building contractor in Turkey, is putting up the largest shopping center in Africa with its Libyan partner, Lidco. The project, called Zümrüt, is part of the \$2 billion "Bab Tripoli 2" project, which also includes luxury apartments, offices and a five-star hotel in the country's capital.

Speaking to Today's Zaman, Renaissance Construction Vice President Kamil Yanıkömeroğlu noted that they plan to expand to other North African nations, anticipating demand for shopping centers from Tunisia and Algeria. Yanıkömeroğlu indicated that Zümrüt would be completed in 2010, adding that his company is currently in talks with two firms for management of the five-star hotel.

Commercial Counselor at the Turkish Embassy in Tripoli İbrahim Eriş, speaking to Today's Zaman, stated that Libya was planning to invest \$125 billion in the construction sector in the next five years. Eriş highlighted that those who do not invest in Libya now will regret their hesitation five years from now. He added that although visa requirements between the two countries have been lifted, because of Libya's bureaucracy this would not go into effect until after the beginning of the new year

Renaissance Construction has operations in Turkey, Russia, Ukraine and now Libya, building factories, shopping centers and luxury housing. To date, Renaissance has built 60 factories, 16 shopping centers and numerous luxury homes in Russia. The firm, which was founded in 1993, has been involved in 450 projects valued at over \$3 billion.

Two Turkish Construction Companies Among Top 100 in Europe, Report Says

Friday, 18 December 2009

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Two Turkish construction contractors have been named among Europe's top 100 construction companies, international accounting firm Deloitte has said in a report. Turkey's ENKA Construction was placed 37th and GAMA Holding came 85th on the list of "Leaders of Construction in Europe Report 2009," which was made public on Friday. French construction and electrical engineering company Vinci topped the list with a 29 billion euro contracts turnover in 2009.

ENKA received 1.9 billion euro turnover as GAMA entered the list for the first time this year with 735 million turnover.

Halkbank Receives 250 Million USD Loan From World Bank

Thursday, 17 December 2009

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkey's Halk Bankasi, or Halkbank, has received a loan of 250 million USD from the World Bank.

The bank signed an agreement with the World Bank on Thursday for the release of the loan. Halkbank will utilize the loan for financing the activities of small and medium scale businesses in Turkey. The loan will be paid back in 14 years.

Turkish state-owned Halkbank was established in 1938. It initially lent money indirectly through "popular funds", before being authorized in 1950 to open branches and lend money directly. Today, it is the 7th-largest bank in Turkey in terms of assets.

Turkey's budget deficit narrows from year earlier

Thursday, December 17, 2009

ANKARA – Bloomberg

HURRIYAT

Turkey's budget deficit in November narrowed from a year earlier for only the second time this year, the Finance Ministry said.

The overall fiscal shortfall contracted to 3.1 billion Turkish Liras (\$2 billion) from 3.4 billion liras in November 2008, the ministry in Ankara said in a statement on its Web site. The gap before interest payments on debt, the so-called primary balance, was 1.2 billion liras compared with a surplus of 2.1 billion liras a year earlier.

The figures brought the overall budget deficit in the first 11 months of the year to 46.4 billion liras, more than five times the shortfall recorded in the same period last year.

Government spending has surged this year even as the global crisis reduces tax income. The gap has widened on an annual basis every month except May.

The deficit may end the year at less than 60 billion liras, Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek said on Dec. 3, according to Referans newspaper. That's less than the official forecast of 63 billion liras and about six times the original budget plans drawn up before the global crisis struck.

Parliament is debating the government's budget plans for 2010, which aim for a gap of 50.1 billion liras and a primary surplus of 6.6 billion liras.

Non-interest spending in the 11 months through November surged 22 percent from a year earlier while revenue fell 0.3 percent over the same period. Tax income declined 1.2 percent from a year earlier.

SOCIAL ISSUES

Drinking cups of tea and coffee 'can prevent diabetes'

Tuesday, 15 December 2009 16:29

BBC

Tea and coffee drinkers have a lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes, a large body of evidence shows.

And the protection may not be down to caffeine since decaf coffee has the greatest effect, say researchers in Archives of Internal Medicine.

They looked at 18 separate studies involving nearly 500,000 people.

This analysis revealed that people who drink three or four cups of coffee or tea a day cut their risk by a fifth or more, say researchers.

The same amount of decaffeinated coffee had an even bigger effect, lowering risk by a third.

Type 2 diabetes usually starts after the age of 40 and develops when the body can still make some insulin, but not enough, or when the insulin that is produced does not work properly. Type 2 diabetes is treated with a healthy diet and increased physical activity. In addition to this, medication and/or insulin is often required.

If the findings prove true, doctors may well start advising people to put the kettle on as well as take more exercise and watch their weight, say the researchers.

When the authors combined and analysed the data, they found that each additional cup of coffee consumed in a day cut diabetes risk by 7%.

Lead researcher Dr Rachel Huxley, from the University of Sydney in Australia, said because of the finding with decaffeinated coffee, the link is unlikely to be solely related to caffeine.

Instead, other compounds in coffee and tea - including magnesium and antioxidants known as lignans or chlorogenic acids - may be involved.

Special brew

"The identification of the active components of these beverages would open up new therapeutic pathways for the primary prevention of diabetes mellitus.

"If such beneficial effects were observed in interventional trials to be real, the implications for the millions of individuals who have diabetes mellitus, or who are at future risk of developing it, would be substantial."

Dr Victoria King, of Diabetes UK, said: "Without full information about what other factors may be influencing the type 2 diabetes risk of the studies' participants - such as their physical activity levels and diet - as well as what the active ingredient in tea or

coffee appears to be, we cannot be sure what, if anything, this observed effect is down to. "What we can be sure of is that the development of type 2 diabetes is strongly linked to lifestyle, which means that many cases could be prevented by keeping active and eating a healthy balanced diet that is low in fat, salt and sugar with plenty of fruit and vegetables."

Can vitamins cause cancer?

Thursday, 17 December 2009 12:26

Today's Zaman

The vitamins being sold on pharmacy shelves look so alluring that there are many people who take them and neglect to eat fresh fruits and vegetables.

But Dr. Ismail Çelik, who studies the causes of cancer, says relying on these pills can lead to cancer.

Çelik is a preventative oncologist and an expert on malignant melanoma, a type of skin cancer. He is a doctor at Hacettepe University Hospital who specializes in researching factors that lead to cancer and informs the public of these factors. We had a chance to speak with Çelik recently about some of the factors that may lead to cancer. And judging from what he says, some of the very vitamins we take in an effort to ward off cancer might just be putting us at increased risk.

