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Submitted By: Aasia Khatoon

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News Outline

POLITICAL ISSUES

KURDISH ISSUE-----4-9

PM Erdoğan slams anti-democratic attempts to hijack ruling power

PKK plans terrorist acts in eastern and western cities

Davutoğlu rules out Taliban-PKK comparison in London

Barzani urges Turkey's Kurds to support gov't initiative

OTHER POLITICAL ISSUES-----9-26

Junta planned for its own government after military coup

General Staff prepares to cancel plans examined by judge

Constitutional Court military trial ruling no setback, say jurists

Concerns over Constitutional Court ruling mounting among MEPs

Freezing cold fails to prevent protest of thousands against coups

Army chief adopts threatening language against coup row

Military junta hoped to discharge 823 military officers

PM: Attempts against democracy threat to existence of state, nation

Sledgehammer dominates political agenda in Ankara

PM Erdoğan calls coup plans inhumane, outdated

Targeted journalists announce plan to file complaint against Sledgehammer coup plan

Military convoy raises eyebrows in Erzincan

Prime Minister Erdoğan says his government ended civilian fascism in Turkey

Prime minister meets with Türk-İş to resolve Tekel issue

GEO-STRATEGIC ISSUES-----26-27

Pakistan's President in Turkey

Turkish President Hosts Banquet for Pakistani & Afghan Counterparts

Turkish Prime Minister Meets Afghan, Pakistani Presidents

OTHER ISSUES-----27-28

Austrian University to open Turkish language department

Turkey's FM seeks joint strategic perspective with China ties

TURKEY AND ARMENIA-----28-35

Armenia and Turkey exchange accusations

No progress over Turkey, Armenia discuss court ruling

Foreign support to Armenia media stirs debate

<u>Armenia warns of 'serious counter-attacks' if threatened</u>	
<u>Turkish, Armenian FMs meet for short talk in London</u>	
<u>Davutoglu Meets Clinton in Britain</u>	
<u>Davutoglu, Clinton Discuss Protocols between Turkey and Armenia</u>	
<u>Turkey Asks For Guarantee From Bern, Washington on Behalf of Armenia</u>	
<u>OTHER ISSUES</u> -----	35-38
<u>Turkey says backs Kazakhstan term at OSCE</u>	
<u>Turkish Speaker in Uganda, OIC to discuss issues</u>	
<u>Nabucco lacks leadership, Aliyev says</u>	
<u>Nabucco will not be built if demand too low</u>	
<u>Baku set to quadruple gas exports to Russia</u>	
<u>TURKEY AND AFGHANISTAN</u> -----	38-45
<u>Erdoğan discusses Afghanistan with UK's Gordon Brown</u>	
<u>Istanbul to host Turkey-Afghanistan-Pakistan tripartite summit</u>	
<u>Istanbul hosting presidential-level trilateral summit with Afghanistan, Pakistan</u>	
<u>Turkey-Afghanistan-Pakistan summit focuses on stability</u>	
<u>Regional powers support Kabul's strategy with Taliban</u>	
<u>NATO Spokesman Praises Turkey's Role In Afghanistan</u>	
<u>Turkish Foreign Minister: Afghanistan Important For Regional Balances</u>	
<u>Karzai's reintegration plan for Taliban</u>	
<u>International Conference On Afghanistan Begins In London</u>	
<u>OTHER ISSUES</u> -----	45-47
<u>Turkey not sure about Copenhagen accord</u>	
<u>Islamic nations need 'united stance' to become a global force</u>	
<u>TURKEY AND ISRAEL</u> -----	47-51
<u>Lieberman, Eliezer quarrel over ties with Turkey</u>	
<u>Israeli FM report on Turkey annoys its own envoy</u>	
<u>Israeli envoy praises historic Turkish welcome to Jews</u>	
<u>Turkey "Strongly Warns Israel" At UN Security Council</u>	
<u>Turkey warns Israel over Gaza at UN Security Council</u>	
<u>We Are Doing Our Best to Promote Commercial Relations with Iraq, Minister Ergun</u>	
<u>TURKEY AND CYPRUS</u> -----	51-54
<u>Turkish Cypriot Premier To Run For President</u>	
<u>Turkey's FM meets UN Ban over Cyprus peace</u>	
<u>UN chief to visit Cyprus, says official</u>	
<u>EP Committee Calls on Turkey to Withdraw Troops From Cyprus</u>	
<u>TURKEY AND CHINA</u> -----	54-55
<u>Chinese Fm in Ankara for Talks</u>	
<u>Chinese Minister: Turkey & China Mutually Respect Territorial Integrity</u>	
<u>Turkish Fm Says Turkish-Chinese Relations at Historic Turning Point</u>	
<u>OTHER ISSUES</u> -----	55-57
<u>Turkish President Receives Iranian First Vice President</u>	
<u>Turkish aid associations continue to extend helping hand to Haiti</u>	

Black Sea's importance growing, says Bulgarian envoy

TURKEY AND EUROPEAN UNION-----57-65

First message of PACE head to Turkey: Get new Constitution

Swedish FM: Turkey's foreign policy facilitates EU bid

EU's information center opens in Ankara

Council of Europe report slams Greece, Turkey over treatment of minorities

Turkey is worst human rights violator, ECtHR says

Venice Commission president: Turkey needs new constitution to solve problems

ECONOMIC ISSUES-----65-69

Poultry sector may be unable to meet Russia's increased demand

Mauritanian president calls for Turkish investment

Russia, Belarus sign oil deal, resolve supply row

Sabancı expects growth in 2010 as unemployment lingers

Poultry sector could meet Russian demand if incentives in place'

Turkish stock market up by 1.29 pc on Thurs

Turkey's C.Bank Forex reserves down

Turkey's C.Bank Forex reserves down

SOCIAL ISSUES-----69-75

Heavy snowfall paralyzes life in Istanbul

Winter break starts for over 15 million students

Siberian cold front to affect all of Turkey this week, experts warn

Meteorologists warn new cold front will hit Turkey

Ankara, Istanbul blanketed by snow, eastern Turkey suffers freezing cold

Turkey pledges €920 mln for new stadiums if Euro 2016 football host

Turkey Season' in France continues with theater and dance events

COMMENTARY-----75-90

Constitutional change: all or nothing

The regime's disease

Is Erdoğan right in his complaint?

Why isn't a single military officer being suspended?

Burqa rule

We forgot everything, even the Kurdish Initiative

Working as partners in Afghanistan

As the military answers for internal threats

Concealing the obvious

A verdict, not necessarily justice

Gov't determination on democratic initiative splits PKK in two

Over 1,500 children still missing in Turkey

POLITICAL ISSUES

KURDISH ISSUE

PM Erdoğan slams anti-democratic attempts to hijack ruling power

Tuesday, 26 January 2010 16:04

Today's Zaman

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan indirectly criticized alleged attempts to stage a coup d'état against his government yesterday while speaking at the International Democracy Congress organized by the Civil Servants' Trade Union (Memur-Sen).

“We are behind the wheel, we step on the gas pedal, but someone comes and puts on the brake. Another one attempts to intervene in the steering,” Erdoğan said, referring to the recently exposed Sledgehammer coup plan, without naming it. The prime minister said Turkey was undergoing a rapid transformation, but at the same time could not get rid of some old topics of controversy and discussion.

“Over the past 100 years, perhaps more, this country has been returning to discussing the concept of reactionaryism. Although the meaning of secularism, the gist of it, its purpose, is very clear, it has been a topic of discussion for 100 years in our country. They reheat and bring back concepts

such as civilian dictatorships, concealing one's real purposes. They are trying to open the will of the nation to discussion." Erdoğan said the same group of people brought these issues up again and again.

He said recent criticism he has faced, such as accusations of "civilian fascism" or "single-party dictatorship," had been directed at former prime ministers Adnan Menderes and Turgut Özal. Erdoğan said the mentality of some circles in Turkey never changes. "Turkey is growing, developing and moving forward, but they do not show the slightest example of this evolution. Our multi-party life owes very much to Menderes. Those who accuse us of single-party dictatorship should look in the mirror first. This country lived through a single-party dictatorship. Who was in power then? It was the Republican People's Party [CHP]. At the time of that dictatorship, the CHP's provincial branch leaders simultaneously served as governors and mayors of the provinces. This country has seen all this. With what face can they say what they are saying now? They should be ashamed. The nation will no longer swallow such lies," Erdoğan said.

He also spoke about pro-status quo forces that are criticizing a political movement that has been a driving force of change in Turkey, making the country a civilian democracy. Erdoğan said these groups capitalized on the status quo and could not tolerate advances in democracy. "They said five years is too much [for a government to be in power]. We came to power and reduced that to four years, did we not? How can you call this civilian fascism or a single-party dictatorship? We are the ones who made this possible," Erdoğan said. He criticized previous governments for holding too many early elections despite wanting to hold on to power for five years. He accused those governments of being inept.

Erdoğan also criticized some columnists for not mentioning the good deeds of the government in their columns. "[They do this] because they don't know how to appreciate what's good. But what matters is what the people appreciate," he said.

The prime minister also said there were attempts to instill fear in the public by the same segment that wants to hold onto the status quo as its life vest. "Their solution is a tunnel of horror regardless of what chronic issue you are trying to solve."

He also said that although everyone speaks about democracy, no one supported the government when it attempted to solve issues of democracy such as the problems of minorities or democratizing the Constitution. He said the opposition was afraid of a new constitution that granted more freedoms because it knew this would change the status quo.

Erdoğan also said Turkey had a serious problem with sound opposition. "In democracies, the opposition is as important as the government. We are faced with an elitist opposition that feeds on the status quo, one which resists every reform and change just for the sake of objecting. How can an opposition party that does not embrace all of its country, that cannot talk to all of its country's people, help Turkey?" he asked, highlighting that the CHP's votes were limited to small pockets of land within the country.

PKK plans terrorist acts in eastern and western cities

Tuesday, 26 January 2010 15:51

Today's Zaman

The terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has set up in a new unit to coordinate large-scale terrorist acts in urban areas, recent statements from its affiliated organizations show.

The PKK's urban arm, the Kurdish Communities Union (KCK), will simultaneously stage demonstrations and create chaos in the eastern and southeastern provinces. The group plans to launch this double-front action on Feb. 15, the anniversary of the capture of the PKK's jailed leader Abdullah Öcalan, and continue until March 21, Nevruz, or the spring festival which is of special significance to Kurds.

Intelligence sources say the group plans to cause bloodshed not unlike in 1992, the bloodiest Nevruz Turkey has ever seen, though protests and violent protests during Nevruz celebrations are common each year. Tens of people died in the 1992 incidents. The process the PKK seeks to launch on Feb. 15, which it calls "serhildan [uprising] of the masses," will gradually increase in intensity.

The terrorist group has chosen a period that is critical for Turkey. The public expects a new Constitution to be drafted, opposition parties have been pushing for early elections, the public is more polarized than ever and the opposition accuses the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) of establishing a "civilian dictatorship." There are also rumors of a new closure case in the offing to shut down the AK Party. The PKK's plans also come at a time when military plans to take over the government are being exposed one after the other.

The PKK has played a crucial role in similar eras in Turkey over the past 30 years. To assume that role, the PKK has set up a special command of 150 militants, sources say, under the command of Fehman Hüseyin, a commander of the PKK's guerilla arm People's Defense Forces (HPG) who uses the code name Bahoz Erdal. Another commander of the group is Kadri Çelik, who uses the code name Ape Hüseyin and who was in charge of the PKK attacks on the Dağlica and Aktütün military outposts that left tens of Turkish soldiers dead. Çelik is also a former member of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK). Çelik and his men are under the control of a group in the PKK known as "İskenderunlular," who are known for their shady links with some criminal elements inside the Turkish armed forces. This group is led by Duran Kalkan, who is responsible for a PKK attack in the Reşadiye district of Tokat that took the lives of seven soldiers in early December 2009. The PKK had not claimed responsibility for that attack as a group, but the İskenderunlu group had. Kalkan himself is of Turkish origin, and he is one of the three most influential people in the splinter group, which seems to have links to other organizations that are more malevolent than the PKK's own contacts.

The new urban terrorism unit will be using the name of TAK, or the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons, a previous unit of the PKK that was originally established to stage terrorist attacks. TAK was active between 2004 and 2007 but was later suspended by the PKK. Last week, TAK restructured and held its first congress as the new TAK, releasing a written statement announcing its decision to "resist annihilation and policies of denial." The statement also threatened to stage large-scale attacks on urban targets. "Every place, starting with the metropolises of Turkey, is a warfront for us. Everyone who supports the current system, starting with army officers and civilian bureaucrats, are our targets. Those betrayers, cooperators and submissive segments that serve the current system of denial and annihilation will not be spared from being targeted by us." Kalkan also made a recent statement to the Kurdish news agency ANF, threatening to instigate uprisings in the Kurdish-dominated East and Southeast. Kalkan in addition targeted the AK Party, accusing it of taking "Turkey" to war.

Davutoğlu rules out Taliban-PKK comparison in London

29 January 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has reacted strongly to comparisons between Taliban fighters in war-torn Afghanistan and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which took up arms in 1984 to fight for an ethnic homeland in southeastern Turkey.

Davutoğlu arrived in London on Wednesday evening to represent Turkey at a 60-nation conference on Afghanistan held on Thursday. The conference followed a regional conference on Afghanistan which took place in İstanbul on Tuesday. In İstanbul, in a joint statement issued after the conference, Afghanistan's neighbors and Turkey backed Afghan President Hamid Karzai's plan to offer incentives to Taliban fighters to make them lay down their arms.

"We ... support the Afghan national process of reconciliation and reintegration in accordance with the constitution of Afghanistan in a way that is Afghan-led and driven," the statement said. Davutoğlu, speaking with reporters en route to London, emphasized the importance of reaching national reconciliation in Afghanistan. Recalling Karzai's recent remarks in which he said he would make a statement at the London conference asking for Taliban names to be removed from a UN blacklist, Davutoğlu said Turkey's approach to this idea was positive.

"We will do everything for national reconciliation," Davutoğlu said but did not elaborate further when asked whether Turkey had been involved in talking with the Taliban to persuade them to disarm.

In response to a question which appeared to put Taliban fighters in Afghanistan and the PKK, which is listed as a terrorist organization by a large majority of the international community, on the same page, Davutoğlu reacted harshly.

Everybody in Turkey is free to be involved in the political process, Davutoğlu said, adding: "There is a political system in Turkey which functions healthily. In Afghanistan, there is an extraordinary situation. There is public order in Turkey."

In early 2008, the Turkish military conducted a major operation against the PKK in northern Iraq, and Turkish warplanes have since carried out regular cross-border bombing raids against targets in the mountainous region.

In Washington, US Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Philip J. Crowley praised Turkey's efforts in Afghanistan, in reply to a question on a trilateral summit with Afghanistan and Pakistan on Monday in İstanbul ahead of the regional conference.

Turkey, as a key member of NATO and the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, has been playing a unique and significant role, Crowley said on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, at the US Department of Defense on the same day, Pentagon Press Secretary Geoff Morrell announced that US Defense Secretary Robert Gates will pay a visit to Turkey next week, to attend an informal meeting of NATO defense ministers in İstanbul on Feb. 4 and 5. Gates will later proceed to Ankara to meet with Turkish officials, Morrell added.

Talks with Clinton on Armenia

Upon his arrival in London on Wednesday evening, Davutoğlu had a brief meeting with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, once more explaining Ankara's uneasiness with the reasoning of the Armenian constitutional court's decision on Jan. 12, which found the protocols signed on Oct. 10 of last year in Zurich in conformity with the Armenian Constitution.

Ankara believes that "the decision contains preconditions and restrictive provisions which impair the letter and spirit of the protocols." Ankara is expecting to receive a written guarantee from the Yerevan administration reaffirming that the detailed reasoning by the Armenian constitutional

court will not have an impact on the process of normalization of bilateral relations between Armenia and Turkey.

Barzani urges Turkey's Kurds to support gov't initiative

29 January 2010, Friday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Reiterating his strong support for the democratization initiative launched by the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government last summer, Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani has encouraged Kurdish people of Turkey for supporting the initiative which seeks to settle Turkey's decades-long Kurdish problem by expanding the democratic rights of its Kurdish citizens.

Barzani, the head of the autonomous Kurdistan region in northern Iraq, held talks in Washington earlier this week. He held talks with both US President Barack Obama and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during the visit which came ahead of key parliamentary elections to be held in Iraq in March.

His remarks on Turkey's Kurdish issue came on Wednesday as he delivered a speech at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings Institute in Washington.

There is need to focus on the democratization policy assumed and efforts exerted by Turkey at the moment in order to resolve the Kurdish issue, Barzani firstly noted, when asked whether the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which also has bases in northern Iraq, continues its terrorist activities against Turkey and whether Turkey eventually continues its military operations against the PKK.

Barzani stated Iraqi Kurds' strong support for the Turkish government's efforts for resolving of the issue through peaceful means, adding: "We have all been convinced that military means or political pressures never bring solution, but if this option is preferred we will not be a part of it." The democratization process helps improvement of bilateral relations between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan region as well, Barzani noted, arguing that Turkey no longer perceived the regional administration in northern Iraq as a threat against itself.

"We don't find the Constitutional Court's ruling appropriate," Barzani was quoted as saying by the Anatolia news agency, referring to a December ruling by Turkey's Constitutional court for shutting down the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) on charges of ethnic separatism. "We don't believe that this [ruling] will serve for the peace process which has been launched. It is a decision against democracy," Barzani went on saying. "My advice to my Kurdish siblings in Turkey is to assume a positive manner and make cooperation with the Turkish government so that, by this means, let's not miss this opportunity, let's follow up the peaceful process," he, however, added.

Relations between Iraqi Kurds and Turkey deteriorated sharply following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Turkey accused the Kurdish administration of harboring the PKK, which launched attacks on Turkish targets from its bases in northern Iraq, and threatened to declare war if the Kurds attempted to seize control of the disputed city of Kirkuk -- home to a sizable Turkmen population.

But tension is now being replaced by a dramatic rapprochement, and the government's Kurdish initiative is further strengthening the positive trend in ties. In a speech delivered to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament in November, Barzani had welcomed the progress made in Turkey's relations with the Kurdish administration and described Turkey's

initiative to solve its decades-long Kurdish issue as “Prime Minister Erdoğan’s brave Kurdish peace initiative.” Barzani further added that the Kurdish authorities will support Turkey in its efforts to end the conflict with the PKK.

OTHER POLITICAL ISSUES

Junta planned for its own government after military coup

Saturday, 23 January 2010 12:51

Today's Zaman

The Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) hoped to replace the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government with a government it planned to form after the staging of a coup d'état devised in 2003.

The new government would be led by Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) Chairman Rifat Hisarcıklioğlu, according to the Taraf daily. The new government was part of a subversive coup plan titled the Balyoz (Sledgehammer) Security Operation Plan. The document was drafted in March 2003, shortly after the AK Party came to power. The masterminds of the plan were retired Gen. Çetin Doğan, the then-commander of the 1st Army, former Air Forces Commander Gen. İbrahim Fırtına and retired Gen. Ergin Saygun.

If the pro-coup wing within the armed forces, frequently referred to as the “junta,” had managed to put the plan into operation, the AK Party government would have been overthrown and replaced by the junta’s planned government, called the “National Agreement Government.”

In accordance with the Sledgehammer plan, TOBB’s Hisarcıklioğlu would be nominated as prime minister. Former Republican People’s Party (CHP) leader Hikmet Çetin, former Health Minister Yıldırım Aktuna and former Parliament Speaker Necmettin Karaduman would become deputy prime ministers.