The rise of genetically modified and hormone-filled fruits and vegetables has led many people to believe they need to supplement their diets with vitamins. Supplements and vitamins are very popular and easily accessible at pharmacies, and now people even buy supplements that claim to keep hair from falling out, to keep one healthy, to solve iron deficiencies, etc. Some people have even stopped consuming fresh fruits and vegetables, replacing them with vitamins and supplements. But Çelik offers up this strongly worded warning: "The use of vitamins can lead to cancer. Studies done in the 1990s proved this. All doctors are aware of this study. When you get your vitamin A from carrots or other vegetables, it can help protect against lung cancer, which is why some smokers started taking vitamin A (carotene) capsules every day. But actually, an opposite effect occurred, and the number of lung cancer cases exploded." Çelik thus notes that actually, the best vitamin intake occurs when a person gets their vitamins from foods and not from pills. He warns that the real danger occurs when vitamins are separated from natural fibers, skins and the other fresh ingredients and placed into tablets.

5 ways to protect oneself from cancer:

These are steps suggested by international health organizations, not just Dr. Çelik. Here are five things you can do to protect yourself:

Consume lots of fibrous foods. Whole wheat breads, vegetables, etc.

Avoid eating too much red meat. Eat red meat only once a week.

Reduce your consumption of oils. Even too much olive oil can be harmful to your health, as it can cause weight gain, which increases the likelihood of certain types of cancer.

Make sure you consume five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. This is quite an easy task in Turkey. Have tomatoes at breakfast, have some cooked vegetables during lunch and try to eat two kinds of fruit in the evening.

Stay away from alcohol. Çelik says: "People talk about drinking a glass of wine, but even this can pose a cancer risk. As for cigarettes, these pose a risk of lung cancer in men and breast cancer in women. Don't smoke cigarettes and do not be near people who smoke if

you can help it.”

More advice from Dr. Çelik: “Make sure you eat right. Consume lots of fiber and especially try to eat wheat bread because whole wheat foods protect your heart, keep you from being constipated and reduce your blood pressure levels. Wheat is like medicine. If it were a medicine, I would sell it! We need to return to our villages. ... If we would eat like our ancestors, stop using taking vitamins and keep active, we would reduce our risk of cancer.”

The importance of staying active

Çelik also notes that staying active reduces your risk of cancer, saying: “Move around a lot. Walk, for example. Get off the bus one stop before your own. Don’t use the elevator, and take the stairs.”

Keep an eye on those ears of yours

Thursday, 17 December 2009 09:37

Today's Zaman

Air travel can take a heavy physical toll on your body. Sometimes the change in pressure can cause your ears to ring, or they can simply get badly plugged.

And then we all know what happens next: temporary pain and hearing loss. This is a horrible situation for babies, who suffer but do not understand what is going on -- which is why when planes begin the landing procedure, babies sometimes begin to cry. But is the situation purely the result of changes in pressure? No, of course not. Your general health also plays an important role here.

Dr. Oray Karaçaylı from the Memorial Hospital in Ataşehir tells us that it is imperative for travelers to have clear nasal passages if they do not want their ears to become plugged. This means that if you are suffering from a seasonal flu, for example, you might want to think twice about boarding a plane. If you must fly when you are sick, it is a good idea to use nasal spray and chew gum or candy if possible because the more you chew, the more you swallow, and swallowing activates the muscles that open the Eustachian tubes. Also make sure that you do not fall asleep as the plane is landing; this is because swallowing tends to slow down when you are asleep. If you are traveling with a baby, giving it a bottle or a pacifier at this point in the journey is a good idea for the same reason.

Here are some other suggestions from Dr. Karaçaylı when it comes to dealing with your ears:

On the subject of “ear-cleaning wax,” a well-known Anatolian method that has been around for hundreds of years, Dr. Karaçaylı says the wax can and might well be used to block water from entering ears, but adds that “there is no need to do this continually. It is only something we advise after someone has had quite a few outer ear infections. It is important not to upset the body’s natural balances.”

Dr. Karaçaylı notes that when it comes to cleaning the ears, a moist and clean cloth or perhaps a towel is ideal for the outside of the ear and notes that it is important to understand that the human ear is one of the body’s organs that cleans itself.

Should people wash their ears out if they complain that they cannot hear?

If someone’s ears are not cleaning themselves, then washing the ears can be beneficial, though simply rushing to wash your ears before finding out what the problem is may not

be a solution.

Why do ears ring?

There are many factors that can cause this. Some of these factors can be arthritis in the inner ear, damage caused by extremely high decibel noises, a loss of hearing due to age, various rapid and intense changes in pressure, or even the frequent use of certain medicines.

What are some of the reasons for hearing loss?

The most important question when it comes to hearing loss is whether it occurred all at once or gradually. A loss of hearing that happens suddenly could mean that the ear is plugged, that it was somehow struck by something external or that water has gotten into the ear. It could be a middle ear infection, or perhaps liquid has collected in the ear. The situation needs to be analyzed carefully before the appropriate treatment is given.

What should be done when children have ear problems?

Children with problematic ears may not be able to hear television even at high decibel levels. Or perhaps they may struggle to hear their teachers at school. Some families may overlook or even ignore the problem at first. Sometimes the family hears of the problem first from the child's teacher or sometimes a more observant family will notice it. Of course, such a problem demands careful attention and care.

'This is the most dynamic country in Europe'

Friday, December 18, 2009 Özgür Öğret
ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

Simon Johns, bass player for English indie-rockers Stereolab, found love in Istanbul and has been living here for the last two years. He finds the city's historical heritage breathtaking and its people very friendly. Turkey is the 'the most dynamic, and probably most rapidly changing country in Europe,' Johns says

The brief Wikipedia page on Simon Johns starts out by saying he is best known as the bass player of London indie-rockers Stereolab; this is true, but there is much more to say. Johns has been living in Istanbul for the last two years and is happily married to his half-Turkish American wife, Ayla. But let us not get ahead of ourselves.

"I was born in the seaside city of Weymouth, which is in western England, the most beautiful part of the world," Johns said as he began to tell his tale. After moving around for a while, he spent 13 years in Brighton, England, where he studied art and made a life before moving to Turkey. Before he joined Stereolab in 1998, Johns played in other bands, the best-known being the short-lived Clear Spot, which also featured My Bloody Valentine drummer Colm Ó Cíosóig.

Clear Spot released its only recording, the 7-inch vinyl single "Moonman Bop," on Stereolab's self-owned record label, Duophonic Records. At the same time, Stereolab was looking for a bass player for a recording session. Johns was offered the job and became a fulltime member of the band a few months later. "I had nothing better to do. I was working for a magazine, doing television listings; it was a pretty boring job," said Johns.

First time in Turkey

Stereolab played its first shows in Turkey at the Babylon nightclub in Istanbul in 2001. Johns does not remember much about the city from that trip, since touring musicians

hardly have time for sightseeing during their travels. “When you come to play, you do not see anything,” he said. “You go to the hotel, sleep, do your job and you go.”

This normally would have been the case once more with Stereolab’s return in 2006, but fate had other plans for the bassist. After that show, also at Babylon, the band went out for drinks, and Johns met his future wife. That night was spent in conversation before saying “goodbye, nice to meet you,” but a few months later, she found Johns on Myspace.com to ask if he would like to meet in London, where she was going to pay a visit. The London meeting went so well that Johns was asked to accompany her to Paris also.

“We went to Paris; we fell in love there, and then [I] moved here two years ago,” said Johns. His friends and family were surprised at this choice at first, especially his mother, who said she would miss him, but Johns’ family comes to visit at holidays now and “they love it,” he said. “They have a nice, cheap holiday.”

An Englishman in Istanbul

Before settling in Istanbul for good, Johns visited the city several times. “I had no expectations; I did not know what the people were like. I knew it was an Islamic country, but not like Iran,” the musician said, describing his first impressions with words such as “unusual,” “unique” and “fresh.” Now that he has lived here for some time, how would Johns describe Turkey to a friend or family member who has never visited?

“I would describe it as the most dynamic, and probably most rapidly changing country in Europe, with people you would recognize,” Johns said, noting that there are a lot of Turks in London. “People are really friendly here.”

Comparing Turkey to England, which he called “a very violent place,” Johns said that in his home country, he would know which bars to stay away from because of the way they look on the outside and what kind of people are drinking there. Here, he said, he had some worries because he did not know the local codes, but he has found that he can walk around after dark and go anywhere he likes.

“People [in Turkey] are naturally conservative and afraid of strange people, but no different than you would find in Paris or London,” Johns said, explaining that he has not felt the cold shoulder from the locals here. He lives in Beyoğlu, in a building he described as not in good shape, but added that he does not mind, as he likes the architecture.

When asked what he likes to do in Istanbul in his free time, Johns said: “You can not help but be impressed with the layers and layers of history. In every corner, there is a fascinating thing to see.” The musician said he enjoys walking in the city’s different neighborhoods, keeping his head up and his eyes open, discovering history.

“The public-transportation system is terrible, though,” he said with a laugh, adding that it does not matter much, because the same is true in England. Johns also visits lots of art exhibitions. He does not paint, but is still interested in the field. He said he does not yet know Turkish music as well as he intends to, but that he is working on it. Though he does not play in a band here, he jams with other musicians from time to time.

Music is his business

Johns hosts a radio show on Açık Radyo, which is one of the most unique and prestigious stations in Turkey. Explaining how he got the job a year and a half ago, he said, “My wife is like my life coach; she organizes everything for me.” His wife’s mother is friends with journalist Stephen Kinzer, who did a show called “Blues Baba” (Father Blues) on Açık Radyo when he lived in Istanbul. Kinzer encouraged Johns to visit the station, to

just go and say “hi.” When he did, Johns had a very long conversation with Açık’s executive manager, Ömer Madra.

“I could leave and never see him again or I could say, ‘Can I have a program, please?’” John said, recalling the meeting. “It was very unlikely; I am very shy.” But he asked, Madra accepted and Johns has been sharing his musical knowledge and taste with his Turkish audience ever since. He does two shows a week now, one on Sunday afternoons and the other on Saturday evenings.

Johns also writes music for advertisements. He has a producer colleague in England who orders stock music from him, making requests such as “I need six folk tunes.” Johns then writes six folk tunes and sends them to be produced and take their place in the stock-music library that advertising people use to select sounds for their jingles or TV ads. As for his work with Stereolab, the band is enjoying a hiatus after two decades of activity. “It has been 20 years of constantly recording and touring,” Johns said, explaining the need the band felt to take a break.

Promoting cricket all around Europe by bike

Thursday, December 17, 2009
CEYLAN YEĞİNSU
ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

After England regained the Ashes title earlier this year with its first Test match at Lord's in 75 years, Oliver Broom, 29, decided to cycle to Brisbane in time for the first Test of the Ashes there next year. Setting out from England in October, he has since traveled across Europe and is now in Istanbul. As a part of his mission to promote cricket around the world, he is organizing a cricket match in Istanbul on Saturday

Armed with a cricket bat, a bike and his radiant blond hair, Oliver Broom is bound to turn heads as he wanders around Istanbul.

But Broom is not an ordinary traveler passing through the city; he is on a 25,000-kilometer mission to get to Australia by bike, while promoting cricket along the way.

England regained the Ashes title earlier this year with its first Test match win at Lord's in 75 years; while some chose to celebrate with a glass of champagne and a night on the town, Broom, 29, decided to cycle to Brisbane in time for the first Test of the Ashes there next year.

Broom worked in London's West End for six years as a chartered surveyor, but his dead-end job eventually took its toll and the young Durham graduate decided he wanted to embark on an adventure before settling down.

“I knew I wanted to travel the world, but I didn't just want to disappear for one or two years. I wanted to be active and set out on a project,” Broom told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review.

Returning on a train from a friend's going-away party to Australia, Broom decided to go to Australia and then to the Ashes tournament. By the time he arrived home, he had developed his plans.

“People have called me a cricket nut. I'm not, but I think it's a great game and definitely worth promoting,” Broom said in the interview.

Combining his passions and goals, Broom laid out three aims for himself: to go to the Ashes (by bike), promote cricket and raise 100,000 pounds for charities on the way. A 25,000-kilometer marathon by bike through unknown terrain would be enough to

challenge any athlete. But not only is Broom not a professional cyclist, he had barely cycled before.

“I did a bit of mountain biking at university, but in London I didn’t really cycle because my bikes kept getting stolen,” he said.

Broom proved that he could cycle long distances when he rode with his ex-girlfriend to Paris earlier in the year.

“It was a lot of fun, but the day I set out on my world tour, I rode to Dover with 17 friends. That was the longest I had cycled in one day,” he said. “That night, lying in bed in agony, I questioned whether I could make it to Australia.”

Broom set out from England in October and has since traveled all across Europe, through northern France to Paris and on to Strasbourg. From there, he went across southern Germany, to the Danube and through to Belgrade and Slovenia before landing in Istanbul.

“The trip has been pretty straightforward until now, especially cycling on the flat Danube cycle path and going through countries that have a strong cricket base,” Broom said. He noted that the past week had been much more challenging because of bad weather and difficult cycling conditions.

“Last week, while cycling in Bulgaria, I was forced off the road because I had one lorry behind me and one in front that were not prepared to slow down or move, which caused me to somersault over a barrier and fall in a ditch,” he said.

Another challenge for Broom has been financing his trip, especially because he did not tell anyone about his plans.

“It was very difficult to get sponsors, because I could not use any of my contacts at work, and I did not get that many positive responses to my letters of proposal,” Broom said.