Among other ministers would be former deputy Mehmet Seyfi Oktay (justice), retired Gen. Kemal Yavuz (defense), former State Minister İsmet Sezgin (interior), the late politician İsmail Cem (foreign affairs), former minister Zekeriya Temizel (finance), former head of the Higher Education Board (YÖK) Kemal Gürüz (education), former deputy Ömer İzgi (public works), former İstanbul University Rector Kemal Alemdaroğlu (health), former deputy Işın Çelebi (transportation), former Parliament Speaker Köksal Toptan (agriculture), CHP İstanbul deputy and Confederation of Turkish Labor Unions (Türk-İş) Chairman Bayram Meral (labor), former Deputy Prime Minister Hüsamettin Özkan (industry and commerce), former State Minister Rüştü Kazım Yücelen (energy and natural resources), former minister İstemihan Talay (culture), former minister Eyüp Aşık (tourism), former minister Hikmet Uluğbay (forestry) and CHP İstanbul deputy Nur Serter (environment).

Other state minister posts would be occupied by Süheyl Batum, Mehmet Moğultay, Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz and Türkan Saylan.

The program of the National Agreement Government, however, would be drafted by coup generals, not the new Cabinet.

A section of the Sledgehammer plan was dedicated to the “introduction” of motives that would lead to a military takeover in the country. According to this section, the coup would be the result of efforts by internal and external enemies of Turkey who worked to undermine the territorial and national integrity of the republic entrusted by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the modern Turkish Republic.

Hisarcıklioğlu held a press conference yesterday during which he lashed out at the Taraf report.

He complained that he had long been considered a supporter of the AK Party government and, out of nowhere, it was announced that he would have been the prime minister of a coup government.

The TOBB chairman said he learned about the Sledgehammer coup plan from the media, adding that he would seek legal redress against the reports that portrayed him as a coup proponent. “I have never sided with any movement other than democracy. ... Some people may dream about a coup d’état. But I will not even exist in dreams in which there is no democracy. I will not exist in a place where the public does not exist,” he remarked.

Red card to Islamic headscarf

The coup plan aimed to increase pressure on the use of the Islamic headscarf by the country’s conservative women. According to the plan, the coup plotters were determined to protect the country against any domestic and foreign threat and from the “abuse of the nation’s religious sensitivities” for political motives and in a way to discredit the principles of Atatürk. “All precautions will be taken to prevent the transformation of the turban [headscarf] into a political symbol and use of the scarf in the public sphere and state institutions,” read the plan.

The document also mentioned a plan to reform the country’s legal system in accordance with the “contemporary needs of the century.” As part of efforts to that end, necessary measures would be taken to enable jurists to give verdicts based on the principles of the Constitution and other laws; necessary legislation would be enacted to strengthen the impartiality of the judiciary; the judicial system would be restructured; and the internal and external security of prisons would be ensured by the gendarmerie.

The Sledgehammer Security Operation Plan concerned the country’s Kurdish population as well, as it aimed to settle the decades-old Kurdish question through “its own methods.”

The plan argued that the main reason behind the country’s Kurdish question was geographic and economic. The question could be settled through the improvement of agricultural and animal husbandry policies in the country’s eastern and southeastern regions, according to the plan. The document also suggested that a further activation of the village guard system in the regions would help settle the Kurdish issue.

Turkey first implemented the village guard system on March 26, 1985. The number of village guards rose to about 80,000 during the 1990s, when terrorist attacks increased. About 5,000 village guards have stood trial on charges including terrorism, human rights violations and smuggling, and many of them have been found guilty. Based on these figures, human rights associations argue that the system should be abolished.

Even greater budget for weapons

The coup plan envisaged an increase in the budget allocated to the armed forces for the purchase of new weaponry and for the lodgings of members of the military. The increased budget would help modernize the country’s defense system and protect Turkey against internal and external threats, according to the document.

A plan for the improvement of the country’s education system was also included in the Sledgehammer document. Each student would be obliged to complete an uninterrupted 11 years of education. The main philosophy of the education system would be to raise a contemporary population which is loyal to the principles of Atatürk and his republic. All schools, private and state, would be subject to a strict control mechanism that would prevent the concealment of people in those institutions who are engaged in activities of reactionaryism.

The coup plan also suggested the taking over of all private universities by the state, which would put an end to the private university system.

Goodbye to EU, IMF, World Bank

Instigators of the Sledgehammer coup plan continued in the document to lash out at government policies pursued for Turkey's full membership in the European Union and economic cooperation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

The document argued that the EU, the IMF and the World Bank were aiming to cause greater damage to Turkey than the Treaty of Sèvres. Against the government's economic policies based on liberalism, the document suggested statism.

"Our economy experienced the greatest contraction in its history in 1999. The IMF imposed even greater conditions on Turkey than the Treaty of Sèvres under an 'additional letter of intent' in exchange for the money it would lend Turkey, and those conditions were, unfortunately, accepted. The economy bodies of the state were rendered ineffective due to 'high interest rates,' 'internal debt,' 'external debt' and 'foreign currency pressure,'" argued the plan.

The plan also declared war against international holdings and companies functioning in Turkey.

"The name and address of the capitalist method of exploitation in our day is international companies. Around 60 percent of world trade is in the hands of 500 big companies. There is almost no holding in our country that is not partner to an international company," it complained.

The document also envisaged the expropriation of the assets and financial resources of groups and individuals suspected of involvement in activities of reactionism and separatism.

General Staff prepares to cancel plans examined by judge

Saturday, 23 January 2010 15:26

Today's Zaman

The Turkish General Staff is preparing to cancel plans included in the documents that were seen by a civilian judge during the "cosmic room" search.

Gen. Ferit Güler, the secretary general of the General Staff, said on Friday that the documents in the cosmic room were classified as "secret" and the search violated that secrecy, so the plans were no longer reliable and would therefore be cancelled.

He was referring to the civilian search of the Special Forces Command's Tactical Mobilization Unit in Ankara that began on Dec. 25 as part of an investigation into an alleged military plot to assassinate Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç and which ended on Wednesday night.

Gen. Güler pointed out that events have been misreported "in order to strengthen the negative perception that is aimed against the Turkish Armed Forces [TSK] in society." He added that the General Staff allowed the search at the Special Forces Command's Tactical Mobilization Unit because they have nothing to hide, but the search was misreported, he said, by saying that the "commandership was raided."

In addition, he said the destruction of documents is a routine event at all commands but this was reported, he said, as "the military destroyed all documents."

"The TSK has shown its respect for the rule of law. The TSK also knows that those who try to use dirty tricks against the TSK and try to show it as a criminal organization will continue to do so. The TSK has never been involved in illegal acts and it is not possible that it will be in the future. If there are individuals who committed crimes, the necessary judicial procedure will be taken," he said. The cosmic search began after the capture of two officers from the Tactical Mobilization Group -- a unit of the General Staff's Special Forces Command -- as they stood watch near the Arınç's house in Ankara's Çukurambar neighborhood.

Most observers applauded the search as they believe it will shed light on a number of murky

incidents in the country's past. The search aims to determine whether there is a military plot to assassinate high-level politicians.

Güler's remarks came after media reports on a security action plan named "Balyoz" (Sledgehammer). The General Staff released a statement on Thursday saying that it was an action plan against a foreign threat scenario made in a seminar at the First Army Command. "The Turkish Armed Forces is seriously investigating such leaks of information. There is an investigation at the First Army Command and we cannot make a final ruling before it is concluded," Güler said. First revealed by Taraf daily on Wednesday and then reported in other media, some senior officers allegedly prepared the Sledgehammer coup plan which includes shady campaigns to foment tension in the country, ultimately leading to a military coup. Friction between the strict secularist establishment, which includes the military, and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) have often surfaced. But in a victory for the military, the Constitutional Court late on Thursday overturned a law allowing military personnel to be tried in civilian courts.

Constitutional Court military trial ruling no setback, say jurists

Saturday, 23 January 2010 14:46

Today's Zaman

The Constitutional Court has annulled a law that allows military officers to be tried in civilian courts, but legal experts say that is unlikely to affect ongoing investigations and trials into military officers suspected of having participated in coup pl

The Constitutional Court on Thursday overturned a reform package approved by President Abdullah Gül last year that requires civilian courts to try members of the military in peacetime. The Constitutional Court ruled unanimously on the legislation, dubbed by many a "civilian revolution" when it was passed last July.

The law, aimed at meeting EU membership criteria, would for the first time have vested civilian courts with the power to prosecute military personnel accused of crimes against national security, constitutional violations and attempts to topple the government during peacetime. Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), however, challenged the law at the Constitutional Court, which ruled to annul it.

The decision would not, however, affect ongoing trials, according to legal experts. Osman Kaşıkçı, dean of Fatih University's faculty of law said: "The annulment of the law does not mean that we have to return to previous regulations. Soldiers will continue to be tried in civilian courts. Members of the military who are being tried in civilian courts cannot be referred for court-martial. A new law in line with the Constitutional Court ruling would have to go into effect, but there is no such law."

Reşat Petek, a retired prosecutor, also said the ruling would not impact ongoing trials and investigations. "International covenants are applied in Turkey as domestic law. When we look at the European Convention on Human Rights and its additional protocols, we see that military courts are not accepted as independent and impartial. This is why we have to discuss military courts."

CHP spokesman Mustafa Özyürek said: "The law [that was annulled] was passed hastily with a single proposal. There was no infrastructure for it, no preliminary work had been carried out. Article 145 of the Constitution is very clear. What we had said is that the law is against that. The government accepts that, too. This does not mean that military officers will not be tried. Retired

officers and officers on active duty could have been tried before civilian courts before that law, too.”

Cüneyt Toraman, from the İstanbul Bar Association, also says the annulment will not change what happens in practice. “The Constitutional Court’s ruling is based on the writing style of Article 145 of the Constitution. If this was going to be taken as the basis for everything, crimes that are committed and that have anything to do with the military should have been heard by military courts. However, this has never been applied like that. The Constitutional Court is trying to breathe life into an article that has never been applied. They will not be able to change the existing practice, though. They will only muddy the waters,” Toraman said.

Civilian prosecutors conducting the investigation into Ergenekon, a clandestine gang charged with plotting to overthrow the government, will continue as before, according to former prosecutor Gültekin Avcı. “The decision will not have any effect on the Ergenekon investigation process because coup attempts are always activities that go beyond the boundaries of the command center,” he said.

The military, however, does not agree with this view. In a statement released yesterday the legal undersecretary of the General Staff, Hıfzı Çubuklu, said, “Evaluations regarding officers being probed by prosecutors or who are currently standing trial should be referred to military courts.”

Coup plotting not a military crime

Justice and Development Party’s (AK Party) parliamentary group deputy leader Bekir Bozdağ said the decision was wrong and that the overturned law was not in violation of the Constitution. He said Article 250 of the Code on Criminal Procedure (CMK) had made clear what crimes should be tried by civilian courts. “Crimes against the constitutional order and terrorism, organized crime and narcotics crimes [are listed in Article 250]. Is drug trafficking a military crime? Does trying to bring down the constitutional order have anything to do with military service? No,” he said.

In addition to statements expressing the view that the annulment will not create drastic changes, there were various reactions from jurists. İbrahim Kaboğlu, a professor of constitutional law, said it was a necessity of the rule of law to expand the civilian judiciary’s sphere of influence. “What should be is that all military officers’ crimes committed outside the military sphere should be heard by civilian courts,” he said.

Another angry reaction came from the Democratic Judiciary, a platform of liberal jurists, which slammed the ruling as antidemocratic in a statement released yesterday.

However, the first concrete effect of the revocation was seen yesterday. The İstanbul 12th Higher Criminal Court announced that it would wait to see the reasoning of the Constitutional Court before it accepts an indictment of military officers detained as part of an investigation regarding a weapons cache buried in İstanbul’s Poyrazköy district in April of last year during the Ergenekon investigation. 12th Higher Criminal Court Chief Justice Vedat

Yılmazabdurrahmanoğlu said the decision was linked to the indictment they had at hand, noting they had 10 more days to consider it and would decide once they study the court’s reasoning.

Concerns over Constitutional Court ruling mounting among MEPs

Monday, 25 January 2010 11:07

Today’s Zaman

Strong expressions of concern by leading members of the Strasbourg-based European Parliament over the probable impact of a recent ruling by Turkey’s Constitutional Court

Strong expressions of concern by leading members of the Strasbourg-based European Parliament over the probable impact of a recent ruling by Turkey's Constitutional Court, which on Thursday overturned a law allowing military personnel to be put on trial in civilian courts, continue to pour in, with some calling on the Turkish government to bring in a fundamental resolution to the issue by adopting a new constitution as soon as possible.

The law, approved in early July, which included a change to Article 5918 of the Turkish Penal Code (TCK), paved the way for military personnel to be tried in civilian courts and prevented the prosecution of civilians in military courts. The law was a major change in civilian-military relations, analysts said, because such a move limits the power of the military over civilians. The law was passed as part of government efforts to align Turkey's judicial system with that of the European Union.

The adoption of the law was at the time hailed by many as the biggest step taken by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) toward creating a balanced military-civilian relationship in the EU candidate country.

However, the Constitutional Court overturned the law allowing the military to be put on trial in civilian courts, a move fiercely opposed by the armed forces at a time of escalated tension with the government, with a unanimous ruling.

According to Dutch Christian Democrat Ria Oomen-Ruijten, the Constitutional Court ruling clearly shows the urgent need for a new constitution in Turkey.

"Civilian rulers' control over military forces is an indispensable condition for every European country. This is what should exist in every healthy democracy. However, all of these incidents show us an urgent need, which is the rewriting of the constitution immediately," Oomen-Ruijten, the European Parliament's rapporteur on Turkey, told Today's Zaman.

A November report penned by Oomen-Ruijten had said that the European Parliament "takes note of progress made on legislation limiting the jurisdiction of military courts and regrets the lodging of an appeal before the Constitutional Court seeking annulment of that legislation; is concerned by the continuing involvement of the military in Turkish politics and foreign policy, and reiterates that in a democratic society the military must be fully subject to civilian oversight."

Maria Eleni Koppa, a Greek lawmaker of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, meanwhile, recalled how the European Parliament focused on civilian-military relations in its work regarding Turkey.

"We're extremely worried over the court's ruling. The military is still having too much say in politics in Turkey," Koppa, also the vice chairperson of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, told Today's Zaman, reiterating that civilian control over military forces is a must for EU membership.

"As members of the European Parliament, we are also very concerned over the details of the Balyoz coup plan. We're closely following the developments," Koppa also highlighted, referring to a plan allegedly prepared by the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) and aiming to create an atmosphere of chaos in the country through a series of acts of violence which would eventually lead to a military coup.

The coup plan exposed by the liberal Taraf daily last Wednesday and titled the Balyoz (Sledgehammer) Security Operation Plan, was drafted in 2003, shortly after the AK Party came to power. The masterminds behind the plan were apparently retired Gen. Çetin Doğan, who was then-commander of the 1st Army, former Air Forces Commander Gen. İbrahim Fırtına and retired Gen. Ergin Saygun.

Oomen-Ruijten suggested that Turkey's fundamental problems concerning democratization

could only be resolved through a rewritten constitution.

“Otherwise, all reforms will be handicapped with the existing constitution. We have been hearing nowadays that a new constitution can be written after the next elections. We’ve been worried of such hearsay, because that hearsay means that there will be no serious reforms until after the elections. The latest ruling by the Constitutional Court has clearly shown us that we can forget about reforms as long as a new constitution is not adopted,” she warned.

Freezing cold fails to prevent protest of thousands against coups

Monday, 25 January 2010 10:55

Today's Zaman

Despite the cold and snowy weather paralyzing life in many parts of the country, thousands of people throughout Turkey took to the streets on Saturday to condemn recently uncovered military action plans.

Apart from İstanbul, which hosted the largest demonstration, protests were held in the provinces of Kahramanmaraş, Sakarya, Batman and Kütahya. An anti-coup group named 70 Million Steps Against Coups organized the İstanbul demonstration, which was held in the city's Taksim Square. A group of some 5,000 people walked from Tünel to Galatasaray Square along İstiklal Street.

The Taraf daily last Wednesday uncovered the latest military plan aiming to create an atmosphere of chaos in the country through a series of acts of violence that would finally lead to a military coup.

The coup plan, titled Balyoz [Sledgehammer] Security Operation Plan, was drafted in 2003, shortly after the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) came to power. According to the plan, the military had a systematic plot to foment chaos in society through bloody acts, among which were planned bomb attacks in the Fatih and Beyazit mosques in İstanbul. The two are among the most frequented mosques in the city.

The demonstrators demanded the trial of coup plotters. Some of the banners they held read “Civilian resistance against coups,” “The military has exhausted the nation,” “We want freedom” and “Coups-planners should be tried.”

Hilal Kaplan, who spoke on behalf of coalition members, said they gathered despite the freezing cold to say “no” to coups. Indicating that coup planners work non-stop to crush the freedoms of the entire society with a “sledgehammer,” Kaplan said: “The military, in its ‘Cage’ operation plan, planned to kill Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew and in its ‘sledgehammer’ plan plotted to bomb mosques when they were full. In one coup plan they conspire to kill children, while in another they aim to cause our jets to crash. In one coup plan they even talk about the need for civil war. Who are they? Who do they think they are to be able to make such plans?” The Cage Operation Action Plan, which was uncovered in late 2009, envisaged killing non-Muslim figures in the society and putting the blame on the AK Party government.

Army chief adopts threatening language against coup row

Tuesday, 26 January 2010 15:45

Today's Zaman

In the face of growing criticism of the General Staff due to an apparent military plan to violently overthrow the Justice and Development Party (AK Party), Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ has addressed the media with “threatening” language and wa
“How on earth could the Turkish Armed Forces [TSK] plan to bomb mosques? This is unjust. The TSK has limits to its patience. I denounce these claims,” the military chief stated on Monday during a speech in Ankara.

Başbuğ was attending a ceremony organized in commemoration of the late Gen. Kazım Karabekir, a close companion of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk -- the founder of the modern Republic of Turkey.

Başbuğ’s remarks were a strong reaction to recent news reports over an alleged TSK coup plan called the Sledgehammer Security Operation Plan. According to the plan, the armed forces aimed to instigate chaos in society through bomb attacks on popular and historic mosques in İstanbul that would eventually lead to a military takeover. The plan was allegedly thought up in 2003 by retired Gen. Çetin Doğan, the then-commander of the 1st Army.

The army chief started his speech by quoting the late Gen. Karabekir, who said: “Reporting false news to the public would bring disaster. Search for the truth, learn it and then interpret it in the way you like.” Başbuğ underlined that Karabekir’s message retains its importance.

“We order our soldiers to attack [enemies], exclaiming ‘Allah, Allah!’ How on earth would the TSK bomb mosques? Such claims are unjust,” Başbuğ stated.

The chief of General Staff also noted that the armed forces would never appreciate a change of political power in the country through undemocratic means. He added that the Land Forces Command was examining the alleged coup documents.

The Sledgehammer plan also mentioned a TSK plan to create tension between the Turkish and Greek militaries which would culminate in a Turkish jet crashing after a skirmish with Greek jets. According to the plan, Turkish military aircraft would provoke Greek pilots by entering Greek airspace. A dogfight between aircraft of the two countries would result in the crash of a Turkish jet. If they were unable to provoke Greece, a Turkish pilot would crash one of the Turkish jets, blaming it on the Greeks. Subsequently, the Turkish media would accuse the AK Party government of failing to ensure the security of the country.

The General Staff had claimed last week that the Sledgehammer plan was part of a series of “scenarios” by the armed forces, drafted against the prospect of an external threat. “The plan seminar in question is part of the General Staff’s operations program for the years 2003-2006. The aim of the seminar is to develop operation plans and train TSK staff against an external threat to Turkey. The seminar lays out a scenario that mentions a period full of increasing tension in the country,” read the General Staff statement.

Başbuğ also added that the armed forces were in a fight against “whistleblowers.” “We need to be engaged in a serious fight against leakers of information. There are ongoing investigations against 61 members of the armed forces. Nine of them are addressed at judicial bodies. One of them has been concluded, and he has been sentenced to three years in jail. Ten other people are also currently behind bars,” he remarked.

Military junta hoped to discharge 823 military officers

Tuesday, 26 January 2010 15:34

Today's Zaman

A pro-coup wing within the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) had hoped to discharge 823 active members of the military on charges of engaging in acts of “reactionaryism” after staging a coup d'état devised in 2003.