Two weeks prior to leaving, Oliver received a chance phone call from Betfair, a betting agency, asking to be his chief sponsor. “I was so lucky because despite my efforts to save up, I did not have enough funds to take me to Australia,” Broom said.

Cricket game in Turkey

As a part of his mission to promote cricket around the world, Broom will be organizing a cricket game in Istanbul on Saturday.

“I realize this will be a great challenge because cricket has very few followers in Turkey, but this encourages me more to teach people about the game and give them the opportunity to play,” he said.

Broom is currently working with the Ankara-based Turkish Cricket Board to organize the game. He had hoped to play in Taksim Square, but did not get permission, so he is now trying to find another central location that will attract the maximum amount of attention.

“Meeting people around Istanbul, a lot of people have shown great interest and curiosity and have said they will come along and participate,” Broom said. “There are four cricket teams in Ankara, but people in Istanbul don’t have a clue. People have heard of it, but don’t know anything about it, so they are keen to watch.”

Broom told the Daily News that he has had a great stay in Istanbul, meeting many friendly people who have helped him around the city. On Monday, the cyclist will set off for central Anatolia and down through Syria, desperate to get somewhere warm after the bad conditions he has faced recently.

He will then cross to India’s east coast, where he will spend two months following the Indian Premier League in a 20/20 tournament. From there, he will travel to northern

India, then on to Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar. From Laos, he will cycle south through Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia before taking a boat to Darwin, Australia. A blog chronicling Broom's journey can be found at www.cyclingtotheashes.com

COMMENTARY

Obama Gave the Signal of Retreat to Afghanistan

CAGRI ERHAN

Saturday, 12 December 2009

Türkiye

Newspaper

USAK PUBLICATIONS

BILLIONS WERE SPENT

The Taliban and al Qaeda would not exist today if 10% of the U.S. expenditure in the Afghanistan war was instead spent on the people of Afghanistan. But obviously, war equipment had to be used in order to keep their producers afloat.

While U.S. President Obama is sending additional reinforcements to the U.S. forces in Afghanistan, he is also contemplating the initiation of U.S. withdrawal in July 2011. Today, there are nearly 113.000 foreign soldiers in Afghanistan. When Obama calculates that number with the additional 30.000 soldiers, the Taliban will be annihilated and security will be established in Afghanistan. Obama's calculation is wrong. NATO is experiencing the greatest failure of its history. Reinforcing the operation with 30.000 additional troops will not be enough to establish security and stability; however, it may be helpful for the realization of an "honorable withdrawal" in 2011. Since December 2009, Afghanistan is no longer a relevant issue for NATO and the U.S. From now on, the main objective is to withdraw with the least possible casualties.

In 1878, 35.000 soldiers were used by the British Empire to establish a temporary British rule in Afghanistan. However, this military presence was never enough to suppress the ongoing resistance that began in 1839. Britain, therefore, was obliged to accept the independence of Afghanistan in 1919.

LITTLE CHANCE TO SUCCEED

When the Soviet Union in cooperation with the Babrak Karmal regime invaded Afghanistan, the total Soviet military presence in the country was limited to 115.000 soldiers. Ten years of Soviet invasion caused more than one million Afghans' death. The Afghan Mujahedeen, who did not possess any tanks, helicopters or aircrafts, managed to force one of the most advanced military powers of its time, the Red Army, to withdraw from the region. After the Soviet's withdrawal, Mujahedeen took control of Kabul, and the Taliban regime was established. The armed Mujahedeen resistance managed to defeat an army of 100.000 men with only 30.000 fighters. With the dispatch of 30.000 additional soldiers, Afghanistan will host the largest foreign military force of its history ever, after that of the Great Alexander's conquest of Afghanistan. On the other hand, The Taliban and Al Qaeda members who are supposed to be eliminated are thought to have nearly 15.000 members around the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Most probably, the U.S./NATO forces will not be able to achieve what the previous ones couldn't achieve either. This is because of the great disparity amongst the alliance on against whom, and for what purpose the mission is being carried out as well as the ethnic issues of Afghanistan, create great impediments on controlling the Taliban.

We can analyze the level of disparity amongst the ally powers through their responses to Obama's call for additional forces. While the U.S. considers sending 30.000 soldiers, the remaining 26 NATO countries consider sending a total of only 7.000 soldiers. Moreover, most of these countries do not consider sending their forces as combatants. There are two possible explanations of this situation: either most of the NATO members do not want to take an active part in this struggle, of which they do not know the objective, or they realize that a permanent victory is not possible.

Since there is a small difference between harming the Taliban and aiding them to gain more popular support, the U.S. has never been able to keep a sensitive balance since the end of 2001. The bombings carried out to destroy the Taliban that result in civilian casualties caused by military operations can unexpectedly increase support given to the Taliban. The support given to the Karzai Government by Western states as the "best of a bad lot" diminishes the faith of Afghan society in NATO and the U.S, even though his government is known to carry out large-scale corruption.

On the other hand, despite U.S. Commander McChrystal's assessment of "something more than just military operations must be done to stabilize the country" in his report, neither the U.S. nor NATO headquarters contemplate any such policies. As a military organization, we can understand why NATO is reluctant to get involved in humanitarian aid and regional development policies. However, after the experiences in Vietnam and Iraq wars, it is hard to understand why the U.S. does not consider carrying out infrastructure projects which would be regarded as a positive step by the Afghan population.

According to the 2009 Yearbook, published by Stockholm International Peace and Research Institute (SIPRI), the worldwide total military expenditure in 2008 was 1,464 trillion dollars. This figure illustrates an increase of 2.4% compared to the previous year and an increase of 45% compared to 1999. The U.S. alone spent 41.5% of that total. The Obama administration's 2009 budget indicates a figure of 175 billion dollars for the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. But there is wide speculation that the actual spending is higher than this. According to a report prepared by the U.S. Congress, by the year 2015, the total expenditure on the Iraq and Afghanistan operations will be around 2.7 to 4.5 trillion dollars.

ONE OF THE POOREST

Why have I mentioned all these war expenditures? Because the total annual expenditure of the United Nations and its agencies is only 27 billion dollars. Consequently, the UN, including all humanitarian aids, only spends one eighth of the U.S. military spending. Afghanistan's GDP in terms of purchasing power parity is 22,32 billion dollars. When you consider the foreign exchange rate, this figure drops to 11,71 billion dollars. Per capita income is 800 dollars. With these figures, Afghanistan is the 219th country among 229 states and regions worldwide. Two thirds of the Afghan population live with a per day income of less than 2 dollars.

The Taliban and Al Qaeda would not exist today if 10% of the U.S. expenditure on war was spent on the Afghani people instead. But obviously, war equipment had to be used in order to keep the defense sector of the U.S. afloat. Obama's latest briefing on Afghanistan clearly shows that no one cares about saving the Afghani people. Let's see if the U.S. will be able to save its own soldiers from the Taliban "honorably". .

The Party That Closed Itself Down

Monday, 14 December 2009

Prof. Dr. Ihsan Bal

Director of USAK Center for Security Studies

USAK PUBLICATIONS

The Democratic Society Party (Turkish: Demokratik Toplum Partisi, DTP) was founded in 2005. In the 2007 elections, the DTP received around one-fourth of the Kurdish people's votes in Turkey and formed a party group in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) with 21 parliamentarians.

The interests that the DTP represented in parliament and the political line to which the party adhered led to heated debates in Turkey. In the end, the party was banned by the Constitutional Court on December 11, 2009, for alleged links to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and for becoming a supporter, focal point and promoter of the violence. Although the closure of political parties in Turkey is a widespread tradition, the majority of political parties and intellectuals have begun to stand against the political party closures in recent years. The process of the DTP's closure case in the Constitutional Court took place in a wide public platform with the opposition of these intellectuals and with thoughts against closing the party.

Many Turkish intellectuals argued that such a disposition towards closing down parties is unacceptable in a modern democracy. These intellectuals defended the party's right to survive even though the party represents only a portion of the Kurds and does not reject its dialogue with PKK, which has adopted terrorism as a method. However, the DTP has never made it easy for those who support democracy and freedom of opinion and are advocates of the DTP. In the last eight years, Turkey's EU process, democratization process, and reforms in the field of law have developed a pluralistic environment that is very attractive for the Kurds as well. Turkey has ensured pluralism and that different groups could express their demands in many areas.

Failing to develop policies that discouraged the use of violence as a legitimate method, the DTP did not take advantage of the democratic environment that had been given to them and the opportunity to act as the political representatives of the Kurdish people. The EU strongly demanded that the DTP distance itself from violence several times; however, the DTP ironically seemed to legitimize the violence, especially the violence done by the PKK. The polarization increased in the country due to the recent street events, the murder of a young man in Diyarbakir, the burning to death of a seventeen-year-old girl, Serap Eser, and most recently, the death of seven soldiers in a PKK ambush in Tokat, which made it much more difficult for those who strongly oppose turning Turkey into a graveyard of party closures to defend the DTP.

In addition to all of this, DTP co-chair Emine Ayna's explanations that condoned violence, the revelation that some of the party officials were the same as the militants of the PKK's city organizations, the DTP extremists' war against the democratic opening, and even declaring the democratic opening was dead just five months after it began, have made it extremely difficult for both Kurdish and Turkish democrats to defend the party. President Abdullah Gul, who showed a great example of courage in starting the democratization reform, including the solution to the Kurdish problem, expressed his disappointment with the closure decision by saying "I wish party executives would show

the necessary care to protect parties. As long as a party cites a terrorist organization as its raison d'être, what can the court do. I wish party executives would understand the total democratization process and the interest shown to them when they came to the Assembly.”

The death of a political party and its realization by the court is a tragic situation. However, the DTP preferred to commit political harakiri by declaring itself as unauthorized and declaring the PKK and Ocalan as authorized in terms of the solution to problems related to the Kurds, and by not distancing itself from violence and terror. Before the closure decision of the Constitutional Court, the DTP expressed that they could not do anything against some of the DTP deputies who had an understanding based on the legitimacy of the violence. At the same time, the DTP refused a golden opportunity created by the democratization process and aligned itself with the nationalist MHP and secular nationalist CHP. Unlike the other party closures, this one is based on concrete actions and concrete links between the party and the terrorist organization. The closure decision shows that this winter would be a harsh one for Turkey. Yet, democracies do not have a chance to carry the political parties that get along with terrorist organizations that legitimize the annihilation of democracy. From this point of view, the decision is an troublesome one.

The rule of law might be consolidated by decisions made without the pressure of violence. The legal criticism of the court's decision does not seem very meaningful. A political criticism may be appointed, but expecting courts to give political decisions would not be an ethical and correct approach. Following the Constitutional Court's decision, there may be some problems in the short term. Nevertheless, in the medium term, the number of Kurdish people who are ready to punish the DTP that disappointed them is remarkably increasing day by day.

Iraq, Africa new destination for Turkish shoes

Friday, December 18, 2009

REETA PAAKKINEN

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

Shoe manufacturers in Turkey are orienting toward new markets as Western Europe, their traditional export market, suffers from the global downturn. In the first nine months of the year, shoe exports to Iraq went up 45 percent, says İslam Şeker, chairman of the Footwear Industrialists' Association of Turkey

Turkish shoe manufacturers are increasingly orienting toward new markets in Africa and the Middle East due to a decline in orders from Europe, according to the chairman of the Footwear Industrialists' Association of Turkey, or TADS.

Approximately 80 percent of the 500 million pairs of shoes manufactured in Turkey each year are sold overseas. Russia is the leading export destination with 15 percent of the entire export volume, followed by Romania, Bulgaria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and the Netherlands.

Over the first eight months of 2009, total exports declined 0.8 percent in terms of pairs sold, and 22 percent in terms of value, compared with the same period in 2008. Exports to Russia increased by 3 percent over the same period.

One rising star in export markets for Turkish shoes is neighboring Iraq, said TADS

Chairman İslam Şeker, the managing director of Pati Ayakkabıcılık, which manufactures men's shoes and slippers. Şeker's firm exports all of its annual production of some 400,000 pairs.

Over the first nine months of 2009, exports to Iraq increased by 45 percent. "People in Iraq prefer Turkish goods and are overall sympathetic toward Turkish products," Şeker said.

Turkish shoes became unexpectedly popular in Iraq and the Middle East after an Iraqi journalist threw his shoes at then-U.S. President George W. Bush in December 2008. A Turkish company that claimed the shoes were its brand saw its exports boom.

In addition to Iraq, other countries in the region – and beyond – are likely to feature more prominently in the future as export destinations for Turkish shoes. "In fact, the sector has started looking also at Africa," Şeker said. "Turkish shoe companies are already exporting to some 15 countries in Africa and in the future this is bound to grow."

China as the main competitor

Turkey's main competitor in Africa's shoe market is China. However, evolution in consumer habits worldwide implies shoppers are increasingly prioritizing quality instead of price, Şeker said.

"People used to prefer to buy several pairs of lower-quality shoes for a lower price and this benefited Chinese shoe manufacturers," he said. "But these days, partly due to the economic crisis, people are increasingly preferring quality products."

According to Şeker, the Turkish shoe sector's exports are likely to recover from the crisis next year.

"I expect European consumers to start recovering next year, which will be good for us," he said. "But because of the more diversified range of export destinations, part of the new growth for Turkish shoe exports will also come from Arab and African countries."