Among the officers were three colonels and 66 majors. The rest were captains and first lieutenants. The planned discharges were aimed at clearing the TSK of members who reportedly engage in acts that damage the secular and modern structure of the Turkish Republic.

The discharges were part of a subversive coup plan titled the Balyoz (Sledgehammer) Security Operation Plan. The document was drafted in March 2003, shortly after the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) came to power. The masterminds behind the plan were retired Gen. Çetin Doğan, who was then commander of the 1st Army, former Air Forces Commander Gen. İbrahim Firtına and retired Gen. Ergin Saygun. If the pro-coup wing within the armed forces, frequently referred to as the “junta,” had managed to put the plan into operation, 823 active members of the military would have been expelled from the TSK.

“All words we utter and any steps we take should aim to protect the secular and democratic republic. For now, we do not have a bigger threat [than reactionaryism] posed against the secular and democratic republic. An internal revolt would damage our republic more than any external threat, be it from northern Iraq or Greece. ... Some members of the military are expelled because they are implicated in reactionaryism.

It is hard to understand how members of a modern institution can be diverted from the bright and modern road,” Doğan said during a TSK seminar held on March 5-7, 2003 at the Selimiye Barracks. Doğan’s remarks found coverage in the liberal Taraf daily on Monday.

Doğan underlined that the TSK was supposed to remain outside politics. However, when it came to protecting the fundamental values of the republic, the military cannot be expected to stand idly by, according to the general.

“The TSK is obliged to maintain its Kemalist line in accordance with its historic mission. ... Let me put it straight: [Referring to the AK Party] Those who were not able to find a [prestigious] place in society until now are currently in Parliament. This is a challenge. We cannot retreat from our line in the face of such a challenge,” he said.

The seminar was also an occasion during which a document was drafted regarding the expulsion of some TSK members after the Sledgehammer coup plan was put into operation. The document categorized 823 officers in accordance with their political views, the attire of their wives and their adherence to religious obligations.

‘We cannot raid each İstanbul house in search of reactionaries’

According to Taraf, Doğan also complained that there were “safe neighborhoods” in İstanbul and nearby provinces, predominantly home to observant Muslims.

“There are safe neighborhoods in İstanbul as well as in Sakarya and in Kocaeli. They are just like safe neighborhoods in eastern Turkey, where the separatist threat is immense. In such safe neighborhoods in İstanbul and nearby provinces, people live in the darkness of the Middle Ages, attending [religious] congregations day and night. Their activities almost snowball,” the general said.

Doğan also said it would be impossible to raid every house in İstanbul in search of religiously observant residents, but that tough measures should be taken against such individuals after the planned coup. “Therefore, plans for martial law and other measures should be more radical. The main objective is not to use only power. It is to discourage individuals through a show of power,” he said.

Colonel’s handwritten note on Hitler-Erdoğan

Taraf also published a handwritten note -- allegedly penned by Col. Süha Tanyeri -- that called for the propagation of e-mails on similarities between the political movement of Nazi mastermind Adolf Hitler and that of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The note suggested that a campaign should be launched for the circulation of e-mails that claim Erdoğan's movement is no different from that of Hitler. The note is 80 pages long.

A chain of such e-mails emerged in January 2003 and found wide coverage in the Turkish newsweekly Aktüel. According to the e-mails, Erdoğan's AK Party swept to power just like Hitler's fascist movement. "After having been swept to power with 37.4 percent of the national vote, the Nazis set the Reichstag, the German parliament, ablaze and staged a coup. They deprived the German nation of fundamental rights and freedoms," read the e-mails.

The e-mails also featured a Nazi message that read: "We told the nation the truth. We stated that we would resort to democratic means till we were swept to power. The nation elected us knowing this. They wanted us. You cannot try us."

The e-mails concluded, asking: "Yes, this is it. Could all those mentioned above have any link to what we have experienced in Turkey?"

PM: Attempts against democracy threat to existence of state, nation

Wednesday, 27 January 2010 09:39

Today's Zaman

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan yesterday shared his views on coup attempts, saying that attempts to undermine democracy pose a risk to the existence of the state and the nation.

Speaking at the parliamentary group meeting of his Justice and Development

Those who are nourished by such plans, who use them as a means of abuse and benefit from them should know that all those subversive plans are cursed and that curse will pull them toward darkness, sentencing them eternally in the public conscience."

Erdoğan was implicitly referring to a military coup plot that was uncovered last week. The "Sledgehammer Security Operation Plan," revealed by the Taraf daily, led to a nationwide outcry because it included detailed plans to trigger chaos in the country with the ultimate goal of a military takeover.

According to the plan, the military was to systematically foment disorder in society through violent acts, among which were planned bomb attacks on the Fatih and Beyazıt mosques in İstanbul.

The General Staff denounced the allegations, claiming that the plan was a "scenario against external threats." Erdoğan complained that some circles had remained under suspicion in the wake of assassinations of some intellectuals in the country; however, the real masterminds behind those murders were emerging now.

Erdoğan said the real masterminds behind the murders of journalists Uğur Mumcu, Abdi İpekçi and Çetin Emeç, academic Necip Hablemitoğlu and politician Bahriye Üçok could not be uncovered.

"History reveals facts. Now, the truth is slowly emerging. What we are doing now is removing the mystery surrounding the murders of journalist Hrant Dink, İpekçi and Mumcu and casting a light on these murders in order to prevent the reoccurrence of such incidents in the future," Erdoğan said.

The prime minister also complained about the lack of support from the opposition parties in the government's struggle against illegality.

Stressing the importance of receiving the support of all segments of society, particularly the support of the opposition parties in this regard, Erdoğan said he was unable to understand why some parties act as advocates of illegal groups.

He was referring to the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), whose leader Deniz Baykal declared that he was an advocate of Ergenekon. Ergenekon is a clandestine crime network that has alleged links within the state and is suspected of plotting to topple the government. Dozens of Ergenekon suspects are being tried in a court in İstanbul's Silivri district over charges of being members of a terrorist organization.

The CHP and supporters of Ergenekon describe the investigation into the organization as a government attempt to crack down on its opponents while the supporters of the case see it as milestone in the progress of Turkish democracy.

The prime minister noted that Turkey was undergoing critical times with regard to its democracy, national sovereignty and transparency while noting that his government was trying to change the status quo in the country.

"The issue is this, will Turkey change or will it be left to its fate? Will Turkey remain with the status quo and become isolated or will it continue its transformation in the axis of the modern world. Will Turkey have an advanced democracy, a modern legal system or will it continue on its way in a backward and defective manner? We are in favor of change and a change of the status quo. We are in favor of democracy and democratization. We are in favor of Turkey opening up to the world, an advanced democracy and legal system and more freedoms," he explained.

The prime minister also directed criticism toward some columnists who he said were "provoking" the government.

"Some columnists are trying to provoke us. I am sorry, but we know what we are doing. Nobody should try to provoke us. If you are comfortably writing those articles in your columns today, please ask yourself why you were not able to write such things seven years ago," asked Erdoğan. Erdoğan was responding to allegations that Turkey was heading toward "civilian fascism," under the AK Party government, which has been in power since 2002. The government strongly rejects accusations that they are aiming to destabilize the country.

Sledgehammer dominates political agenda in Ankara

Wednesday, 27 January 2010 09:08

Today's Zaman

Ankara politicians discussed the Sledgehammer Security Operation Plan -- a coup plot to topple the ruling AK Party prepared in 2003 by then-1st Army Commander retired Gen. Çetin Doğan -- yesterday. Both the governing party and opposition leaders dedicated

PM: Attempts against democracy threat to existence of state, nation

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan yesterday shared his views on coup attempts, saying that attempts to undermine democracy pose a risk to the existence of the state and the nation.

Speaking at the parliamentary group meeting of his Justice and Development Party (AK Party) yesterday, Erdoğan said: "Every attempt and plan that weakens democracy and violates the law is a threat and danger to the existence of the state and the nation.

Those who are nourished by such plans, who use them as a means of abuse and benefit from them should know that all those subversive plans are cursed and that curse will pull them toward darkness, sentencing them eternally in the public conscience."

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Erdoğan was responding to allegations that Turkey was heading toward “civilian fascism,” under the AK Party government, which has been in power since 2002. The government strongly rejects accusations that they are aiming to destabilize the country.

Bahçeli: TSK statement on coup allegations not satisfactory

A recent statement from Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ denying that an army operation plan called Sledgehammer was a scheme devised to stage a coup d'état has failed to satisfy Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). Speaking yesterday at his party's parliamentary group meeting, Bahçeli said Başbuğ's statements about the Sledgehammer operation, were weak in defending the military's innocence.

“We have to trust the Turkish Armed Forces [TSK], but it is impossible to find the General Staff's statements regarding these allegations satisfactory.”

He also told his party's deputies that the Turkish military could not be made an object of polemic discussions. He also said there was an obvious campaign being waged against the TSK seeking to smear its reputation but added that if there are any flaws or crimes, they should come out.

“If not, every decision of an institution with a worn-out reputation would become controversial. We hope that none of this nonsense is true,” he said.

Bahçeli said the military had yet to clarify certain points. “The fate of a controversial document [the Sledgehammer plan] with a wet signature is still not clear. A very serious claim such as an alleged attempt to assassinate the deputy prime minister is still in the dark. The case being such, there are systematic campaigns to create doubts about some former and current members of the TSK which are likely to continue. ... Even the tiniest possibility of a coup attempt should be investigated. We support all such initiatives. Most certainly, all our country's agencies and institutions are important for us. ... There is even more need for the TSK and all of its positions up the chain of command to function in a more transparent and independent way. That would also eliminate any doubts about their commitment to democracy and give them the opportunity to prove their innocence in the alleged crimes.”

Bahçeli also noted that his party has always been against all attempts at military intervention in the past and continued to be so. He said they would more loudly be voicing the same objection this time.

Stating that the Turkish nation can have no quests or options other than democracy, the MHP leader said his party deemed illegitimate and strongly opposed any outside attempt against the democratic regime. The MHP leader said those who have been elected to office should be removed by elections, noting that the rules of democracy should always function, no matter how flawed, adding that everybody should understand this fact.

“It should be understood that this kind of political primitivism, which sees political preferences other than one's own beliefs as inferior and acts as if they do not exist, would strike a serious blow to our country's political life. However, an uncompromising and unyielding stance from those who say they are defending democracy would yield as negative a result for society as would those who are looking for an opportunity to interfere in the nation's will. If, the government has lost its power, if its connection to society has weakened, if its support from the nation has decreased, it is unavoidable that the government will also be weakened. This is why we are saying that it is time to call for elections,” he said.

Bahçeli also noted that a large number of investigations and legal processes were going on into alleged attempts to intervene in democracy, noting that some of these investigations were into police officers, journalists, jurists, intelligence officers, politicians, businessmen and members of academia. He said the MHP was cautious about every piece of information and every publication

regarding these judicial processes. He noted that Turkey had no chance of replacing its military, adding that all allegations had to be thoroughly investigated.

Bahçeli also criticized the government's democratic initiative, which seeks to end separatist terror by extending the cultural rights of Turkey's Kurds, claiming that the government had failed to convince the nation despite "knocking on all doors," and "using the pro-government media" to promote the initiative. He said the government's "democratization" efforts were "traps."

Baykal: Army chief should be dismissed if allegations are true

Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal has said if recent allegations over a plan to overthrow the government called the Sledgehammer operation proved to be true, then the government should immediately dismiss the chief of General Staff. Speaking at his party's parliamentary group meeting yesterday, Baykal said: "If there indeed is such a plan, it must have occurred with the knowledge of the chief of General Staff.

If the plan is real, there is no way he can say he doesn't know about it. If there is such a plan, how can you tolerate this? You should dismiss him immediately."

He also expressed the opinion that allegations that have emerged in the past few years, including the latest Sledgehammer operation document indicating that some generals in the military were preparing to stage a coup, are groundless.

"Every week we are faced with a new scenario. Someone writes it down, and someone else stages it. The nation is waiting to see what happens next," he said, noting that coup allegations had turned into a soap opera.

"Everybody's talking about a coup. You see coups in headlines, on TV screens. The prime minister talks about it all the time," he said, adding that Turkey has developed in the past 30 years and left the possibility of a coup d'état behind.

He said there was no coup in place but rather just a continuous discourse using the words coup d'état. He also expressed skepticism that this was actually because of a coup plot that was under way. "Is this information coming in because there were plans for a coup? Or is it emerging because of somebody else?"

Baykal said fears about a coup are usually expressed when some politicians who are losing their reputation and influence try to revive their earlier popularity. He said a witness who had informed prosecutors that a plan had been prepared to undermine the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) was nowhere to be found. He said what was being discussed were only allegations, noting that they were very serious if true and even more serious if not.

"They said there was a plot to assassinate the deputy prime minister. Eight people were detained and investigated. The civilian court said, 'There is nothing here' and released them all. Shouldn't we be asking ourselves some questions in this situation? Doesn't it mean anything that all of this ends up in a fiasco? Isn't there a message we have to see? Of course there is," he said.

Country needs fresh start

Baykal also said a new start for Turkey has become imperative. "I would like to present my case to all our citizens that the AK Party government, which has been in power for the last eight years, has brought Turkey to such a point that we need a fresh start."

He said Turkey has consistently failed to find peace under AK Party rule and is experiencing new conflicts every day, claiming that this was caused by weakened support for the AK Party. Baykal accused the government of "trying methods that might shatter society" in an attempt to reverse the consequences of its wrong policies. He also claimed that the AK Party was trying to

appear as the victim hoping to control the reaction of society against it. He said this approach could be seen in the AK Party's domestic as well as foreign policy.

The CHP leader said Turkey's economy was being mismanaged, putting all segments of society in a difficult situation. He also stated his belief that the government had no remedy to correct this situation. "Every segment is being hurt. Unfortunately it is impossible to say that the government is looking for a solution to this. This is the general picture. For this reason the government is losing support and losing its power. Unnecessary conflicts and hostility have been created; our people have been turned against one another. ... The ethnic background of people has become something to be questioned. This is not good. State institutions are at odds with each other. The Supreme Court of Appeals is uneasy and has no confidence in the future. ... The Turkish Armed Forces [TSK] is saying there is a campaign against it. This is the situation we are in."

PM Erdoğan calls coup plans inhumane, outdated

Thursday, 28 January 2010 13:31

Today's Zaman

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, during a speech on Wednesday, focused on an alleged military plot to stage a coup d'état and overthrow his Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government, calling such plans "undemocratic," "inhumane" and "outdated." The prime minister was speaking at a meeting that brought together the governors of Turkey's 81 provinces at Ankara's Rixos Hotel.

"To want to get rid of their own citizens and to exclude them and to prepare filthy scenarios to this end is not only undemocratic but also outdated and inhumane. Such a mindset would not conform to the principles of a modern country and an improved democracy. We will definitely fight against these threats with all of our power. We will block all attempts at separatism and destruction," Erdoğan remarked.

The target of his speech was a suspected Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) plot to instigate chaos in the country through bomb attacks on popular historic mosques in İstanbul to eventually lead to a military takeover. Titled the Balyoz (Sledgehammer) Security Operation Plan, the document was drafted only a couple of months after the AK Party government came to power.

The masterminds behind the plan were allegedly retired Gen. Çetin Doğan, who was then commander of the 1st Army, former Air Forces Commander Gen. İbrahim Fırtına and retired Gen. Ergin Saygun.

The prime minister stressed that Turkey's fight against terror and terrorist organizations would continue with the same determination, but without damage to human rights.

"It has been clearly seen that concessions on human rights and freedom for security and democracy damage the fight against terror. Therefore, the fight against terror will continue and all fields that prepare the ground for terrorist activities will be eliminated one by one. I need to underline that the fight [against terror] will also have psychological, sociological and diplomatic dimensions. Politics should oversee these dimensions as well," he added.

Targeted journalists announce plan to file complaint against Sledgehammer coup plan

Thursday, 28 January 2010 14:08

Today's Zaman

Journalists who coup plotters had hoped to arrest after a planned military takeover announced at a press conference on Thursday that they are set to file a criminal complaint against the individuals behind the subversive plan.

Nazlı Ilıcak, a columnist for Sabah, said that "We, 36 journalists whose names are included in a 'would be arrested list,' are inviting the political parties represented in Parliament to take action, and we are denouncing the Sledgehammer Security Operation Plan and will file a criminal complaint against the originators of the plan."

Last week, a Turkish daily exposed yet another coup plan devised by the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) against the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government. Allegedly prepared by Gen. Çetin Doğan, the plan aimed to topple the democratically elected government by provoking unrest throughout the country. Chaos would be incited through bomb attacks at popular İstanbul mosques and dogfights between Turkish and Greek aircraft.

According to the plan, the pro-coup wing in the military would have 36 journalists arrested and "make use of" 137 others in securing public support for the coup.

The Sledgehammer plan is not, however, the first of its kind. The liberal Taraf daily has revealed several others in the past, including the Action Plan to Fight Reactionaryism and the Cage Operation Action Plan. All of those plans were drafted by active duty members of the military and sought to topple the AK Party government.

Military convoy raises eyebrows in Erzincan

A military convoy's unexpected journey from the eastern province of Erzincan to nearby Erzurum has raised questions about whether it was planned as a "show of power" after the detention of a colonel on active duty.

Eskişehir Gendarmerie Brigade Commander Col. Recep Gençoğlu was detained on Wednesday as part of the probe into Ergenekon, a shadowy criminal network that has alleged links within the state and is suspected of plotting to topple the government. It was reported that Gençoğlu, who was appointed to Eskişehir on Aug. 30, 2009, was detained due to his alleged involvement in a conspiracy in Erzincan.

The colonel was transferred to Erzurum on Thursday for interrogation by Erzurum public prosecutor Osman Şanal. Shortly after the colonel's arrival in Erzurum, a 25-vehicle military convoy traveled from Erzincan to Erzurum's Üzümlü district. Üzümlü is only 17 kilometers away from the Erzurum city center.

Military sources said the convoy was part of a "test drive." They did not, however, respond to questions on whether the exercise had any links to Gençoğlu's detention. After a large amount of ammunition, including hand grenades, was found on Oct. 27, 2009 in an Erzincan reservoir, the Erzurum Public Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into an alleged clandestine network in Erzincan connected to Ergenekon. Two gendarmerie officers were arrested on Nov. 25 over their connection to Ergenekon and the secret ammunition caches. Weapons and bullets were found in the home of one of the arrested suspects during the operation. Although the officers served in Erzincan, the investigation is being conducted by a specially authorized Erzurum Public Prosecutor's Office.

According to reports, the gendarmerie and National Intelligence Organization (MİT) jointly set up a plot to create false evidence implicating some religious communities in crimes by using phony witnesses. According to the plan, ammunition and bombs would be planted in the houses where followers of some religious communities lived, and these weapons would later be found during police searches. Thus, these religious communities would be categorized as "armed

terrorist organizations.” Gençoğlu is suspected of links to this conspiracy.

Prime Minister Erdoğan says his government ended civilian fascism in Turkey

Monday, 25 January 2010 10:57

Today's Zaman

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said yesterday that civilian fascism in Turkey has ended during his Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government's term in office, responding to criticisms of civilian fascism during his party's rule.

Some circles recently launched a campaign against the government, accusing it of acting in an authoritarian way and dragging Turkey toward a civilian fascist regime. They claimed that Erdoğan acted like Russian leader Vladimir Putin, known for his authoritarian conduct. Responding to these claims, Erdoğan said: “We are waging a struggle for the country's civilization and, thanks to us, civilian dictatorship has ended in this country.” The prime minister's remarks came during a ceremony to inaugurate the Bozüyük-Mekece-Sakarya divided road.

Erdoğan also appealed to the workers from the state-owned alcohol and tobacco monopoly Tekel, who are currently staging a protest, telling them that it is the nation and not labor unions that bring parties to power and remove them from office, responding to the protestors' claims that they can topple the government through their general strike.

The workers were dismissed from Tekel factories following their privatization, and vowed to go on a hunger strike if the government failed to respond to their demands. “Labor unions do not bring parties to power, the nation does; and it is the nation that removes a party from power. Nobody should see themselves as having the power to do this,” Erdoğan said.

On Saturday, Erdoğan spoke at the opening ceremony of the Elmadağ ramps on the Ankara-Kırıkkale highway, saying his government would never give any credit to the despicable plans that aim to foment conflict in Turkey.

He was referring to a newly uncovered military action plan that included shady plans to create tension in Turkey with the ultimate goal of paving the way for a military coup. The military plot, codenamed “Sledgehammer,” led to a nationwide outcry, with many demanding the authorities cast full light on the plot.

Addressing those attending the ceremony despite freezing cold weather, Erdoğan said: “I know your hearts are very warm; I feel this. I tell you to continue to follow us. As the 72 million citizens of the Republic of Turkey, we will never allow those who seek to sow seeds of evil among us [to succeed]. We will continue to walk on our path. We will never give any credit to gangs, mafia organizations or shady plans.”

When asked about his view on the Sledgehammer plan, the prime minister said those who saw themselves as above Parliament were in a state of total ignorance.

Prime minister meets with Türk-İş to resolve Tekel issue

29 January 2010, Friday

TODAY'S ZAMAN ANKARA

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Confederation of Turkish Labor Unions (Türk-İş) President Mustafa Kumlu met yesterday to find a solution to the problems of workers dismissed from Turkey's alcohol and tobacco monopoly, Tekel.

In a meeting that took place after Today's Zaman went to print, Erdoğan and Kumlu planned to discuss how to end the weeks-long protests of workers laid off after the privatization of Tekel factories. The meeting was requested by Türk-İş, and Erdoğan stated on Tuesday that he had agreed to speak with them.

This comes following a meeting organized by Türk-İş with the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Unions (DİSK), the Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions (KESK), the Confederation of Turkish Real Trade Unions (Hak-İş) and the Civil Servants' Trade Union (Memur-Sen), where the unions agreed to strike in early February if Kumlu and the prime minister could not resolve the Tekel workers issue.

After losing their jobs at Tekel factories, workers from across the country gathered in Ankara to protest the layoffs starting on Dec. 15. The workers demand that the government transfer them to other public institutions, but the government has refused, and has offered them 11 months of temporary work under Article 4/C, which provides jobs for workers dismissed after the privatization of public institutions.

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GEO-STRATEGIC ISSUES

Pakistan's President in Turkey

Monday, 25 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari arrived in Istanbul on Sunday.

Zardari will meet with Turkish President Abdullah Gul and Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai at a dinner to be hosted by Gul later this evening.

On Monday, Zardari will participate in the tripartite summit of Turkey-Afghanistan-Pakistan together with Gul and Karzai.

He is also scheduled to take part at the "Summit of Friendship and Cooperation in the Hearth of Asia" on Tuesday.

Turkish President Hosts Banquet for Pakistani & Afghan Counterparts

Monday, 25 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

Turkey's president hosted a banquet in honor of his Pakistani and Afghan counterparts in Istanbul on Sunday.

Turkish President Abdullah Gul hosted dinner at Istanbul's Sait Halim Pasa Mansion in honor of Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari and Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai who have arrived in Turkey to attend the tripartite summit of Turkey-Afghanistan-Pakistan that will begin on Monday.

Turkish Premier Recep Tayyip Erdogan attended the dinner as well.

The gathering was closed to press.

President Gul also met with Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus President Mehmet Ali Talat in Istanbul.

Turkish Prime Minister Meets Afghan, Pakistani Presidents

Monday, 25 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

The Turkish prime minister met Afghan and Pakistani presidents in Istanbul on Sunday. Turkey's Premier Recep Tayyip Erdogan had separate meetings with Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari at Istanbul's Ciragan Palace.

During their meeting, Karzai and Erdogan decided on training of Afghan troops and police in Turkey and on a closer cooperation in fight against terrorism.

Turkish and Afghan education ministers and an adviser to the Pakistani prime minister had a meeting in Istanbul on the sidelines of a Turkey-Afghanistan-Pakistan summit to take place in the same city on Monday.

The three executives released a joint declaration at the end of their meeting which envisaged Erdogan's opening 68 schools built in Afghanistan by the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA).

In the joint declaration, the three executives supported translation of each other's books in their languages, and education of girls and women.

The executives also agreed to prepare faculty development programs, create vocational training opportunities, boost cooperation among schools, broaden student and expert exchange programs, and increase scholarships.

OTHER POLITICAL ISSUES

Austrian University to open Turkish language department

Wednesday, 27 January 2010 15:17

Time Turk

Turkey's ambassador in the Austrian capital met with Austria's education minister on Tuesday. Turkey's ambassador in the Austrian capital met with Austria's education minister on Tuesday. Speaking to AA after his meeting with Austrian Minister for Education, Arts & Culture Claudia Schmied, Turkish ambassador in Vienna Ecvet Tevzan said that they agreed during the gathering to sign a cooperation agreement on education and culture.

Tevzan said Turkish Education Minister Nimet Cubukcu would pay a visit to Austria in near future, while her Austrian counterpart Schmied would visit Turkey in June.

"We have also agreed to start a teacher exchange program between Turkey and Austria which envisages teachers to be assigned in each other's countries for 3 months to do research," Tevzan said.

Tevzan said that problems of Turkish children studying in Austria were also on the agenda of his meeting with the Austrian minister.

He said a department would be opened within the body of Vienna University in order to train teachers of Turkish language.

Turkey's FM seeks joint strategic perspective with China ties

Wednesday, 27 January 2010 15:16

Time Turk

Davutoglu said that Turkish-Chinese relations had been going through a "historic turning point".

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said on Wednesday that Turkish-Chinese relations had been going through a "historic turning point".

Davutoglu and Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi held a press conference after holding a meeting in Istanbul.

"There are several business opportunities between Turkey and China in several areas," Davutoglu said.

"We have to develop a joint strategic perspective in bilateral relations," he said.

Turkey and China, two active members of G-20, could make great contributions to global economic system, Davutoglu said.

We, as two great states, consider that we can also contribute to "humanistic culture", the Turkish foreign minister said.

Davutoglu said, "Turkey and China will have a close cooperation in issues including Afghanistan, the Middle East, Iraq and other matters in Eurasia."

The prime minister of China will also pay a visit to Turkey in the coming period, he said.

Davutoglu said Yang and he also discussed transportation, energy policies and Silk Road railway project in their meeting.

"I hope that China would make comprehensive investments in Turkey and send more tourists," he said.

Davutoglu added, "I believe that Turkish-Chinese relations would boost peace and security."

TURKEY AND ARMENIA

Armenia and Turkey exchange accusations

Saturday, 23 January 2010 12:58

Today's Zaman

Armenia accused Turkey on Friday of trying to block a deal to establish diplomatic ties and open their border and warned the process could collapse, while Ankara kept on insisting that a ruling by the top Armenian court on protocols between the two countries.

The comments by Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian appeared to be a response to Turkish complaints over the Constitutional Court ruling in Armenia last week that Ankara said was an attempt to rewrite the text of the deal. The rhetoric in both countries has grown increasingly bitter since they inked accords in October designed to overcome a century of hostility stemming from the World War I killings of Anatolian Armenians.

"If Turkey is not ready to ratify the protocols, if it continues to speak in the language of preconditions and to block the process, then I don't exclude it," Nalbandian said at a press conference in Yerevan on Friday when asked if the process was in danger of collapsing. But he added, "I hope Turkey will ratify the documents."

According to a Turkish Foreign Ministry statement on Jan. 18, the Armenian Constitutional Court's "grounds for decision" over the conformity of the protocols to their constitution "contain preconditions and restrictive provisions which impair the letter and spirit of the protocols" and "undermine the very reason for negotiating these protocols as well as their fundamental objective."

In Ankara, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, speaking at a joint press conference with visiting Jordan's Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh, recalled that Turkey had sent the protocols to Parliament in order to be ratified a week after they were signed on Oct. 10, while Armenia sent

them first to the Constitutional Court in order to decide whether the proposed protocols were constitutional.

The two protocols require parliamentary ratification in both countries before they enter into force. The Armenian court ruled the protocols were constitutional.

“Of course, it may be argued to which extent the legal opinions -- put forth by the Constitutional Court along the approval process -- are binding within the Armenian constitution. However, what matters for us is the protection of the wording and spirit of the protocols,” Davutoğlu said. “Today, we continue to be committed to the wording and spirit of the protocols,” he said, highlighting the presence of a strong political will in Turkey for full normalization of ties with Armenia.

Recalling that he conveyed his concerns to Nalbandian during a lengthy telephone conversation earlier this week, Davutoğlu said he reminded Nalbandian of the fact that they started this initiative to normalize relations with a “visionary view.”

The Armenian court’s legal opinions do not have an impact on principles agreed upon by Armenia and Turkey, his Armenian counterpart told him, Davutoğlu said, noting that he would discuss the issue with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Swiss Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey, whose country mediated the talks between Armenia and Turkey, during telephone talks later on Friday.

“The picture which will emerge with the [implementation of the] protocols should not change; all elements targeted with these protocols, including the commissions, should be accepted as a whole,” he said.

Davutoğlu was referring to the fact that the court had ruled to approve the protocols, which call for the establishment of a joint commission of historians to better understand past events, but on the other hand refers to the Declaration of Independence of Armenia.

Paragraph 11 of the Declaration of Independence states, “The Republic of Armenia stands in support of the task of achieving international recognition of the 1915 Genocide in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia.” Ankara argues that with such a ruling, Armenia has taken the heart out of the protocols and created a new, restrictive situation.

Turkey to establish 3rd high-level strategic council with Jordan

The foreign ministers of Jordan and Turkey on Friday discussed necessary steps to be taken to establish a joint mechanism similar to the high-level strategic councils created between Turkey and Syria and Turkey and Iraq last year.

A strong zone of economic cooperation will emerge in the Middle East following the establishment of a high-level strategic council between Jordan and Turkey, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said on Friday at a joint press conference in Ankara following his talks with Jordan’s visiting Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh, highlighting that such a zone would eventually help build permanent foundations for regional peace.

Davutoğlu recalled that Syria, Jordan and Libya removed visa requirements for Turkish nationals in agreements concluded last year and that Turkey and Lebanon had signed an agreement to abolish visa requirements for their nationals in early January.

In December Turkish President Abdullah Gül and Jordan’s King Abdullah II signed a long-awaited free trade agreement. Davutoğlu and Judeh had reviewed implementation of the agreement, Davutoğlu said, adding that Turkey was preparing to soon sign a free trade agreement with Lebanon.

Davutoğlu said he and Judeh had exchanged views on an entity to be established between Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria following the signing of the free trade agreement between Turkey and Lebanon that is to serve as a free trade zone. *Ankara Today's Zaman*

No progress over Turkey, Armenia discuss court ruling

Friday, 29 January 2010 05:08

TIME TURK

While there was no change in the position of the parties, the meeting was beneficial, sources said.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu met Thursday his Armenian counterpart Eduard Nalbandian in London where he is attending a conference on Afghanistan.

Davutoglu's meeting with Nalbandian lasted around 15 minutes. The two ministers exchanged viewpoints on the new situation that arose after a recent decision made by the Armenian Constitutional Court on the protocols signed between Turkey and Armenia in 2009.

Nalbandian told Davutoglu that there was "no change" in the character of the process (after the Armenian court's decision).

Today's meeting provided an opportunity for the two ministers to express their views face to face. While there was no change in the position of the parties, the meeting was beneficial, sources said. Davutoglu also met with Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov of Azerbaijan on the sidelines of the conference.

During the meeting, Mammadyarov informed Davutoglu on the meeting of Azerbaijani and Armenian leaders in Russia.

Turkey wants Armenia to declare that a recent decision by the Armenian Constitutional Court has not brought any changes to the protocols signed on October 11, 2009.

Foreign support to Armenia media stirs debate

Thursday, January 28, 2010

VERCİHAN ZİFLİOĞLU

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

Financial support from international foundations and foreign embassies to the Armenian media has sparked a debate, with some saying such efforts would give journalists a chance to work more freely. Critics, however, insist change must come from within the country's own dynamics. Foreign support for Armenian media has grown in recent years, following a regional pattern. "Hedq" (Trace) one of the best-known online portals, moved into print format last September with the support of the British Embassy.

Boris Navasaritan, president of the Yerevan Press Club, said he thinks journalists who receive international support can work more freely. "Unfortunately, the rulers in Armenia have an oppressor mentality. However, the world is changing rapidly. It is not possible for Armenia to [resist] change," Navasaritan told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review during a recent visit to Istanbul.

Levon Barsghian, president of the Journalists Club Asparez in the northwestern Armenian city of Gyumri, said he agrees with Navasaritan, but added he believes the issue of foreign support should be tackled carefully.

“We thank all institutions that offer support for the freedom of speech and democracy,” he said. “But the political perspective of this support should be given attention, too. The only goal of such support must be about freedom of speech for the Armenian press. Opinions, political views and ideologies should not be forced upon anyone.”

Change coming from inside

Lucia Najsova, chief editor for *Zahranicna*, a foreign policy magazine in Slovakia, said the momentum for media reform has to come from Armenians themselves. “An ‘imposed’ change will most probably not be a lasting one, nor will it be genuinely embraced by the majority of the people. Change can, however, be assisted by those who went through similar experiences. It is wiser to learn from the errors of your fellows than from your own.”

Najsova compared the Armenian media with those in Eastern European countries. “In the past 20 years, during the restoration of democracy in the former Czechoslovakia, we certainly did receive a lot of help from foreigners who had good intentions. Without them, our liberalization would have been much more painful and longer. But there were also those who had no idea about the experience of the country they came to ‘civilize.’ We experienced a number of entertaining moments, being put into positions in which we supposedly had yet to learn how to dine using cutlery.”

According to Navasartian, one of the most modern printing houses in Armenia was founded in the early 1990s with the support of the Eurasia Foundation, which had support from the United States Agency for International Development, or USAID, as well as other governments, private foundations, corporations and individuals. Then, the Open Society Institute, funded by billionaire investor George Soros, and Internews, another global nonprofit organization, opened offices in Yerevan.

“Armenians’ enthusiasm in embracing foreign investors entering the media sector should not be surprising,” Asli Tunç, dean of the communication faculty at Istanbul’s Bilgi University, told the Daily News. “I believe that this is a strategic move for Washington to create a competitive media market in Armenia. Those efforts cannot make any country’s media independent, but training programs and financing civil society organizations might increase the level of journalism standards in the long run.”

Nevertheless, Tunç said she believes the Armenian press has become more free thanks to international support. “Over 50 television channels and 20 radio stations have started broadcasting since the early 1990s. Moreover, various international foundations have supported journalists in hiring lawyers when they were attacked,” she said.

Armenia warns of 'serious counter-attacks' if threatened

Thursday, January 28, 2010

YEREVAN – Agence France-Presse

In a clear warning to arch-rival Azerbaijan, Armenian President Serge Sarkisian said Thursday that the ex-Soviet republic's military is ready to carry out "serious counter-attacks" if provoked. "Today the Armenian army is an iron guarantee that ensures our survival and is a cold, sobering shower for any hot-headed adventurers," Sarkisian said in a statement to mark Armenia's Army Day public holiday.

"The author of any provocation should expect serious counter-attacks and major surprises from the Armenian army. Not realizing this is, at the least, naive," he said.

Sarkisian's comments were clearly aimed at neighboring Azerbaijan, which is locked in a long-simmering conflict with Armenia over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Backed by Yerevan, ethnic Armenian forces seized control of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding districts from Azerbaijan in the early 1990s, in a war that claimed an estimated 30,000 lives.

The two former Soviet republics have cut direct economic and transport links and failed to negotiate a settlement on the region's status despite years of negotiations.

Armenian and Azerbaijani forces are spread across a cease-fire line in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, often facing each other at close range, and shootings are common.

The dispute has complicated recent reconciliation efforts between Armenia and Azerbaijan's ally Turkey, which has called for progress in Karabakh negotiations before it will ratify a deal signed last year to establish ties with Armenia after decades of hostility.

Turkish, Armenian FMs meet for short talk in London

Thursday, January 28, 2010 FULYA ÖZERKAN

LONDON – Hürriyet Daily News

Davutoğlu-Nalbandian talks mark the first face-to-face meeting after Armenia's court ruling draws strong criticism from Ankara. The ruling jeopardized the protocols that were signed to begin normalization of diplomatic relations between the two foes.

The foreign ministers of Turkey and Armenia held an impromptu meeting Thursday at an international conference in London during which Turkey relayed its concerns about the prospects of the two countries' protocols.

The informal meeting marked the first face-to-face talk since an Armenian court ruling drew strong criticism from Ankara, jeopardizing the fate of the protocols that seek to normalize diplomatic relations between the two old foes.

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu once more expressed Turkey's concerns over the court ruling that refers to the 1915 killings of Armenians as "genocide" and makes reference to eastern Turkey as "Western Armenia," diplomatic sources said. "The two sides had the chance to review their well-known positions. There is no change," said one diplomat.

Davutoğlu and Nalbandian agreed to meet on the sidelines of a security conference next week in Munich, Germany, for more bilateral talks, sources said. They also said that meanwhile Ankara was urging third parties to prompt Armenia to indicate that the protocols' content will not be contradicted.

The two foreign ministers held a telephone conversation last week with Ankara saying the court decision was against the spirit of the accords on which the sides already reached an agreement.

Davutoğlu held a 15-minute meeting Wednesday with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as soon as he landed in London, with their talks focusing entirely on the Armenian court's ruling, Turkish diplomats told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review. Ankara communicated its concerns to Washington and asked that these concerns be addressed. Clinton also met separately with Nalbandian on Thursday.

On the plane from Istanbul to London, Davutoğlu said Turkey signed the protocols with Armenia to normalize Turkish-Armenian ties, help Turks and Armenians eliminate their prejudices and maintain the comprehensive peace in the Caucasus. "We do not want those visions to be blurred. The court ruling is restrictive," he said.

Turkey is now working on a legal text that proves the court ruling's non-conformity with the protocols that will be sent to Switzerland, which brokered the talks between the two countries, and to the co-chairman of the Minsk Group, which is leading the Karabakh talks.

"Our views should be heard and our concerns should be removed," said Davutoğlu.

The Wall Street Journal reported Wednesday the deal between Ankara and Yerevan to open their shared border and establish diplomatic relations was under the growing threat of collapse.

Armenia is pushing for rapid ratification of the protocols, signed in October, while Turkey has a longer time frame in mind, said the report. On Wednesday, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev added concern about the deal by saying he was confident Turkey would not ratify the agreement until Armenia has returned Nagorno-Karabakh, an Azerbaijani territory occupied by Yerevan.

"There is a common understanding in the region that there should be a first step by Armenia to start the liberation of the occupied territories," Aliyev said in an interview with The Wall Street Journal on the margins of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. He said he was "fully satisfied" with Turkey's understanding of the issue, despite harshly criticizing Turkey's handling of it in the past.

"If the two issues are disconnected, then probably Armenia will freeze negotiations with Azerbaijan [over Nagorno Karabakh]," said Aliyev, adding that he believed economic pressure was one of the main incentives for Armenia to come to the table. The leader has warned previously that such an outcome could lead to renewed war.

Davutoğlu will meet with his Azerbaijani counterpart, Elmar Mammadyarov, on Friday at the London conference. Diplomatic sources said Ankara would inform Baku of its current position after the Armenian court ruling.

The Turkish foreign minister was scheduled to meet with Clinton again Thursday as the Daily News went to print. Davutoğlu also held talks with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, his Kazakh counterpart and European Union's foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton.

Davutoglu Meets Clinton in Britain

Thursday, 28 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkish Foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu met U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in London on Wednesday.

Davutoglu is in London to attend an international conference on Afghanistan on Thursday.

The meeting between Davutoglu and Clinton was closed to press.

Later in the day, Davutoglu is expected to take part in another meeting on helping Yemen root out al Qaeda threat.

Davutoglu, Clinton Discuss Protocols between Turkey and Armenia

Thursday, 28 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton discussed protocols signed in October by Turkey and Armenia, diplomats said on Wednesday.