The image of Turkish goods in Europe has also improved significantly in the past five years, Şeker said. "Turkish products did not have as good an image as we would have hoped for. But in the past few years the situation has improved," he said. "People would rather see 'Made in Turkey' written on a product than buy cheap Asian goods."

Businesspeople in the Turkish shoe sector would like to see an amendment to the visa rules for European Union countries to facilitate better competition in the markets.

"More competitiveness means better-quality products for the consumer. Goods cannot move without people," Şeker said. "The current visa regime in EU countries, which keeps our businessmen from developing and expanding their network in the EU is not very humane, let alone constructive."

How the Turkish army trains Afghans to combat terrorism

Friday, December 18, 2009

FULYA ÖZERKAN

ISPARTA - Hürriyet Daily News

Turkey remains cool on the United States' insistence that Turkish combat troops be dispatched to war-torn Afghanistan as part of the new strategy led by the Obama administration. Turkish government officials have openly said that they do not want to get involved in a hot clash with terrorist elements. Turkey prefers training of Afghan soldiers. The courses are being held in six sessions from October to May, for 21 days

each month. A total of 143 Afghan soldiers were trained in the period between October and November

After taking a Turkish language course in Istanbul for eight and half months, the Afghan military captain turns up at the commando training center in the southern Turkish province of Isparta.

There, he learns on-the-ground tactics from experienced Turkish commandos, such as how to combat terrorists, how to shoot and how not to be deceived by terrorist traps in open, mountainous fields.

“The Turkish army is very strong. The world knows this,” said Capt. Abdullah Ghaferi, who has been training in Isparta for only three days. “Let the soldier be the Afghan, the officer the Turk and let the weaponry be Russian. Then we would be heroes in the world.”

Ghaferi is one of a dozen Afghan soldiers trained by the Turkish military, which aspires to contribute to the establishment of the Afghan National Army.

Turkey remains cool on the United States’ insistence that Turkish combat troops be dispatched to war-torn Afghanistan as part of the new strategy led by the Obama administration. Turkish government officials have openly said that they do not want to get involved in a hot clash with terrorist elements.

The Turkish military has echoed similar concerns and wants to keep its troops out of combat operations in Afghanistan. The General Staff organized a tour for members of the press Friday to demonstrate how Turkish commanders are training the Afghan soldiers at the military facility in Isparta.

Military officials said the courses are being held in six sessions from October to May, for 21 days each month. A total of 143 Afghan soldiers were trained in the period between October and November, drawing appreciation from the Afghan administration.

For the December period, 73 Afghan soldiers began training in Isparta following a two-day orientation program.

As part of the theoretical training, a Turkish commando illustrated samples of original anti-tank and anti-personnel mines and remote-controlled explosives for the inexperienced Afghan soldiers. That knowledge helps increase the soldiers’ familiarity with the equipment used by terrorists. More interesting, however, were the on-the-ground exercises in which the soldiers applied what they have learned from their commanders.

“Two soldiers – go to the abandoned building,” the Turkish commando shouts to a dozen Afghan soldiers in the line. A whole scenario has been set up, with explosives and role-playing “terrorists” in the mountainous area. Two soldiers rush to the building as soon as they hear the instruction from the Turkish commando. Heavy fire is heard in the air.

“You see, if you do not scan the area before you go in, that could cost your life,” the Turkish commando said. “The number-one rule says to identify the entrances of any buildings in the area where you could be trapped by terrorists.”

In another field, a man acting out the role of a terrorist lies on the ground, playing dead.

“One soldier – come here,” shouts the Turkish commando. One Afghan soldier from the line rushes to the scene and immediately another firing sound is heard.

“Rule number two: Be careful, a terrorist could have carried a bomb on himself,” warns the Turkish commando. “If you identify the terrorist and scan the area, you would not be harmed.”

In the following stage, Afghan soldiers are taken from the training center to a remote,

hilly area with a panoramic view of the geography of the region where soldiers learn how to retaliate against terrorists who fire at them, especially at night. Next to each Afghan soldier wearing a blue helmet, there is an experienced Turkish soldier wearing a red helmet.

The Turkish army believes training Afghan army members is more advantageous and meaningful than being involved in direct conflict with terrorists.

“Of course, this training is not 100 percent sufficient for the Afghans to combat the Taliban. But what matters is that they continue training when they return home,” said a Turkish military official who wished to remain anonymous. “Our contributions are much more meaningful than sending combat troops. The Afghans have full confidence in the Turkish military and say ‘you are unique.’”

'Turkey at the bottom of the league in terms of women's rights'

Friday, December 18, 2009

GAZIANTEP - Anatolia News Agency

Despite having the 17th largest economy in the world, Turkey remains low on development indexes due to the condition of women in the country, according to the president of a Turkish women’s organization.

A wider process is needed to strengthen the position of women in Turkey, Gülseren Onanç, the president of the Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey, or KAGİDER, said at the sixth Women Entrepreneurs Meeting in Gaziantep.

“Turkey ranks 129th out of 134 countries in terms of women’s economic and social conditions. Turkey is 79th on the development index and has the 17th largest economy in the world, but we are unfortunately in the lowest league when we look at the situation of women,” Onanç said, citing data from the United Nations Development Programme, or UNDP. “We need a collective campaign to improve this.”

Noting that only 6 million women participate in the workforce in Turkey, Onanç said this number needs to increase for the sake of the country’s economic and democratic development. She added that if the involvement of Turkish women in the workforce were to increase from 24 to 29 percent, the poverty rate would drop by 15 percentage points.

‘Language of peace can only be created with women’

Turkey is going through a period where more peace, trust and collaboration are needed, said Onanç, adding that every individual needs to express his or her thoughts freely as equals and that everyone needs to show tolerance.

“Unfortunately, in Turkey today, there is polarization and tension that harms the country’s economy. The way I see it, this tension is written in a language with a male-dominant way of thinking,” said Onanç. “I believe that the language of peace and collaboration can only be created with women.”

Women in chains of prejudices on religious and ethnic grounds

Friday, December 18, 2009

ISTANBUL – Hürriyet Daily News

Modernism and tradition are not always recognizable, especially when women are the focus, according to experts. The stereotypes among women are not true even though

many people who call themselves modern believe headscarfed women have traditional lifestyles, says one expert, adding that the stereotypes serve only to alienate women from each other

Given political, social and economic discrimination, being a woman is difficult enough. When adding ethnic or religious differences to this, however, the alienation of women becomes much harsher, according to experts discussing Turkish women as “the other.” Women’s active participation in society is very low in Turkey, yet women often become a political object especially on ethnic and religious issues, such as the headscarf.

The headscarf issue, banned for public workers and students, still elicits debate as to whether it is a part of freedom of religion or an obstacle to women having a modern life. One expert said women’s dress does not always define her ideology and way of life, but that secular women always see women who wear a headscarf as backward people with traditional lifestyles, a stereotype that must be stopped.