Davutoglu and Clinton, who both are in London to attend an international conference on Afghanistan, had a 15-minute brief meeting, diplomats said.

The two ministers exchanged views on protocols that envisaged establishing diplomatic ties and reopening their shared border.

Turkey Asks For Guarantee From Bern, Washington on Behalf of Armenia

Thursday, 28 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkey asks United States and Switzerland, the official mediator between Ankara and Yerevan, to give written clarification that the recent decision of Armenian Constitutional court will not legally close the door to challenge the claims of genocide. “We will try to find a solution on the legal ground,” says a Turkish official.

Turkey will start talks with Switzerland and the United States to get legal clarification that the recent decision of the Armenian court will not prevent a debate between Ankara and Yerevan on whether or not the 1915 killings of Armenians at the hands of Ottomans amounted to genocide. The recent decision by the Armenian Constitutional Court on the protocols agreed to by Armenia and Turkey to start normalization of relations has angered Ankara, which argues the decision legally closes the door to a debate challenging the genocide claims. Turkish reaction has been interpreted by some as a pretext not to ratify the protocols in the Parliament due to the objections of the opposition parties. “This is absolutely not true. We do not want the reconciliation process with Armenia to collapse,” said a senior Turkish official.

The groundbreaking protocols signed last October foresee the establishment of diplomatic ties, the opening of the border as well as the establishment of a committee that will discuss the 1915 events.

The Armenian Constitutional Court ruled last week that the protocols were in conformity with the Armenian constitution, but Turkey’s major source of concern is the court’s reference to the Armenian Declaration of Independence. The court said the interpretation and application of the protocols should be in compliance with the Armenian constitution and paragraph 11 of the Armenian Declaration of Independence, which states: “The Republic of Armenia stands in support of the task of achieving international recognition of the 1915 Genocide in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia.”

If the Armenians continue to consider the events of 1915 as an undisputable genocide, in the Turkish view, this goes against the essence of the normalization process. “We can set up a commission of historians that can talk about everything on the 1915 events, yet cannot discuss whether it was genocide or not because the Armenian court ruled this is not an issue open to discussion,” said a Turkish official. “We immediately asked for clarification from Armenia, the United States and Switzerland,” said the same official. Switzerland was the mediator during last year’s talks between Turks and Armenians.

Switzerland has first agreed with Turkey’s concerns, yet after talks with Armenians said the Swiss government was ready to guarantee Turkey that the court ruling would not hamper the process, according to the Turkish official. “We have asked Switzerland to give us a written guarantee,” said the official. Although the Swiss were unwilling to give the written guarantee, the concerned sides decided to continue the dialogue. “We will talk to Switzerland and the U.S. and try to find a solution on legal grounds,” the official added.

Meanwhile, Turkey has urged Armenia and Azerbaijan to reach a partial agreement that will pave the way later for a lasting solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. So far talks between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis have focused on five subjects. One of them is the withdrawal

of the Armenian forces from the occupied Azerbaijani territory surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh. While the protocols foresee no direct link between the Turkish-Armenian normalization and Nagorno-Karabakh, talks between Armenian and Azerbaijani leadership gained momentum after the start of the reconciliation process between Ankara and Yerevan, according to Turkish officials. "Our relations with Armenia have deteriorated due to the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. If there is no change in the Armenian-Azerbaijani track, then the efforts for Turkish-Armenian reconciliation can backfire," said the Turkish official.

OTHER ISSUES

Turkey says backs Kazakhstan term at OSCE

Friday, 29 January 2010 05:28

TIME TURK

Davutoglu and his Kazakh counterpart Kanat Saudabayev met in London on Thursday. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and his Kazakh counterpart Kanat Saudabayev met in London on Thursday.

The two ministers gathered within the scope of an international conference on Afghanistan. They discussed the issues about the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Kazakhstan took over term presidency of OSCE as of 2010.

Davutoglu conveyed Turkey's experiences in OSCE to his Kazakh counterpart, and said that Turkey would extend support for successful presidency of Kazakhstan.

Turkish Speaker in Uganda, OIC to discuss issues

Friday, 29 January 2010 05:24

TIME TURK

Turkish Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali Sahin arrived in Kampala, capital city of Uganda. Turkish Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali Sahin arrived in Kampala, capital city of Uganda. Sahin is set to attend the fourth conference of the Parliamentary Union of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) member states.

Sahin said on Thursday that OIC conference would be an appropriate basis to discuss Cyprus problem and the problems of Turkish minority in Western Thrace.

Speaking to reporters at Ankara's Esenboga Airport prior to his departure for Uganda, Sahin said that OIC was an international prestigious organization which was consisted of 57 member states having nearly one billion population. He added that the visibility and activities of the organization increased not only in regional but also in global issues in recent period.

Sahin said that participants of the conference in Uganda would discuss Palestinian issue, Darfur, Sudan, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, strengthening of solidarity among Islamic countries and boosting the dialogue between parliaments of western world and Islamic world.

He noted that the conference would be completed on January 31 with a final statement and adoption of several drafts of decision.

Sahin said that he would also hold bilateral meetings with parliament speakers of other participant countries.

Recalling that Turkey declared 2005 as "African Year" and targeted to open 15 embassies in African countries, Sahin said that Turkey decided to open an embassy in Uganda as of March 1,

2010 and appointed Ahmet Melih Ulueren as the ambassador. Parliament speakers from 50 countries will be in attendance at the conference on Saturday. Sahin is also scheduled to meet with Turkish businessmen operating in Uganda. The Parliamentary Union of the OIC member states was established on June 17, 1999. 50 parliaments are the members of the Union. 11 regional and international organizations and parliaments are observers of the Union. OIC is an international organization with a permanent delegation to the United Nations. It groups 57 member states, from the Middle East, Africa, Central Asia, Caucasus, Balkans, Southeast Asia and South Asia. The official languages of the organization are Arabic, English and French.

Nabucco lacks leadership, Aliyev says

Thursday, January 28, 2010

DAVOS, Switzerland – Bloomberg

The Nabucco gas pipeline project to Europe lacks the leadership necessary to secure gas supplies, consumers and financing, Azeri President Ilham Aliyev said.

“So far we do not know who is that leader who will move this process forward,” Aliyev said in an interview with Bloomberg on Wednesday in Davos, Switzerland. “Who will engage itself in negotiations with gas producers, transiters? Who will do the marketing for this gas? What will be the pricing?”

“So a lot of questions that are not answered for quite a lot of time,” Aliyev said.

Nabucco, backed by the European Union as a way to tap Caspian gas and diversify supplies away from Russia, has become “too politicized,” he said. At the same time, a number of countries are committing to both that project and Russia’s potential rival South Stream pipeline, creating “ambiguity.”

“Azerbaijan must know is it all serious about Nabucco,” Aliyev said. About \$20 billion of investment is needed to expand its biggest gas field, Shah Deniz, to help fill Nabucco, Aliyev said.

Aliyev also complained about a two-year pricing dispute with Turkey. “The issues of transit are unresolved,” he said. “The price for our gas from Turkey is unsatisfactory so we cannot move forward under these circumstances.”

Tenders for steel:

Meanwhile, the Nabucco project will send out tenders for steel in May and expects to have financing in place by the end of the year.

Nabucco Gas Pipeline International, the group planning the 3,300-kilometer (2,050-mile) link to bring gas from the Caspian Sea region to Europe, needs to buy 2.3 million tons of steel, procurement manager Johann Gallistl said on Wednesday in Vienna.

Financing for the 7.9 billion-euro (\$11.1 billion) project will be determined after the “open-season,” a process to gauge demand, that will last from July into the third quarter, Gallistl said.

Werner Auli, head of gas at OMV, a Nabucco partner, said the pipeline will offer 20-year contracts to “big” European energy companies and new market entrants. The group has had “a lot” of meetings with banks, he said.

“We will start the open season process this year and we will either get enough demand or we won’t,” Auli said. “If we don’t get enough demand, Nabucco will not be built.”

Auli said he's confident the group will be able to fill the pipeline, which will carry 8 billion to 10 billion cubic meters of gas a year in 2014 and 2015. It may boost capacity to 16 billion cubic meters by 2018 and maximum capacity will be 31 billion cubic meters, Auli said.

"If we get only 16 billion cubic meters, we will not be investing the full 7.9 billion euros," he said. Nabucco, which the European Union has agreed to help fund, is due to start shipping gas in 2014.

Nabucco will not be built if demand too low

29 January 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

The Nabucco gas pipeline will not be built if an open season bidding process for capacity this year shows demand is too low, an executive of Austria's OMV said on Wednesday, adding that demand looked strong.

"We will start the open season process this year, then we will get enough demand or not," Werner Auli, OMV's head of oil and gas, told a conference. "If not, Nabucco will not be built, this is very simple. We are a commercial company, we are not an institution. If the demand is not there, we will not build the pipeline," he said. Besides OMV, Bulgaria's Bulgargaz, Turkey's Botaş, Germany's RWE, Hungary's MOL and Romania's Transgaz are partners in the EU-backed project, which would reduce Europe's reliance on Russian gas. Auli said he expected that the open season process, where companies make bids for the pipeline's capacity, would show good results.

The process should take place from July to October this year with a final decision on investment by the end of 2010. The pipeline, skirting Russian soil, would bring gas from the Middle East and the Caspian region to Europe.

Baku set to quadruple gas exports to Russia

Thursday, January 28, 2010

BAKU – Daily News with wires

HURRIYAT

Having significantly lowered natural gas imports from Turkmenistan, Russia's state-controlled energy conglomerate, Gazprom, is turning to Azerbaijan to make up some of the shortfall.

Gazprom and its Azerbaijani counterpart, SOCAR, announced on Jan. 21 the Russian conglomerate would significantly increase gas purchases from Azerbaijan over the next two years, EuraisaNet's Caucasus service reported.

An agreement signed last year indicated that Gazprom would buy 500 million cubic meters of gas from SOCAR in 2010. Following a meeting in Moscow between Gazprom chief executive officer Alexei Miller and SOCAR counterpart Rovnag Abdullayev, however, the Russian firm announced it would obtain 1 billion cubic meters of SOCAR gas this year and 2 billion cubic meters in 2011.

Following the meeting with Abdullayev, Miller reiterated a pledge to purchase "as much gas as SOCAR can supply." Experts widely believe Gazprom's desire to lock up SOCAR's gas production is motivated by a desire to prevent the construction of new energy export routes that would circumvent Russia, and, therefore, break the Kremlin's stranglehold on the European market.

One such project, the proposed Nabucco pipeline, has long been stalled by questions about financing, profitability and reliable suppliers.

Azerbaijan has supported Nabucco, but Baku's willingness to ramp up exports to Russia could be a signal that Azerbaijani policymakers are losing faith that the project will ever surmount its existing obstacles.

In recent months, SOCAR has significantly increased its volumes of gas exports. According to a company statement, it exported 146.58 million cubic meters of gas in December, up from 41.83 million cubic meters last June. Overall in 2009, SOCAR exported 1.03 billion cubic meters of gas.

Gazprom recently cut the amount of gas it imports from its main Central Asian supplier, Turkmenistan, by nearly half. Purchases from Azerbaijan will not nearly cover the shortfall in Turkmen supplies but they could nonetheless help Moscow maintain its strong position in the Caspian Basin energy market.

TURKEY AND AFGHANISTAN

Erdoğan discusses Afghanistan with UK's Gordon Brown

Saturday, 23 January 2010 13:03

Today's Zaman

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has discussed the situation in Afghanistan on the phone with his British counterpart, Gordon Brown, ahead of several upcoming international summits. During the phone conversation on Friday, Erdoğan and Brown discussed regional issues and bilateral matters in addition to exchanging views on summits on Afghanistan that will take place in both countries, the Anatolia news agency said.

Erdoğan briefed Brown about the Afghanistan-Pakistan-Turkey summit that will take place in Istanbul, and Brown gave details on an international conference on Afghanistan that will be held in London next week. The two leaders agreed that efforts should be intensified for the resolution of problems in Afghanistan as soon as possible, Anatolia said.

Erdoğan and Brown also agreed that the leaders in Cyprus should be assisted in regard to the ongoing negotiation process on the Cyprus issue. Erdoğan told Brown that some have tried to use the Orams case to prevent the negotiation process on the Cyprus issue from succeeding. The British Court of Appeals' latest decision on the Orams case was disappointing, Erdoğan said. The British court ruled Tuesday that a British couple cannot keep their holiday villa in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (KKTC). The court of appeal decision upheld an earlier European Court of Justice ruling that the property should be returned to Meletis Apostolides, whose Greek Cypriot family had to leave the northern part of the island in 1974 after a Turkish military intervention.

Istanbul to host Turkey-Afghanistan-Pakistan tripartite summit

Saturday, 23 January 2010 13:51

USAK PUBLICATION

Turkish President Abdullah Gul will host the tripartite summit of Turkey-Afghanistan-Pakistan in Istanbul on January 25

President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan and President Asif Ali Zardari of Pakistan will be in attendance at the fourth summit of the tripartite meetings process which includes different dimensions such as economy, development, security and inter-parliamentary relations.

Besides the bilateral relations, recent developments both in the region and in the world will be high on agenda of the summit.

President Gul will also host the "Summit of Friendship and Cooperation in the Hearth of Asia" on January 26.

Besides the presidents of Afghanistan and Pakistan, high-level officials from the neighboring countries to Afghanistan and representatives of several international organizations will attend the meeting.

Istanbul hosting presidential-level trilateral summit with Afghanistan, Pakistan

Monday, 25 January 2010 11:01

Today's Zaman

Istanbul will host a presidential-level trilateral summit with Afghanistan and Pakistan today, which will be followed by a regional conference on Afghanistan with the participation of the war-torn country's neighbors and observers from international organ

The summit, which will bring together President Abdullah Gül with his Afghan counterpart, Hamid Karzai, and Pakistani counterpart, Asif Ali Zardari, is the fourth of such summits organized by Turkey. The last such trilateral summit was hosted by Turkey in early April, 2009, only days before US President Barack Obama's visit to Ankara. In the spring of 2007 Turkey arranged a meeting between Karzai and his then-Pakistani counterpart, Pervez Musharraf, after Kabul accused Islamabad of not doing enough to stop militants from entering Afghanistan by way of Pakistan.

In early December 2008, despite rising regional tension between New Delhi and Islamabad in the aftermath of the Nov. 26 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, Ankara managed to secure another trilateral meeting between Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan, this time in Istanbul, for talks aimed at boosting cooperation between the two neighbors.

Intelligence and military officials from the two countries, which have a history of deep mutual mistrust, will also gather during the trilateral summit, which will focus on the training of police and security forces. Officials will also discuss whether religious imam-hatip high schools in Turkey could offer Afghanistan and Pakistan a model to prevent religious fundamentalism.

As of Sunday evening, Gül was scheduled to host a dinner in honor of Karzai and Zardari after Today's Zaman went into print. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was also scheduled to participate in the dinner to be hosted at Istanbul's Tarabya Palace, was expected to have separate bilateral talks with the visiting presidents earlier on Sunday. In a related arrangement, Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç was scheduled to depart for Dubai on Sunday evening to represent Turkey at the Pakistan Investment and Public-Private Partnership Conference organized by the Friends of Democratic Pakistan (FoDP) group.

Tomorrow's regional conference in Istanbul will pave the way for an international conference in London on Jan. 28 that may set a timetable for transferring responsibility for some areas to Afghan control.

A senior Pakistani official with knowledge of the diplomacy involving multiple governments told the Reuters news agency that initiatives were under way to begin negotiations with some factions of the Taliban and that this was likely to surface during the meetings in Istanbul and

London.

“The Turks are playing a behind-the-scenes roll patching up relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan,” the official said. “There’s a lot happening behind the scenes that people don’t know about.”

In an interview with British media earlier this month in London ahead of his talks with British Foreign Secretary David Miliband, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said that without reconciliation between Afghanistan’s factions, no settlement could be achieved. With 1,700 troops already deployed and a further 1,000 promised, Turkey was ready to try to persuade the Taliban to end the violence and take part in elections, Davutoğlu said at the time, without elaborating.

“The Turks are among those working on negotiations with the Taliban -- not all the Taliban, it’s being selectively done,” the same official told Reuters.

A European Union diplomat in Brussels told Reuters that he saw the meetings in Turkey as preparing the ground for the London conference

“Clearly there are going to be a lot of contacts among all the players, including the Russians and Turkey, in the run-up to the London conference. That’s just part of preparing for a big conference like this, that I think everyone now sees as happening at a crucial time.”

Turkey-Afghanistan-Pakistan summit focuses on stability

Tuesday, 26 January 2010 15:56

Today's Zaman

Projects contributing to regional stability, security and prosperity have started to emerge as high-level representatives from Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan came together at a comprehensive tripartite summit that began yesterday in İstanbul.

One endeavor in that regard is cooperation in the field of education. According to the joint statement of the ministers of education of the three countries, they have a memorandum of understanding to establish mechanisms in the areas of vocational training, exchange programs, scholarships, training teachers, fighting illiteracy and overcoming gender disparity.

In a press briefing prior to the tripartite summit, Engin Soysal, former ambassador to Pakistan, told reporters in response to questions that having Islamic religious schools in those countries was not in their joint statement, but their talks might include such a conversation.

Stressing that this, their fourth summit, is comprehensive, Soysal added that another dimension in the summit is increasing economic cooperation. In that regard, officials seek to improve the capacities of the chambers of commerce and their cooperation in the three countries. Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) President Rifat Hisarcıklioğlu gave a presentation at the summit in the afternoon.

Senior Pakistani railway officials are also in attendance at the summit to talk about the details of a Turkey-Iran-Pakistan line. The countries had agreed in March of last year to conduct container train service from İstanbul to Islamabad via Tehran in the first phase of their plan and passenger train service in the second phase. The first train arrived in Islamabad from İstanbul on Aug. 14.

Another important element the summit focused on was establishing security. Senior officials from the general staffs of the three countries and chiefs of intelligence units are meeting to discuss that issue. Training more police officers is one topic of discussion.

However, having Turkish troops involved in military operations in Afghanistan is not a possibility, Soysal said when asked.

At the core is creating an atmosphere of reconciliation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, a key ally of the United States in its battle to crush the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan and destroy the al-Qaeda network in tribal areas near the Afghan-Pakistani border.

Asked if Turkey is considering having talks with Taliban's civilian officials, Soysal said this is about "Afghan ownership."

"Afghan ownership is the key word. This should be an Afghan-driven initiative," he said, referring to a speech made by Afghan President Hamid Karzai during his Nov. 19 inauguration. "The first of his six headings in that speech was the element of peace and reconciliation," he said. Soysal said poverty and a lack of services provide a fertile ground for extremists, and it is therefore important for international bodies to provide basic services. The Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TİKA) is there for that purpose, he said.

"Sometimes TİKA is involved in mundane jobs such as digging up wells so people can have water," Soysal added.

Hosted by President Abdullah Gül, the summit will also be home today to another cooperation initiative, called the "Summit of Friendship and Cooperation in the Heart of Asia." Aside from the presidents of Afghanistan and Pakistan, high-level officials from neighboring countries such as China, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan will also attend the meeting.

Today's participants at the summit also include Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Reza Rahimi and British Foreign Minister David Miliband. President Gül had bilateral talks both with Karzai and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari yesterday morning. The level of rapprochement between Afghanistan and Pakistan was quite warm as Zardari and Karzai met for five hours upon their arrival in a relaxed atmosphere at their hotel, Soysal said.

Noting that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had bilateral discussions with both leaders, Soysal stressed the "family atmosphere" among the leaders and officials.

"Turkish-Afghan relations are people-to-people, unique relations. Turkish-Pakistani friendship is unique and goes back a long time," he said. "Turkey has a unique position to be able to do that." The first of these summits was held in Ankara in April 2007 and focused on security. The second one, mainly about economic relations, took place in İstanbul in December 2008. The third was organized in Ankara in April of last year and focused on security and intelligence. Soysal said the fourth summit, which will end today, is the most comprehensive of all.

Regional powers support Kabul's strategy with Taliban

Wednesday, 27 January 2010 09:26

Today's Zaman

Presidents, senior diplomats and ministers who support a safer, more secure and stable Afghanistan released a statement yesterday outlining their shared vision and principles of cooperation to support the process of dealing with the Taliban on the eve of

At the İstanbul Summit on Friendship and Cooperation in the Heart of Asia, hosted by President Abdullah Gül, the Afghan and Pakistani presidents and senior diplomats and ministers from the UK, the US, Iran, Tajikistan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Russia and several representatives from international agencies supported Turkey's motto, "Regional cooperation starts from the region," in their İstanbul Statement.

As they reiterated their commitment to continued support for the government and people of Afghanistan as they reconstruct their economy, the friends of Afghanistan stated that they

support the Kabul government's program as set out by Afghan President Hamid Karzai in his inaugural speech on Nov. 19.

After a trilateral summit of Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan on Monday and following yesterday's regional gathering, Karzai said that military options are not enough to fight the Taliban.

"Those Taliban who are not part of al-Qaeda or other terrorist networks are welcome to come back to their country and lay down their arms and resume life under the constitution of Afghanistan," Karzai said, adding that there is international consensus on talking to the insurgents. "The difference this time is that we have the backings of our friends, neighbors and the international community," he said, and expressed his hopes of receiving financial support at the London conference.

Karzai also said that his government's plan to reintegrate insurgents will become more clear at the meeting in London, which will start on Thursday.

At a joint press conference with Karzai yesterday, President Gül said military and security issues were discussed in detail at both Monday's trilateral summit, the fourth of its kind, and at other available venues, but that there needs to be more effort.

"Dealing with the problem only with military tools is not possible. We need to win the Afghan people's hearts. Their military forces need to be educated and equipped," he said, adding that Karzai told the conference that they don't want other countries' children to die for them, but they need financial support to address their developmental needs.

Praising Turkey's efforts to bring Pakistan and Afghanistan closer and to gather the international community together to support Afghanistan, Karzai said that they don't have enough resources to recruit an army that is institutionalized and trained.

Turkish officials at the conference reiterated that the Istanbul gathering will facilitate the success of the upcoming conference on Afghanistan in London. They also stressed Afghan control of the plans to deal with the Taliban.

Referring to a recent terrorist attack in Kabul which claimed several lives, Gül said it was encouraging to see how well the Afghans dealt with it, one sign that things are beginning to change.

Turkey pledged \$200 million last year for reconstruction in Afghanistan and is already spending it building schools, hospitals and roads.

Another major donor is the European Union, which spends 250 million euros each year in Afghanistan and plans to contribute more.

"With the initiatives that are coming out in London, we are going to do more. Without any question, we are going to raise our civilian aid contributions throughout Afghanistan. We are the fourth largest donor. We want to work more closely with the member countries to make this all work. We have very, very good cooperation with Turkey inside Afghanistan," James Moran, director of the European Commission's Asia section, told Today's Zaman.

"Turkey has been extremely active on the regional front for quite sometime now. Today will give more momentum to some of these initiatives before the London conference on Thursday," he added.

Asked about the details of the plan to reintegrate the Taliban, he said this will happen at the local level.

"It has to happen at the local level, where you will have to re-engage with the former combatants. What does a man who has been fighting for the last couple of years but has no other source of income but whatever money he gets from joining the Taliban factions do? What is his

alternative? At the moment he doesn't have one. So it's very important to give these people viable economic alternatives then viable aspirations. And that's what we are going to do," he said. British Foreign Secretary David Miliband also stressed at the meeting that the Istanbul conference and Turkey's support were very important before major decisions are made in London this week.

Representatives from institutions such as the United Nations, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), NATO, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) were also present.

NATO Spokesman Praises Turkey's Role In Afghanistan

Tuesday, 26 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkey is a major actor in Afghanistan with its cultural and geographical proximity as well as with its NATO involvement, a NATO spokesman has said.

"No other country in Afghanistan can play the role that Turkey plays," James Appathurai told a group of Turkish journalists in Brussels ahead of Thursday's meeting in London on Afghanistan. Appathurai said a gathering of Afghanistan's neighbors in Istanbul on Tuesday would serve as a useful platform in the run up to an informal meeting of NATO defense ministers in February in Istanbul.

Appathurai said transformation of Afghanistan was expected to pick up speed in 2010 with a road map for security issues, including the training of the Afghan police and military.

"Seventy percent of the Afghan population supports the government. We believe that military and political conditions are very much appropriate for speeding up transformation efforts," Appathurai said.

Turkish Foreign Minister: Afghanistan Important For Regional Balances

Wednesday, 27 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said that Afghanistan issue was important for regional balances and international relations.

Speaking to private NTV channel on Tuesday, Davutoglu said that Turkey would feel even the smallest event happened in its friendly country Afghanistan.

Davutoglu said that Turkey wanted settlement of security in the whole Afghanistan as well as economic development, regional consensus and a national consensus covering all groups in the country.

He added that all ethnic groups (which had the will) should be involved in the political process.

Karzai's reintegration plan for Taliban

Thursday, 28 January 2010 16:09

Hürriyet

A London gathering on Afghanistan comes following two summits in Istanbul earlier this week where Afghan leaders gained their neighbors' support for efforts to persuade Taliban fighters to renounce violence, lay down arms and rejoin the political process.

A London gathering on Afghanistan comes following two summits in Istanbul earlier this week where Afghan leaders gained their neighbors' support for efforts to persuade Taliban fighters to renounce violence, lay down arms and rejoin the political process. In London, Karzai makes a call to Taliban who are not part of terrorist networks

Afghanistan's president formally announced Thursday his plan to reintegrate the Taliban into a political settlement, but called on the insurgents to sever ties with al-Qaeda and any other terrorist networks.

"We must reach out to all of our countrymen, especially our disenchanting brothers who are not part of al-Qaeda or other terrorist networks [and] who accept the Afghan constitution," Hamid Karzai told a 60-nation conference on Afghanistan.

The international gathering in London drew close to 700 members of the press from 70 different countries and comes on the heels of two summits in Istanbul early this week where the Afghan leadership gained its neighbors' support for efforts to persuade Taliban fighters to renounce violence, lay down arms and rejoin the political process. In London, Karzai has been seeking international support for his plan, which has already won backing from Europe and the United States.

"We will establish a national council for peace, reconciliation and reintegration, followed by a peace jirga (council) in Afghanistan," the country's president said. Tribal leaders are expected to participate in the council, but it is not yet clear if moderate factions of the Taliban will also be included.

In his address, Karzai thanked the Turkish efforts made to host the Istanbul talks, while calling on Saudi Arabia, which has previously hosted talks between the Afghan leadership and Taliban representatives, to help with his reintegration plan.

For Karzai, stability and development in Afghanistan will come from a combination of reconstruction, good governance, economic progress, regional cooperation, reintegration and security. The emphasis in the new era is expected to be given to the civilian elements in Afghanistan, as the United States has also come to an understanding that without reconciliation, no progress will be achieved. This shift comes amid diminishing public support in the U.S., Britain, Germany and other nations in the NATO-led campaign and casualties among foreign troops that have affected those countries' domestic politics.

According to Turkey, the challenges facing the war-torn country cannot be overcome solely through military instruments, without assuring the use of soft power and winning the hearts and minds of all Afghan people.

Reintegration plan will be funded

Karzai's reintegration plan will be financed by a trust fund estimated at \$500 million, with Western governments renewing their commitment to win over Taliban insurgents to win the fight against terrorism.

"By the middle of next year, we have to turn the tide in the fight against the insurgency," British Prime Minister Gordon Brown told the conference. Some Taliban leaders are resisting engaging in negotiations, but the Afghan leader earlier said there were thousands of Taliban who were willing to join peace talks.

"To those insurgents who refuse to accept the conditions for reintegration, we have no choice but to pursue them militarily," said Brown. Diplomats say laying down arms and renouncing violence are preconditions for any negotiations.

Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell said Wednesday that any reconciliation with Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar was "probably a bridge too far" after he gave safe haven to al-Qaeda

to launch the Sept. 11 attacks.

International Conference On Afghanistan Begins In London

Thursday, 28 January 2010 14:42

TIME TURK

Foreign ministers of over 70 countries gathered at a conference in London to discuss the current situation and future of Afghanistan.

Issues related with Afghanistan's security, fight against terrorism, administration, and development will be discussed during the meeting which aims at raising international support to this country.

A new fund aiming to help Afghanistan to integrate members of the Taliban to Afghan community is expected to be formed during conference.

UN SG Ban Ki-Moon, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, British Foreign Minister David Miliband, U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton are among the participants of the conference where international organizations like UN, NATO, OIC, and World Bank are represented.

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu is representing Turkey in the conference.

The conference is expected to adopt a final document explaining Afghan government's policy plans for the next two years and expressing the support of the international community to this plan.

Another international conference on Afghanistan is expected to be held in Kabul in the months to come.

Turkey hosted a similar conference recently in Istanbul where the importance of training of the Afghan army and law enforcement, and integration of members of the Taliban to Afghanistan, was emphasized for success in the fight against terrorist networks.

OTHER ISSUES

Turkey not sure about Copenhagen accord

Saturday, 23 January 2010 13:37

TIME TURK

Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) said Friday Turkey was not sure about whether or not to join the Copenhagen Accord.

In a statement issued on Friday, the MFA said that "in the web page of the news service Bloomberg, articles were published on January 19 and 20, 2010 stating that Turkey has notified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that it wants to be associated with the Copenhagen Accord".

"Although Turkey welcomes that a compromise text has been formulated in Copenhagen, the above mentioned news does not reflect the truth. Turkey is still at the stage of evaluating whether or not to associate itself with the Copenhagen Accord," the MFA also said.

Islamic nations need 'united stance' to become a global force

Thursday, January 28, 2010

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

Turkey and other countries in the Islamic world need to change their Cold War-era outlook if they want to play a prominent role in the future, according to the message delivered at a forum in Istanbul.

The three-day meeting, titled “Peaceful Civilization and Cooperation,” opened with a strong call to forge a common stance in the new world order. The forum has been organized by the Turkish Asian Center for Strategic Studies, or TACSS, an Ankara-based think-tank.

TACSS chairman Süleyman Şensoy warned that Turkey and other Islamic countries need to overcome the barrier of the mentalities they held during the Cold War era.

“If they continue with their current perceptions, Islamic countries will be unable to forge a claim for themselves for the next five decades or 100 years while power is shared in the new world order,” he said.

According to Şensoy, this transformation period, in which a new world order is being created, also provides new opportunities for more cooperation among the member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, or OIC.

“The Islamic world did not have a common culture to take a joint step during the Cold War era, because they needed to balance their policies according to principles of their own blocs. This new era has provided a chance for new cooperation in the Islamic world,” Şensoy said.

The situation is not all optimistic, however. “Our world is going through a very complicated period where the fault line between the Muslim world and the Western world is becoming more visible and even cracking,” said Professor Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, the secretary-general of the OIC. “New world powers are emerging, and problems related to underdevelopment are plaguing many parts of the Muslim world while extremism and violence are on the rise.”

A political figure from Russia agreed that today’s world does not have a peaceful order.

“We have growing potential for conflict all over the world. The number of conflicts is growing. At the same time, there is a general trend to employ force rather than peaceful political methods to resolve this conflict,” said Valery Dimitrievich Nikolaenko, a former Russian deputy foreign minister.

Nikolaenko, who is also the deputy dean of the Russian Foreign Ministry’s Diplomacy Academy, said the multi-polar world order has provided regional organizations with more power and more roles, and that their leaders have tried to play increasing roles in the solving of problems.

“The regional powers and organizations want to resolve their issues by themselves, without interference from outside. This gives bigger potential to Islamic countries and Islamic organizations such as the OIC,” he said.

“We in Russia are trying to be friends with Islamic countries. We are aware of the political and economic importance of the Islamic world,” Nikolaenko added. “We should cooperate to solve conflicts. We should work to build peaceful civilization and cooperation.”

A politician from the Turkish Cypriot administration called on Islamic countries to take braver steps to end the isolation of northern Cyprus and for all sanctions against Turkish Cypriots to be removed unconditionally.

“The Islamic world should be united and take a common stance for the sanctions to be removed unconditionally. It is time for Muslim states to act jointly. We are now more hopeful as a result of Turkey’s improved relations with Muslim countries,” said Hakkı Altun, a former deputy prime minister of northern Cyprus.

An official from the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry said the Istanbul meeting was an opportunity to discuss and share views about wider issues that concern not only Islamic countries, but the entire international community.

“We hope to gain the support and assistance of international organizations of Islamic countries as well as international forces like the United Nations to solve the Karabakh conflict,” said Hussein Husseinov, the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry’s secretary for political affairs to the European Union, referring to the ongoing dispute between his country and Armenia. “It can be solved through more coordinated efforts led by the Islamic countries and specifically Turkey.”

TURKEY AND ISRAEL

Lieberman, Eliezer quarrel over ties with Turkey

Saturday, 23 January 2010 13:01

Today's Zaman

In an article focusing on the fact that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is being gradually worn down by allegations concerning his wife’s verbally abusive behavior toward staff members, the leading Israeli daily, Haaretz, revealed a recent quarrel.

Haaretz argued that the damage that is being caused to Netanyahu is not political in the party or coalition sense. “His coalition is more stable than ever and will remain so for the foreseeable future. The problem is the loss of respect for the prime minister, which could trickle down from the media, to the politicians and the public, and then spill over, causing a possible political backlash,” it said, recalling that that was the experience of his predecessor in office, Ehud Olmert.

“First because of the Second Lebanon War, then because of the police investigations against him, until one fine morning someone in the coalition decided to bring him down. That someone was Ehud Barak,” the article said.

Defense Minister Barak last weekend became the first Israeli official to visit Turkey since a diplomatic feud that erupted earlier this month when Israel’s deputy foreign minister, Danny Ayalon, summoned Turkish Ambassador Oğuz Çelikkol to complain about a TV show. The ambassador, who was refused a handshake, was forced to sit on a low sofa while Ayalon explained to local TV stations that the humiliation was intentional. Outraged, Turkey threatened to recall the ambassador, forcing Ayalon to apologize. The quarrel was the latest in a series of disputes between the two allies.

The quarrel between Lieberman and Ben-Eliezer took place on Monday at the Israeli ambassador’s residence in Germany following a joint press conference between Netanyahu and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Haaretz said:

Ben-Eliezer: “The Foreign Ministry needs to look for unifying, not divisive elements. You are breaking the mold, the policy of the ministry as it was built up over decades. If you weren’t my friend, I would make shawarma out of you.”

Lieberman: “You are stuck in the traditional Jewish approach, always wanting to please the lord and master.”

Ben-Eliezer: “Anti-Israeli television series are broadcast every other day in Egypt and Jordan. Why don’t you get angry with them?”

Lieberman: “The difference is that the Egyptians and the Jordanians do not say that [Iranian President Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad is their best friend, and they do not attack Israel’s president and prime minister day and night, like Turkey’s prime minister does. It won’t be long before you

Mapainiks [members of the party that was the forerunner of Labor] are declared a rare species. You will be placed in the petting zoo in Bnei Ayish [a Negev community where a child was recently murdered], and even that will be too big for you.”

Israeli FM report on Turkey annoys its own envoy

Thursday, 28 January 2010 11:14

Today's Zaman

A report by the Israeli Foreign Ministry that accused Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of fueling anti-Semitism with his criticism of Israel has sparked a harsh reaction from Israeli Ambassador to Turkey Gabby Levy, according to a news report b

The Israeli Embassy in Ankara sent an angry message to Jerusalem on Monday, saying the report on Israeli-Turkish ties drafted by the Foreign Ministry's Center for Political Research was “divorced from reality,” English-language Haaretz reported on Wednesday. Israeli Embassy officials in Ankara, approached by Today's Zaman, declined to comment on Haaretz's report, neither confirming nor denying its content.

The ministry's report comes weeks after Israel's deputy foreign minister enraged Turkey by summoning Ankara's ambassador for a humiliating public reprimand. It says the reprimand made it clear to Turkey that there must be a limit to its criticism. Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon summoned Ambassador Oğuz Çelikkol to protest a Turkish TV show depicting Israeli agents as cruel and refused to shake his hand while forcing him to sit on a low sofa. Israel was forced to apologize after Turkey threatened to recall the ambassador.

Haaretz stated on Wednesday that the ministry report termed Ayalon's diplomatic rudeness against Çelikkol a “success,” noting that Turkey had understood Israel's “hint,” -- that Tel Aviv thought Turkish hostility toward Israel had crossed a red line.

“One reason why the report was greeted with such shock at the Israeli Embassy in Turkey was that its authors, some of whom had worked at the Ankara embassy in the past, did not consult the current embassy staff in Ankara. Embassy personnel were also miffed that the report was disseminated so widely and with such a low security classification, at a time when Israel's relations with Turkey are already badly strained,” Haaretz said.

“The embassy said the ministry report contained serious accusations against Turkey that are simply at variance with the facts. For example, it disagreed with the allegation that Erdoğan is inciting anti-Semitism, explaining that the concept of anti-Semitism in Turkey is different than it is in Israel or Europe. The Turkish establishment, the embassy said in a telegram, is not anti-Semitic, and terms used in Erdoğan's speeches that were viewed as anti-Semitic here were seen as just the opposite by the Turks. The embassy also said that in the past -- when Israel's approach to the peace process was more to his liking -- Erdoğan maintained close ties with Israel,” Haaretz elaborated.

On Tuesday, without making any reference to the Israeli ministry's report, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu had already highlighted that criticizing Israel's policies should not be labeled anti-Semitism.

Israeli envoy praises historic Turkish welcome to Jews

Friday, 29 January 2010 05:35

WORLD BULLETIN

Top Israeli diplomat in Turkey sees "better ties" in the future after snub incident.

Top Israeli diplomat in Turkey said that relations between Turkey and Israel are based on solid basis and that he sees "better ties" in the future.

Israeli Ambassador to Turkey Gabby Levy said relations have been going through a tough period recently. However, he expressed belief that the two countries would overcome troubles.

Ties strained after Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon's ill-treatment of Turkish Ambassador in Tel Aviv Oguz Celikkol. Ayalon, who summoned Celikkol to express Israel's uneasiness over a Turkish TV-series showing Israeli agents kidnapping a child, had Celikkol sit at a lower armchair in front of a table with only the Israeli flag on it, denying him an handshake in front of the press.

Ayalon's snub violating all diplomatic manners drew strong reaction from Turkish officials.

Levy said misunderstandings and disagreements might arise even between two best friends.

He said, "we have had a common history over the past 500 years. Jewish people have never forgotten how they were welcomed in this country."

"We have good relations in defense and military. I believe we will overcome this tough period soon," Levy said.

Turkey "Strongly Warns Israel" At UN Security Council

Thursday, 28 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkey has "strongly warned" Israel at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for that country's policy and activities against the Palestinians.

Turkey's UN Permanent Representative Ambassador Ertugrul Apakan conveyed to the UNSC

Turkey's thoughts on Israel and Palestinians at the monthly meeting on the Middle East.

Israel must end the forced evacuation of the Palestinians in Jerusalem and end Jewish settlements on occupied territories. Israel must also end the tragedy in Gaza, Apakan stressed.

Turkey fully supports international efforts so that the peace process in the Middle East is restored, Apakan said.

Talks in the region must resume without further delay, Apakan said.

Israel has demolished the homes of Palestinians in Jerusalem.

Palestinian families have been forced out of Jerusalem. Israel has

cancelled the residential permits of Palestinians living in Jerusalem. The number of Palestinians whose residential rights have been taken away in East Jerusalem in 2008 is 21 times bigger than the average in the past four decades, Apakan said.

The international community does not accept Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem. The issue of Jerusalem should be resolved by making this city the capital of two states that will live side by side in peace. The demographic structure, status, cultural and religious system in Jerusalem must be preserved, Apakan noted.

Apakan called on Israel to end forceful evacuation of Palestinian homes and end the demolition of these residences.