“Modernity is identified with women’s way of dress in Turkey. However, no one is asking how many Turkish women who don’t wear headscarves are actually living with traditional norms,” said daily Akşam journalist Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal at a conference in Istanbul on Thursday.

Prejudices from secular women about women who wear a headscarf and vice versa prevent both sides from finding common ground on their basic problems, she said. Both secular and headscarfed women “otherize” each other, said Tuksal while speaking at a conference titled, “Women in Turkey in the past 10 years: What has changed?” organized by the ARI movement, an independent organization.

“Women with headscarves are not necessarily living a traditional way of life nor [does covering] have a role in accordance with patriarchal norms,” she said. Women without headscarves avoid getting to know or understand headscarfed women, positing them as a monolithic entity with identical ideologies and lifestyles, she said.

According to the prevailing stereotype, headscarfed women have backward ideas and cannot have a feminist logic or ideology, said Tuksal.

Tuksal, a graduate of the religious imam-hatip high schools who wears a headscarf, shared her personal experiences, saying that religious women question patriarchal norms by asking whether they are really the orders of God or are invented by males.

Her book, “The Projection of Discourse against Women in Islam,” explores “rivayets,” or relayed stories, in which the Prophet Mohammed spoke against women.

“Most headscarfed women share the responsibility for housework and childcare with their husbands, otherwise they cannot work outside. If you ask them, they may not define themselves as feminists or modern, but their lifestyle and position in their family has a modern or even feminist perspective,” said Tuksal.

Tuksal also said another common belief among secular women, namely that imam-hatip schools are dangerous for girls, is incorrect. “Thanks to imam-hatip schools, many conservative families agreed to send their daughters to school as these girls would not have received an education otherwise.”

She said these girls had a job or received further education in university, which gave them economical independence, positively impacting their way of life.

Also, in contrast to popular opinion, all students in imam-hatip schools do not have identical mentalities or do not necessarily become traditional people in the negative sense, she said.

As headscarfed women and imam-hatip schools, two controversial issues still being debated legally and socially, carry strong stereotypes for secular people, headscarfed women started to question their position in society and their relation to politics after the conservative Justice and Development Party, or AKP, came to power, said Tuksal.

“For the first time a political party that seems closer to religious women came to power, but no legal changes for headscarfed women have been implemented. On the contrary, the AKP did not give roles to headscarfed women even in its women’s branches,” said Tuksal.

“We are represented by ‘presentable blonde women’ since the party thinks we were not good for its image,” said Tuksal, explaining that headscarfed women have been alienated by the party, by conservative businessmen and by secular society.

However, Tuksal is optimistic about the current situation because she believes that through fighting all alone for the headscarf, headscarfed women have learned a great deal. Furthermore, prejudices have decreased as women from different backgrounds have joined each other in non-governmental organization activities.

“Women from both ideologies do not see each other as ‘the other’ anymore as long as they come together and make the effort to get to know each other. Rather than alienation, we are entering a moment of hybridization,” she said.

Ayşe Sucu, head of the Women’s Activities Department at the Directorate of Religious Affairs, said she has worn and removed her headscarf at different periods in her life, adding that there were always people who criticized her decision either way.

She said: “Religion’s essence is in its freedom as one should freely choose a religion and its orders. However, there are always people who criticize your personal decisions and it is almost impossible to make everyone happy on the headscarf [issue].”

Prejudice on ethnicity

In addition to alienation on the religious axis, ethnicity is another cause of women’s alienation.

Education in Kurdish and the usage of Kurdish in public or private is necessary, otherwise Kurds risk becoming alienated even from other Kurds, according to Zozan Özgökçe of the Van Women’s Association, or VAKAD.

Özgökçe said even at airports she has had to translate for many Kurdish women who do not speak Turkish because the Kurdish language is not used at airports or other places. Kurdish women had suffered the most from forced migration from eastern to western Turkey due to the fight between the Turkish military and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK, according to Veysel Eşsiz, from the Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly.

The state has estimated the number of internal migrants at 350,000. However, recent research has revealed that number to be upwards of 1.2 million people, with 40 percent of them women.

These women do not speak Turkish and because they are afraid to speak Kurdish in hospitals, they avoid seeing doctor most of the time, said Eşsiz.

He criticized the state for not developing a policy directed at migrant women to help them avoid becoming alienated.

Armenia urges annulment of protocols if Turkey insists on Karabakh

Friday, December 18, 2009

The historic protocols signed by Turkey and Armenia to establish diplomatic links and open their sealed border risk becoming null and void if Turkey insists on making the Nagorno-Karabakh issue a precondition, Armenia has said.

“We very much hope the Turkish Parliament will not take a step that would mean a miscarriage of the agreements. If this happens, our parliament would [essentially declare] the protocols to be null and void. We would be back to square one,” Armenian Prime Minister Tigran Sarkisian told the daily Hürriyet in an interview in Yerevan last week. In a move to normalize relations, the two countries signed two important documents in October but these have not yet been ratified by the two countries’ parliaments.

Following strong reaction from Azerbaijan, whose territory has been partially occupied by Armenian forces, the Turkish government announced that it would not move forward with the protocols unless Armenia and Azerbaijan make progress in negotiations for the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. Armenia says the process should be free of preconditions.

“Our position has not changed. Judging from Prime Minister [Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan’s statements, it seems that the Turkish position has shifted, which means that the Turkish Parliament may propose certain preconditions,” Sarkisian said.

“If Turkey comes up with preconditions, Armenia would be free to do so as well itself,” he said, citing genocide recognition and not entering any negotiations until borders are opened as examples. He also emphasized that the Turks were originally responsible for closing the border.

One of the most fundamental problems between the two countries is the 1915 incidents that caused the deaths of many Armenian citizens of the Ottoman Empire. Terming it “genocide,” Armenia and the Armenian diaspora have worked hard for the events to be recognized as such by third countries.

Turkey, on the other hand, admits the killings but says it had nothing to do with the crime of genocide. If the protocols enter into force, the two countries will set up an independent commission to explore the incidents.

If the process fails because of Turkey’s preconditions, Sarkisian said, “Turkey will have to explain to [international powers] why it has broken its own agreement. Turkey’s credibility will be at stake. It would be questionable to sit down with Turkey again.”

He continued: “We are not playing any games with Turkey, we are committed to an open and transparent foreign policy, we do not make different statements to others and we do not see an alternative to this process.”

Process should not be stalled artificially

When asked about the deadline for the ratification of the protocols, Sarkisian refrained from giving an exact timeframe but urged “Turkey not to stall the process artificially.”

“[Our] clear deadline is the Turkish legislation. We are closely following this process. If we observe that the Turkish Parliament is not stalling the process, we will make our own conclusions,” he said.