Israel should refrain from acts agitating the population in Jerusalem and protect the status of Jerusalem as indicated in resolutions of the UNSC, Apakan said.

Jewish settlements on occupied territories are not legitimate according to international laws.

Israel must withdraw from territories occupied in 1967 and end the Jewish settlements on these territories, Apakan stressed.

-SITUATION IN GAZA-

Although a year has passed since the Israeli operation on Gaza, 1.4 million Palestinian men, women and children face power shortages, lack of potable water, hunger and health problems in Gaza. Due to Israeli

blockade, the residents of Gaza face unemployment and great poverty.

More than 20,000 Palestinians have to live in tents and partially constructed buildings in Gaza, Apakan said.

This can not go on like it is, Apakan stressed.

The pain of the people of Gaza must be ended. UNSC's resolution 1860 must be implemented and the reconstruction of Gaza must begin. Gaza must be opened to all willing to enter the region and the people of Gaza should return to their normal daily lives, Apakan noted.

If such is not the case, it would be extremely difficult to make progress towards peace and security, Apakan said.

All obstacles to the beginning of a peace process must be overcome so that the process leads to a comprehensive and permanent peace in the Middle East, Apakan also said.

Turkey warns Israel over Gaza at UN Security Council

29 January 2010, Friday

TODAY'S ZAMAN ANKARA

Uneasy with Israel's lack of action to end the ongoing humanitarian tragedy in Gaza, Turkey has once more delivered a strongly worded warning to Israel that the situation "cannot go on."

The remarks by Turkey's permanent representative to the UN, Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan, came in a daylong debate on Wednesday at the UN Security Council. Some 43 delegations participated in the debate on the Middle East, which was also attended by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

One year after Israel's three-week offensive on the Gaza Strip, more than 1.4 million Palestinian men, women and children remain trapped, Apakan noted.

"This cannot go on," Apakan said, as he recalled that mass unemployment, extreme poverty and food insecurity were steadily worsening due to the impact of the continuing Israeli blockade.

The suffering must come to an end, he warned, repeating Turkey's call for the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1860, which outlines support for sending humanitarian assistance to Gaza and removing the blockade on Gaza to help the socio-economic reconstruction of the region.

"In the Middle East, we are, yet again, at a crossroads. The stakes are high," Apakan said, stating that building confidence and making progress toward peace will be difficult unless the crossings are fully open and there is an absolute return to normalcy.

"Progress must be made under the framework of Security Council resolutions, the Road Map, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative. At such a critical stage, there is no alternative to pushing forward with determination. Otherwise, as the secretary-general said, we risk sliding backwards, which is a possibility no one could afford."

Turkey joined the 15-nation UN Security Council as a nonpermanent member in January 2009 and will hold its seat through the end of 2010.

Apakan also underlined that the current pattern of demolishing Palestinian homes, evicting Palestinian families and revoking residency rights of Palestinians in Jerusalem are "unacceptable and undermine trust between the parties." Last year set an all-time record for the number of

Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem who were stripped of residency rights, and in 2008 the number of such actions was 21 times the average of the previous 40 years, which was quite striking and gave a clear idea of the scope of the current practice, he recalled.

OTHER ISSUES

We Are Doing Our Best to Promote Commercial Relations with Iraq, Minister Ergun

Thursday, 28 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkish Minister of Industry and Trade, Nihat Ergun, said Wednesday trade and investments with Iraq continue at a high speed.

We are doing our best to promote commercial relations with Iraq, Ergun said.

Minister Ergun met with the Iraqi Minister of Trade Safaa Al Deen Al Safi in Ankara on Wednesday.

Speaking at the beginning of the meeting, Ergun said that relations between Turkey and Iraq have always been "friendly and brotherly".

Relations between countries are important. Yet relations between neighbors carry greater importance. Turkey and Iraq are close to each other geographically, culturally and historically, Ergun noted.

Neighboring countries should get together more often, Ergun said.

"Turkey and Iraq share deep rooted relations. It is hard to describe our bilateral relations with words. The feelings of closeness between our peoples must be strengthened by political, social, economic and cultural ties," Ergun said.

We have made important progress in our relations. Turkey and Iraq have close political ties and have signed many agreements. We conduct joint meetings of the council of ministers from the two countries, Ergun said.

We are doing our best so that the bilateral relations get developed. Our strength is Iraq's strength, Ergun said.

-IRAQI TRADE MINISTER AL SAFI-

Al Safi, in his part, said that they have observed great support to Iraq's restoration from Turkish officials and businesspeople.

Our two countries cooperate in various political and economic fields. Such cooperation should be further developed, Al Safi said.

Turkey has taken important steps in industrial and foreign trade sectors. We have noticed Turkey's progress especially in the construction field. Our goal is to carry bilateral relations forward and make use of Turkey's experiences, Al Safi stressed.

There are close to 200 industrial complexes in Iraq all waiting to be updated. We can work together with the Turkish private sector in various projects and joint investments, Al Safi noted.

Iraq possesses rich natural resources that Turkey can utilize. Iraqi production of oil and income from this oil will increase in the next five years. Revenues from oil will be used in the restoration of Iraq. We can have joint projects in this field as well, Al Safi also said.

Ergun's meeting with Al Safi later continued behind closed doors.

TURKEY AND CYPRUS

Turkish Cypriot Premier To Run For President

Wednesday, 27 January 2010 15:19

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkish Cypriot prime minister has officially announced his candidacy in an upcoming presidential vote which is scheduled for April 18.

His National Unity Party (UBP) unanimously approved Wednesday Dervis Eroglu's bid for the president of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

Rauf Denktas was the first and founder president of TRNC and he retired in 2005. Mehmet Ali Talat replaced Denktas.

Turkey's FM meets UN Ban over Cyprus peace

Friday, 29 January 2010 05:13

WORLD BULLETIN

The Turkish foreign minister also held a separate meeting with his Indian counterpart S.M. Krishna.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu met Thursday with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on the sidelines of a London conference on Afghanistan.

Diplomatic sources close to the meeting said Davutoglu and Ban had discussed the Cyprus issue and the progress made in ongoing peace talks between the leaders of the island's Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities.

Sources said Ban had vowed to make any kind of contribution to the talks between Mehmet Ali Talat and Demetris Christofias who have recently intensified their negotiations to reunify the divided island.

The Turkish foreign minister also held a separate meeting with his Indian counterpart S.M. Krishna.

Sources said the two ministers had taken up details over a prospective visit by Turkey's president to India.

UN chief to visit Cyprus, says official

Thursday, January 28, 2010

NEW YORK - Agence France-Presse

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is set to visit the war-divided Cyprus and hold discussions with the rival presidents as well as with his special adviser, focusing on the state of progress in the reunification talks. The announcement comes as Cypriot presidents decide to extend their second round of UN-led talks

U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon will visit Cyprus from Sunday to Tuesday to show support for ongoing reunification talks on the war-divided Mediterranean island, his press office said. The U.N. boss was to head for Cyprus after attending the annual summit of the African Union in Addis Ababa Saturday, it said Wednesday.

A U.N. statement said Ban "has decided in that regard to travel to Cyprus, from Jan. 31 to Feb. 2" to personally show his support for efforts by rival Cypriot presidents to make headway in their reunification talks.

"While in Cyprus, he will hold discussions with the leaders as well as with his special adviser, focusing on the state of progress in the talks, and on how best the United Nations can continue to assist their efforts," it added.

Turkish Cypriot President Mehmet Ali Talat and his Greek counterpart Dimitris Christofias are hoping to secure a much-needed breakthrough after 16 months of sluggish negotiations. The two leaders have been locked in discussions on governance and power sharing in a federal Cyprus. They have also aimed to "accelerate convergences" on the economy and EU issues. The two rival Cypriot presidents decided Wednesday to extend their second round of U.N.-led talks in a bid to achieve progress in a flagging effort to end 36 years of division on the Mediterranean island.

"They are not announcing anything today because they are meeting again on Friday," U.N. Envoy Alexander Downer told reporters after Wednesday's lengthy discussions. "There will be statements made at the end of this process which has been extended until Friday." After three days of U.N.-led negotiations ended without progress on Jan. 13, the onus was on this second series of intensive daylong talks to produce results. But Downer would not comment on whether any progress was made after three more days of marathon sessions that began on Monday.

Cyprus has been split since Turkish troops intervened the north in 1974 in response to a Greek-Cypriot coup aimed at uniting the island with Greece.

EP Committee Calls on Turkey to Withdraw Troops From Cyprus

Thursday, 28 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIOPNS

The European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee on Wednesday adopted a draft motion for a resolution on Turkey's progress report 2009.

60 committee members voted in favor of the draft report prepared by Dutch parliamentarian Ria Oomen-Ruijten, while 11 abstained.

Christian Democrats, Liberals and Socialists acted together on several amendments to the report. Part of the report on Cyprus has become tougher for Turkey following this move.

The draft report calls on Turkey to withdraw its troops from Cyprus, resolve the issue of Turkish citizens settled in the island and allow Greek Cypriot access to Maras (Varosha).

It urges Turkish government to seek solutions to preserve the bicultural character of Turkish islands Gokceada and Bozcaada, and to address the problems encountered by Greek people with regard to their education and property rights.

At a news conference following the committee voting, Dutch rapporteur Oomen-Ruijten held Socialists and Liberals responsible for tougher paragraph on Cyprus. She said, however, the report was quite balanced.

The European Parliament is scheduled to debate the report on February 10. Final parliamentary voting on the report is expected the next day.

The draft report says the parliament "is concerned about the alleged magnitude of the Ergenekon criminal network", adding that "Turkey has to approach this case as an opportunity to strengthen confidence in the proper functioning of its democratic institutions and the rule of law."

It expresses "strong concern" in relation to the decision by the Constitutional Court to close the Democratic Society Party (DTP) and ban a number of its democratically elected representatives from political activity; and says it urges all political forces in Turkey to engage peacefully so as to unite Turkish society on the basis of equal rights for every citizen.

It also draws attention to the crucial importance of a comprehensive and substantive reform of the constitution, and welcomes judiciary reform strategy. It encourages Turkey to come up with

reform proposals in judiciary respecting European standards.

It welcomes the broad public debate on a range of traditionally sensitive issues such as the role of the judiciary, the rights of citizens of Kurdish origin, the rights of the Alevi community, the role of the military and Turkey's relations with its neighbours; and commends the Turkish Government for its constructive approach and its role in initiating that debate.

It says the parliament is concerned by the continuing involvement of the military in Turkish politics and foreign policy, and reiterates that in a democratic society the military must be fully subject to civilian oversight.

It welcomes the initiatives taken by the Turkish government to bring Turkish citizens together and enable every citizen, irrespective of origin or religion, to enjoy equal rights and play an active role in Turkish society.

Oomen-Ruijten's report condemns the continuing violence perpetrated by the terrorist organization PKK and other terrorist groups on Turkish soil, and urges the PKK to respond to the political initiative of the Turkish government by laying down its arms and putting an end to violence.

The report underlines concern about restrictions on press freedom, particularly following the imposition of an "unprecedented fine on a media group", as well as regarding frequent website bans; and it recommends that, in light of the unhealthy links between media and business interests, a new media law be adopted.

TURKEY AND CHINA

Chinese Fm in Ankara for Talks

Thursday, 28 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi arrived in the Turkish capital Ankara on Wednesday. Yang was in Istanbul to attend the "Istanbul Forum for Friendship and Cooperation in Heart of Asia". He met with Turkish President Abdullah Gul and Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu in Istanbul.

During his stay in Ankara, Yang will be received by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Chinese Minister: Turkey & China Mutually Respect Territorial Integrity

Thursday, 28 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said on Wednesday that Turkey and China mutually respected each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Holding a joint press conference with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu in Istanbul, Yang said that Turkey and China had established formal diplomatic relations 39 years ago, adding that the relations between the two countries were boosting.

Recalling that the Chinese prime minister accepted Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's invitation to Turkey, Yang invited Turkish leaders and people to Shanghai Expo. Yang said that China wanted to further increase its cooperation with Turkey in every area, adding that the two countries would develop communication between non-governmental organizations and in culture, tourism and education areas.

Turkey had significant influence in the world and in its region, Yang said and stated that Turkey made great contributions to regional and world peace.

Yang noted that the two countries were also cooperating in UN Security Council, adding that the two countries had similar views in fight against global financial crisis and climate crisis.

Turkish Fm Says Turkish-Chinese Relations at Historic Turning Point

Thursday, 28 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATION

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said on Wednesday that Turkish-Chinese relations had been going through a historic turning point.

Davutoglu and Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi held a press conference after holding a meeting in Istanbul.

"There are several business opportunities between Turkey and China in several areas," Davutoglu said.

"We have to develop a joint strategic perspective in bilateral relations," he said.

Turkey and China, two active members of G-20, could make great contributions to global economic system, Davutoglu said.

"We, as two great states, consider that we can also contribute to humanistic culture," the Turkish foreign minister said.

Davutoglu said, "Turkey and China will have a close cooperation in issues including Afghanistan, the Middle East, Iraq and other matters in Eurasia."

The prime minister of China will also pay a visit to Turkey in the coming period, he said.

Davutoglu said Yang and he also discussed transportation, energy policies and Silk Road railway project in their meeting.

"I hope that China would make comprehensive investments in Turkey and send more tourists," he said.

Davutoglu added, "I believe that Turkish-Chinese relations would boost peace and security."

OTHER ISSUES

Turkish President Receives Iranian First Vice President

Wednesday, 27 January 2010

USAK PUBLICATIONS

Turkish President Abdullah Gul received Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Reza Rahimi in Istanbul on Tuesday.

The meeting was closed to press.

Rahimi is in Turkey for "Istanbul Forum for Friendship and Cooperation in Heart of Asia".

Earlier in the day, Gul received British Foreign Secretary David Miliband.

He will also separately receive Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu later in the day.

Turkish aid associations continue to extend helping hand to Haiti

Thursday, 28 January 2010 11:04

Today's Zaman

Turkish aid associations have continued to help victims in Haiti, which was hit by a magnitude-7.0 earthquake on Jan. 12, with a tent city set up by the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay) in the quake-stricken capital Port-au-Prince.

Jannot Cadet, 38, was struggling to survive with her three children in poverty prior to the quake, but her life became considerably worse in its aftermath. Cadet and her children were the first residents in a camp established in a soccer field in the Tabarre region by the Turkish Red Crescent, a tent city designed to shelter 200 families. Another Turkish aid association that headed to the region was Kimse Yok Mu (Is Anybody There). The association is distributing hot meals to victims. In a statement released by the association yesterday, Kimse Yok Mu officials said volunteers from the association had been helping the victims and treating them with compassion. Nearly 2 million people were left homeless after the quake and those in the streets ask whoever they meet for food, the officials said. The association is providing meals for nearly 1,600 people, including orphans, every day.

The statement also said people are living in tents their organization had set up, adding that volunteer doctors from the association have been carrying out health screenings for 300 people per day. It also underlined in the statement that the cost of a meal is only TL 1 and asked people to donate to Kimse Yok Mu by SMS.

People can donate to the Kimse Yok Mu effort by visiting the association's Web site (www.kimseyokmu.org.tr) or by sending an SMS to 5777 and writing HAITI on Avea or Vodafone cell phones and TL 5 will be donated to Kimse Yok Mu on their behalf. "So you can offer a meal to five Haitians with one SMS," the statement says.

Meanwhile, Mustafa Öztürk from the Turkey-based Humanitarian Aid Foundation (İHH) told the Anatolia news agency that although 15 days have passed since the quake hit the country, the situation was still terrifying. He said there are still many dead bodies on the streets and that organ mafias which came to the region had abducted dozens of orphans.

Black Sea's importance growing, says Bulgarian envoy

Thursday, January 28, 2010

Gül DEMİR

TOKYO - Hürriyet Daily News

The strategic importance of the Black Sea as a key geopolitical crossroad linking Europe with Central Asia and the Caucasus is ever growing, according to Bulgaria's Special Envoy Ivan Petkov, speaking at the Third Japan-Black Sea Region Dialogue held this week in Tokyo. Petkov is the representative of the Bulgarian chairmanship-in-office of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, or BSEC. The topic of the two-day meeting was "Prospects of changing the wider Black Sea region and the role of Japan." It was supported by the Tokyo Club and the Japan Foundation and sponsored by the Global Forum of Japan, or GFJ, and BSEC.

"The time when Japanese foreign policy toward the Black Sea region was cautious should be over," said Petkov. He said Japan is faithful to universal values such as democracy and the market economy and that it would only benefit from increased involvement in the region, from stronger ties with Brussels and greater coordination with BSEC.

Petkov outlined the three directions as sectoral partnerships within the frame of the Black Sea Synergy to gather financial support for shared projects in energy, transport and the environment; the necessity of effective participation of the European Commission as an observer to BSEC and

of involving more actively the other EU member states with an observer or sectoral partner status to BSEC; and strengthening of BSEC-EU dialogue through meetings in Brussels.

BSEC has been cooperating with the European Union more closely and establishing higher-level cooperation and ties with other important organizations. Petkov said BSEC became a member of the United Nations' Alliance of Civilizations in 2009.

Importance of security

Turning to the issue of security, Petkov said all BSEC members, not just the littoral states, should pay a working visit to the Black Sea Border Coordination and Information Center in Bourgas. "The aim is to contribute to strengthening the efficiency of border management," he said.

BSEC Secretary-General Ambassador Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos also addressed security.

"After Sept. 11, the fight against terrorism and the efforts to dry up its financial resources, which are mostly linked to various forms of organized crime such as the trafficking of arms, drugs and human beings, have also increased the political and strategic importance of the Black Sea region. We must acknowledge that frozen conflicts pose a threat to security in the region. Frozen conflicts constitute the main obstacles to enhancing regional cooperation. These should be dealt with effectively and solved peacefully," he said.

Mithat Rende, director-general of economic affairs for Turkey's Foreign Ministry, talked about his country's initiative to create the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform. "Countries in the region support this initiative and hopefully it will create new and constructive dynamics that will assist in the comprehensive settlement of all Caucasian disputes."

Rende also referred to the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 and how BSEC has continued to meet "in a friendly and constructive atmosphere." "This has been a clear indication of the commitment of all the member states to BSEC and to its goals of turning the BSEC region into a region of peace, stability and prosperity through economic cooperation."

Additional steps

According to BSEC's secretary-general, of particular importance are the additional steps being planned "in facilitating the road transport of goods, which is also expected to contribute to trade relations in the region. Within this framework, a pilot project for a BSEC permit system for the road transit of goods has been prepared. The implementation of this pilot project will start Feb. 16 with the participation of some of the BSEC member states. This permit system is expected to facilitate the work of the road transporters and simplify border procedures in the region. With this project, BSEC will become the first regional organization to issue such transit documents. "Once they are in force, BSEC agreements to simplify visa procedures for businesspeople and lorry drivers who are nationals of BSEC member states, signed in 2008 in Tirana, will also surely contribute to trade cooperation."

BSEC members are Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine. The organization was established in 1992 through Turkey's initiative and as Chrysanthopoulos describes it, "Today, BSEC is the most inclusive regional organization in the Black Sea area with developed mechanisms and instruments of cooperation and a diverse institutional framework."

TURKEY AND EUROPEAN UNION

First message of PACE head to Turkey: Get new Constitution

Tuesday, 26 January 2010 15:54

Today's Zaman

Turkish deputy Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, newly elected president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), has issued his first statement to Turkey, saying, “Turkey should adopt a new civil constitution.”

Çavuşoğlu, an Antalya deputy of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party), was elected as the new president of PACE on Monday.

In an uncontested campaign, Çavuşoğlu, who also heads the Turkish delegation at PACE, secured the post after the European Democrat Group (EDG) put his name forward as the only candidate. He replaced Lluís Maria de Puig of Spain, who reached the end of his term in office. On the heels of assuming his new post as president, Çavuşoğlu sent a stern message to Turkey, signaling that he will be tough with the European Union-candidate country, which sent him to lead the Turkish delegation in the first place. “Turkey has not completed all its commitments to European values, and the main obstacle is the current Constitution,” he said, in his first press briefing after being elected as head of the assembly. The Turkish Constitution was adopted in 1982 under a military coup environment and is subject to criticism from many European institutions including the EU and the Council of Europe.