The Turkish government has already submitted the protocols to its Parliament for broad discussions in the relevant sub-commissions. Armenia, however, must first get the approval of its Constitutional Court before proceeding with parliamentary ratification.

Karabakh deal depends on Baku

On the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Sarkisian said the pace of the negotiations depended on Baku. Criticizing the Azerbaijani leadership for making “war calls,” Sarkisian said, “We have to be ready for war as history taught us.”

“The best way to prevent war is to be ready for it. If there is any time that Azerbaijanis feel that we are not ready for war, nothing will stop them from breaking the peace, which is why we are not afraid. What would we lose other than our chains?” he said.

Arguing that Turkey could not play a role on the solution of the Karabakh issue because it cannot be neutral, Sarkisian also drew attention to the risks of linking Turkish-Armenian rapprochement with the Karabakh process.

“The first is that it will not contribute in any way to the resolution of the Karabakh issue, on the contrary, it will impede it since Turkey is not neutral. Secondly it will impede with the development of our relations, which is neither in Turkey’s nor our interest,” he said.

“The third dimension is that Erdoğan was pretty tough this time [in Washington]. The impression is that he might have wanted to create an equilibrium between the acknowledgements of no preconditions in the protocols,” Sarkisian said.

‘We must overcome our complex’

Sarkisian emphasized that the alleged genocide is an essential point for Armenians and the government, but said Armenian people should overcome their complex toward the Turkish people.

“I have even stated that in our parliament. The attitude of our people toward Turks and Turkey needs to change, however difficult that may be. Our foreign policy should not be anti-Turkish. It should be pro-Armenian. We need to be able to change the attitude of our nation,” he said.

Sarkisian said one of the most important tools in developing ties between the two countries is public acknowledgement.

“In my opinion, the eventual recognition of the genocide will help Turkish society break through. This is the road to becoming a full-fledged member of the European Union. Its psychological complex must be overcome,” Sarkisian said.

“The Germans succeeded in overcoming their complex, helping their society to unprecedented social and economic development,” he said.

Turkey-Armenia process at turning point

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David JUDSON & İrem KÖKER

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Time is running out for Turkey to ratify the border-opening deal with Armenia that began with a football match last year and reached the stage of signing normalization protocols in October, Armenia’s foreign minister has said.

“The whole world has supported these protocols and they should be approved at once,” said Edward Nalbandian, repeatedly voicing frustration that the deal has become embroiled with Turkish demands for progress on the frozen conflict between Azerbaijan and the Armenian-occupied enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Nalbandian repeatedly used the protocol language that the ratification process be concluded in a “reasonable period of time.” But his tone and comments from other

officials here made it clear that sooner is better and Armenia will withdraw from the talks if progress does not occur by March.

“In March, there will be a point of no return. January is the best timeframe. After that, every morning it will be more difficult to do this than the day before,” said Vigen Sarkisian, the deputy chief of the Armenian presidency.

He signaled that a catalyst for the sense of urgency is the symbolic date of April 24, when Armenians mark the claim of genocide that strongly divides the two countries. That date drove the two sides to the initial signing of the “road map” that preceded the protocols.

The first formal step came just one day ahead of that date this year, propelled by pressure from U.S. President Barack Obama, who Turkey feared would voice the word “genocide,” setting the stage for the U.S. Congress to recognize the killing of Armenians in the final days of the Ottoman Empire with the same term.

Skepticism over thaw

In a twist of linguistic diplomacy, Obama instead referred to the events of 1915 of “Meds Yeghern,” Armenian for “great calamity.” No one, however, expects that nuance to work a second time.

Armenians here have made it clear they are worried about both domestic political pressure and reaction from America’s Armenian diaspora, which has been skeptical of the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement, as the symbolic moment again nears.

However, it was Turkey’s domestic politics that was on the minds of Armenian officials and journalists who came together in Yerevan for four days of discussion organized by Armenia’s Eurasia Partnership Foundation and Turkey’s Global Political Trends Center from Istanbul Kültür University.

Shortly after the October protocol signing, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan traveled to Azerbaijan in the wake of Azerbaijani outrage over the possibility of a border opening without progress on Armenia’s de facto occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The enclave and other occupied territory constitute 20 percent of Azerbaijan. In 1993, Turkey closed its land border with Armenia in solidarity with Azerbaijan, which not only lost the enclave in the conflict but was also forced to cope with the nearly 1 million refugees who fled the fighting.

Erdoğan’s statement, and similar remarks since, have calmed Azerbaijani fears and eased threats of retaliation through energy pricing, but have sparked Armenian accusations that Turkey is violating the terms of the protocol that stipulate a border opening with “no preconditions.”

Many Armenians feel they have done their part of the “no pre-conditions” deal by not insisting on Turkish recognition of the word “genocide.” Domestically, the stance has been hotly debated and is a major reason for parliamentary and diaspora opposition to the deal.

‘Historical dimension’

A stumbling block for opposition deputy Stepan Safarian is the protocol language that would establish a commission to look at the “historical dimension” of relations. The avoidance of specific “genocide” language allows both sides to interpret the document differently, said Safarian, leader of the “Heritage Faction” in the Armenian parliament. “How can a protocol perceived differently by two sides be a good protocol?” he asked. After the initial agreement, one party in the governing coalition of Armenian President

Serge Sarkisian withdrew from the government. That deal also forced the Armenian president to go on a tour of diaspora communities in the United States to sell his plan to skeptics.

Officials here said that campaign had been successful, and some elements of the powerful diaspora have been convinced of the wisdom of improving relations with Turkey.

Deputy Artak Zakarian told journalists that an annual fundraising drive among diaspora communities this year exceeded last year's receipts, an indicator of sympathy with the government's direction.

Armenia's parliament has yet to ratify the protocol and officials here said they would do so only if the Turkish Parliament does so first. As the initiative began with Sarkisian's invitation to Turkish President Abdullah Gül to attend the now-famous football match, Turkey's legislature should be the first to ratify, they argued.

As to any step, however symbolic, on Nagorno-Karabakh, Nalbandian and his colleagues insisted this is an absolute non-starter. The two issues are distinct and "parallel," they repeated, and cannot be coupled.

"There can be no preconditions – in the protocols there are absolutely no preconditions," Nalbandian said, adding during a press conference that he was "saddened that three journalists have now asked the same question about Armenia taking a step on Nagorno-Karabakh."

He said the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents have met repeatedly on the matter, and that is where any discussion of Nagorno-Karabakh must remain.

He said it would be inappropriate for him to comment on the domestic politics of Turkey behind Erdoğan's declarations but said if the border-opening initiative dies, it will be the next generation of Turks and Armenians who will have to resolve their differences.

"Turkey and Armenia have been divided for nearly 100 years," he said. "Let's not live this for another 100 years."