“If we have a civil constitution, that will solve all the problems in Turkey,” he underlined.

Çavuşoğlu’s election is a first for the 47-member Council of Europe of which Turkey was a founding member in 1949. Turkey is also set to assume the rotating presidency of the Council of Europe’s decision-making body, the Committee of Ministers, for six months starting in November 2010.

Asked why Turkey was late in assuming the presidency, Çavuşoğlu said the country went through many ordeals, including military coups, and had domestic problems. “We had been on the Monitoring Committee’s watch list until recently,” he said, adding that Turkey should feel more responsible now that a Turkish citizen is at the helm of PACE. “My election will help Turkey obtain full democratic values,” he noted.

In a show of support, a large delegation from Turkey including Turkey’s chief EU negotiator, State Minister Egemen Bağış, came to Strasbourg to witness the voting session. A small group from Çavuşoğlu’s own constituency, Antalya, also attended the session to watch their deputy be elected president of the assembly.

Çavuşoğlu, who is the first Muslim deputy to lead PACE, told Today’s Zaman that he will maintain his fair and consistent position during his term in office while trying to boost the Council of Europe’s status. He reiterated that the framework of his term, which will last for two years, is delineated by the core values of the Council of Europe. The council is known for a strong emphasis on human rights, democratic development and the rule of law.

Çavuşoğlu vowed that PACE will increase its pressure on Turkey on a range of issues such as drafting a civilian constitution and reopening the Halki Seminary on the island of Heybeliada near İstanbul. “If Turkey has some deficiencies concerning Kurds, Alevis, non-Muslim minorities and Gypsies -- as was recently discussed -- we will voice its deficiencies concerning human rights.” He noted, however, that PACE will also acknowledge the determination of the Turkish government in that regard as he knows very well that the prime minister and government are sincere about improving human rights and freedoms in Turkey.

In an interview with Sunday’s Zaman, Çavuşoğlu did not hesitate to criticize his government on the eve of the vote. He said the Turkish government was slow in realizing reforms needed to make the country more democratic in line with the standards of the Council of Europe.

“The most important reform that must be implemented is judicial reform. When the closure case

was brought against the AK Party, the Council of Europe declared that it would subject Turkey to a second-class audit once again, which was an effective reaction. A resolution by the council recommended that measures should be taken to make party closures more difficult and that legal amendments should be made to this effect. Many things should have been done by now. So we can say that things were a bit late. It should be done. We know that it is hard, but it must be done. If necessary, a referendum should be held,” he said.

He said he understands the position of the government, which faced the risk of closure and snap elections for the last three years. Nevertheless, more could have been done, he argued. “Let us say there was no room for it on the agenda. But we have to force the agenda to its limit and overcome the busy agenda in order to make it,” he underlined.

Swedish FM: Turkey's foreign policy facilitates EU bid

Thursday, January 28, 2010

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

Turkey’s emergence as a strong foreign policy player in its region is making some people nervous, but Sweden’s foreign minister says the country’s step forward is good for everyone and calls for more dialogue with Ankara. ‘Very little would have happened in the last 50 years without political leadership. We need to overcome the burden of the past,’ he says

Turkey’s geo-strategic location and its increasingly dynamic foreign policy are advantages for Europe and the country’s European Union aspirations, according to Sweden’s Foreign Minister Carl Bildt.

“For some, it has been difficult to digest Turkey’s change from a passive partner to the far more active role it is playing now,” Bildt said in an interview with the Turkish Policy Quarterly journal. “One thing is certain; we need more dialogue with Ankara on all these issues now than before.”

The Swedish official, however, said Turkey had gone too far in defending Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir’s stance on Darfur, as well as Iran. “Turkey and Iran are neighbors and we cannot pressure Turkey to confront its neighbor,” he said. “On the other hand, being a good neighbor does not mean that you have to overlook what is happening in a country. This balancing act is a very difficult one.”

The minister praised Turkey’s regional peace efforts, calling them “highly significant.”

“Though some complain about Turkey’s improving relations with Syria, the EU is now also seeking to normalize relations with Syria,” he said. “In the southern Caucasus, Afghanistan, Pakistan... Turkey is a major player. And in Tehran, Turkey has an amount of access that few others have.”

Calling on Turkey to do more in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bildt added: “Bosnia is falling behind. Turkey can do more than it has been doing to contribute to reconciliation in Bosnia. [Bosniak Presidency member Haris] Silajđić is playing the Ankara card, but this is not necessarily what is going to bring a solution.” According to Bildt, Bosnian politicians are preoccupied with internal quarrels and the past and were thus left behind when Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro forged ahead with visa liberalizations.

Although visa liberalization is a very important aspect of EU policy, it is also “a difficult one to handle,” the Swedish foreign minister said, adding: “It is in the hands of interior ministries, not foreign ministers, and with regard to opening up Europe, their agenda is not necessarily the same.”

Bildt also expressed his concerns over frozen conflicts in the South Caucasus, questioning whether there was enough political will between Baku and Yerevan to ultimately seal a deal. “Those among the Armenian diaspora who think it is shameful to move ahead with reconciliation with Turkey think it is doubly so to compromise on the settlement of the Karabakh conflict, so it is not easy for the political leadership in Armenia,” he said.

Turning to domestic Turkish issues, the foreign minister praised the Turkish government’s pro-reform efforts. “We have applauded the recent democratic/Kurdish initiative,” he said, noting that although there were issues regarding how determined the government was in overcoming the opposition, its commitment to the move was unquestionable. In the end, Bildt said, a consensus was necessary for moving forward.

The Swedish minister said the recent disclosures of alleged coup plans within the Turkish military were highly disturbing, but added that the Turkish legal system was fulfilling its duty in addressing the allegations, a fact that was unimaginable even five to 10 years ago.

On the subject of EU accession, he said the Cyprus deadlock was negatively affecting the country’s chances of joining the bloc. “It is a regrettable fact that direct trade between northern Cyprus and the European Union is blocked,” he added. “A settlement on the island would sort out a number of issues in one stroke: the direct trade problem, the chapters of the *acquis* that are blocked and EU-NATO cooperation problems.”

‘Turkey could be EU member sooner than expected’

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has said Turkey would be an EU member by 2023 – a date Bildt found “pessimistic.”

“The strategic element of Turkey’s prospective membership has become more obvious. It is true that this is an elite debate, [but] the important steps in the EU project have been elite-driven,” he said. “The EU project was not the result of a groundswell of love toward each other among different European nations. The euro was also not an initiative driven by the demand of the people.”

“In fact, very little would have happened in the last 50 years without political leadership,” he added. “Both sides need to overcome the burden of the past. And this is what the EU is all about.”

EU’s information center opens in Ankara

Thursday, January 28, 2010

ANKARA – Hürriyet Daily News

The Ankara office of the European Union Information Center was opened Thursday with the participation of top Turkish and EU officials.

“We are adding a largely effective instrument to our information activities. Similar centers have already been conducting activities in various Anatolian provinces through our chambers as well. We seek to answer demands for information about the EU not only from firms but also from the public,” Rifat Hisarcıklioğlu, president of the Union of Chambers of Commodity Exchanges in Turkey, or TOBB, said in a speech at the opening ceremony.

Recalling that Turkey could only open 12 chapters as part of its accession negotiations due to political issues, Hisarcıklioğlu called on EU countries to uphold their responsibilities in terms of the negotiation process.

Touching on the problems of business circles, he said: “We do not want to keep circling around the problems arising from visas, the agreements on tariff quotas and free trade. We have to work these out.”

The center will operate under the wings of the TOBB. Apart from Hisarcıkılıođlu; Chief Negotiator for EU Affairs Egemen Bađıř; Turkey’s secretary-general for the EU, Volkan Bozkır; and the president of the European Commission’s delegation to Turkey, Marc Pierini; also attended the opening ceremony.

Council of Europe report slams Greece, Turkey over treatment of minorities

Thursday, 28 January 2010 11:13

Today's Zaman

A top European human rights watchdog has started debating a report on the problems encountered by non-Muslim minorities in Turkey as well as by the Muslim Turkish minority in Greece.

The draft report, to be finalized after being debated at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) late on Wednesday, slams both Turkey and Greece for not fulfilling the demands of religious minorities in their respective countries. The assembly, under the chairmanship of Turkish deputy Mevlüt Çavuşođlu, who was elected as its new president on Monday, will review the report and approve its final draft after a number of challenges raised by deputies were addressed on the floor.

The report, titled “Freedom of religion and other human rights for non-Muslim minorities in Turkey and for the Muslim minority in Thrace [Eastern Greece],” was written by Michel Hunault, a French deputy from the European Democrat Group (EDG) for the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights. In a nutshell, Hunault suggested to the Council of Europe that “Greece and Turkey should have all their citizens belonging to religious minorities treated in accordance with the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, rather than rely on the ‘reciprocity’ principle stated by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne to withhold the application of certain rights.”

Turkey and Greece blame each other for not fulfilling the terms of the Treaty of Lausanne and both decline to provide broader rights and freedoms to minority groups based on the narrow definition in the 1923 treaty. The “reciprocity” clause is often invoked when one of these issues emerges in bilateral relations.

The PACE report asserts, however, that the two countries should take care of all of their citizens without discrimination, regardless of the way in which the neighboring state may treat its own citizens. The report argued that the recurrent invoking of the principle of reciprocity by Greece and Turkey as a basis for refusing to implement the rights secured for minorities in the Treaty of Lausanne is “anachronistic” and could jeopardize each country’s national cohesion.

It urged the two countries “to take measures for the members of the religious minorities -- particularly as regards education and the right to own property -- and to ensure that the members of these minorities are no longer perceived as foreigners in their own country” while encouraging them to sign and/or ratify the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Report faults Turkey on a number of areas

PACE urges Turkey to recognize the legal personality of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of İstanbul, the Armenian Patriarchate of İstanbul, the Armenian Catholic Archbishopric of

Istanbul, the Bulgarian Orthodox Exarchate, the Chief Rabbinate and the Vicariate Apostolic of Istanbul, saying, “The absence of legal personality which affects all the communities concerned having direct effects in terms of ownership rights and property management.” It specifically asks for constructive solutions concerning the training of religious minorities’ clergy and the granting of work permits for foreign members of the clergy in Turkey.

As for the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Istanbul in particular, PACE claims that Turkey needs to give the patriarchate the freedom to choose to use the adjective “ecumenical.” It further argues that a resolution should be reached with representatives of the minority with a view to the reopening of the Heybeliada Greek Orthodox theological college (the Halki Seminary).

It lists the question of the registration of places of worship and the question of the mazbut properties confiscated since 1974 and says, “They must be returned to their owners or to the entitled persons or, where the return of the assets is impossible, to provide for fair compensation.” The report specifically mentions the Orthodox Syriac monastery of Mor Gabriel, one of the oldest Christian monasteries in the world, founded in A.D. 397. It says the land of monastery should be protected in its entirety.

It advises the Turkish government to take practical measures to make it possible for members of minorities to join the police force, the military, the judiciary and the bureaucracy. The report asks for the full implementation of Law No. 3998, which states that the cemeteries of minority communities cannot be handed over to municipalities so as to prevent the building of housing, something which has occurred at certain Jewish cemeteries.

In the light of recent attacks on religious minorities, PACE asks the government to firmly condemn all violence against members of religious minorities, conduct effective investigations and promptly prosecute people responsible for violence or threats against members of religious minorities, particularly in light of the murders of a Roman Catholic priest in 2006, three Protestants in Malatya in April 2007 and prominent Armenian-Turkish writer Hrant Dink in 2007.

In an attempt to revitalize the minority schools that were closed in Turkey due to low enrolment, the assembly urges the government to adapt legislation so as to allow children from non-Muslim minorities, but who do not have Turkish nationality, to be admitted to minority schools.

Finally, PACE recommends that Turkey should institute an office of ombudsman as soon as possible to avoid tension in society and make anti-Semitic statements and other types of hate speech criminal offenses. As in the Greek case, it also urges the development of a code of ethics by the media on respect for religious minorities in Turkey.

To-do list for Greece

PACE urges Greece to provide support for minority schools, resolve problems with vakıfs (foundations for the Muslim minority), allow the Muslim minority to choose its muftis freely, promote economic and infrastructural development in Thrace, resolve nationality issues and fully implement the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights concerning freedom of religion. It calls for freedom of association with respect to titles, allowing associations to use the word “Turkish” in their name.

What is more, the PACE report asks for the full and speedy implementation of the 2008 legislation that provides for quota-based admission to the civil service for members of the Muslim minority. It calls upon the Greek government to embark on a national campaign against racism and intolerance, stressing that diversity is to be regarded not as a threat but as a source of enrichment. In that respect, it also asks the government to encourage the development of a code of ethics by the media on respect for religious minorities and to penalize any incitements to hatred passed on by the media.

Turkey is worst human rights violator, ECtHR says

29 January 2010, Friday

ABDULLAH BOZKURT STRASBOURG

TODAYSZAMAN

In an annual report released on Thursday, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), the top judicial body to rule on human rights violations in Europe, found that Turkey is by far the worst violator of human rights among the 47 signatory states of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In statistical data on violation judgments by country for the period between 1959 and 2009, Turkey topped the chart with 18.81 percent of all violation judgments, followed by Italy with 16.57 percent and Russia 6.34 percent. Within this timeframe, 2,295 judgments were entered for Turkey and only in 46 cases did the court find no violations. The most common human rights violation committed by Turkey was the denial of the right to a fair trial. Italy scored second with 2,021 judgments against it. In 2009 alone, Turkey again topped the list in terms of violations of articles of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In a tally of the number of judgments entered for Turkey, 356 cases out of a total of 1,625 put the country in the worst violator class. In only nine cases out of the 356 did the court find there was no violation, while stating that at least one violation occurred in the rest of the cases. Russia followed Turkey in 2009 with 210 judgments against it.

In terms of pending applications as of Jan. 1, 2010, the report found that Turkey has the second highest number of complaints lodged against it with 11 percent of the total 119,300 applications. Russia led the pack in this category with 28.1 percent of the applications. In its report, the court described Turkey as a “high case-count state.”

More than half of the judgments in which the court found a violation included a violation of Article 6 of the convention, the right to a fair trial within a reasonable time. In recent rulings, the court found that in most cases Turkey was in breach of this article and noted lengthy trials as a violation the convention. There have been excessive delays, in violation of the “reasonable time” requirement, in civil and criminal proceedings taking place in Turkish courts.

Since 1959, the court has found 16,106 applications lodged against Turkey to be inadmissible or has struck them out.

The European Convention on Human Rights drafted in 1950 places Turkey under the jurisdiction of the ECtHR. In 1987, Turkey accepted the right of individuals to make applications to the ECtHR and in 1990 recognized the compulsory jurisdiction of the court. However Turkey has still not ratified some of the protocols of the convention despite signing it.

In October 2009 the European Commission on Enlargement to the European Union attested that Turkey had made some progress on the observance of international human rights law. However, the implementation of some ECtHR judgments requiring legislative amendments has been an outstanding issue for several years. Further efforts are needed to strengthen the institutional framework on human rights, in particular with regards to the establishment of an independent human rights institution and of an ombudsman.

Venice Commission president: Turkey needs new constitution to solve problems

29 January 2010, Friday

ABDULLAH BOZKURT STRASBOURG

TODAYS ZAMAN

The new president of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission has called on Turkey to adopt a new constitution to solve its problems, while reaffirming the commission's commitment to share its expertise with Turkish authorities over constitutional revisions.

In an exclusive interview with Today's Zaman on the sidelines of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of the Europe (PACE) plenary meetings in Strasbourg, Gianni Buquicchio said: "You will not eliminate all these [legal] problems, especially concerning the closure of parties, if you do not change the constitution and the Law on Political Parties. We have said this several times, and the Turkish authorities know this."

The Venice Commission president added that "one of [his] main objections as the new president of the commission is to restart a real substantial cooperation with two important countries -- Turkey and Russia." "You need to revise the constitution. Your government was very motivated to change the constitution. It seems there is a draft which appears to be a good one. I do not understand why this draft has not been put forward for discussion and possible adoption in Parliament," Buquicchio remarked.

He accused the opposition of not supporting the government in this endeavor. "The opposition parties should play a constructive role. I can't imagine all parties would be in favor of [change], but I think there could be some parties who are in favor of progress for the Turkish society," he underlined.

The fact that Turkey is one of the oldest democracies and one of the founding members of the Council of Europe should not hinder the urgent need for expert help from that renowned institution, Buquicchio explained. "The Venice Commission was not created for new democracies only. They [Turkish officials] have to change their approach. It is not inappropriate for them to ask for help from the Venice Commission and share our wisdom. Luxembourg and Finland have asked our opinion regarding recent constitutional revisions. Why not Turkey?" he asked.

Turkey has not officially requested the opinion of the commission on constitutional changes as of today or sought the expertise of the commission members. "This is a pity. They have not submitted a request yet," Buquicchio lamented. He was encouraged, however, by a Thursday meeting with PACE's Turkish president, Mevlut Çavuşoğlu, whose first message to Turkey was to get a new constitution. "The PACE president could help us in that regard," Buquicchio said. Any Turkish authority can directly apply to the Venice Commission to ask for an opinion, including but not limited to the Justice Ministry or Parliament.

"Turkey can apply directly to our commission, and this is the best solution. This is a shared cooperation not imposed by the body of the Council of Europe," he emphasized. The alternative to direct contact is for PACE to force Turkey to adopt Venice Commission criteria. This happens only when there is a gross problem in violation of European charters.

High judiciary has monopoly

The Venice Commission head described the high judiciary in Turkey as a "monopoly" and urged Parliament to have a say in the election of high justices to reclaim legitimacy and accountability in the eyes of the public. "The problem also concerns the high council of the judiciary [Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors, (HSYK)], where the most important jurists have a kind of monopoly. This also needs to be changed. Parliament should have a say in this," Buquicchio explained. The HSYK is the sole authority in Turkey to nominate and appoint judges and prosecutors to courts and decides on their promotions.

He emphasized that there should be a balance among different powers in the country. “For a good working high council, you need a balance between different powers, among the government, judiciary and possibly executive branches, in order to have checks and balances. This is important because the court must be a legitimate one,” he pointed out.

Addressing the election of justices to the Constitutional Court, Buquicchio said Turkey could follow the German example, where the parliament plays an important role in appointing justices to the top bench. “When these persons [nominees] become members of the court, they forget the political support. They become completely independent. That is the question of democratic culture,” he noted.

He further argued that the judiciary’s hands are often tied by existing laws or the constitution. “If the laws are not clear or precise, you can obtain results like the closure of some political parties,” he said, stressing that political parties are very important components of the system and that they shouldn’t be shut down except under very strict conditions, “like repetitive violence and actions - but not for words.”

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Poultry sector may be unable to meet Russia’s increased demand

Saturday, 23 January 2010 16:36

Today’s Zaman

Following a recent decision by the Russian government to increase its poultry imports from Turkey to 500,000 tons annually, Turkish poultry producers have voiced concerns that the sector may not actually be able to meet this demand.

Sector representatives say Turkey can meet only a small part of Russia’s poultry requirements. As part of incentives to increase mutual trade following Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s recent visit to the Russian capital, Minister of Agriculture Mehdi Eker announced that Russia has agreed to increase its poultry imports from Turkey to 500,000 tons annually, bringing in some \$1 billion.

Poultry Meat Producers and Poulterers Association (BESD-BİR) President Zuhul Daştan told Today’s Zaman on Friday that Turkish poultry producers could meet “only some part” of the increased demand from Russia. Daştan asserted that the revised amount was five times Turkey’s total annual poultry exports. “Turkey produces 1.2 million tons of poultry on average in a year. But a considerable part of this goes to the domestic market. I don’t think Turkey’s annual poultry exports to Russia could exceed 100,000 tons.”

Recalling that Russia plans to completely halt poultry imports in the next five years, Daştan said Turkish producers will have to focus on the domestic market to survive. “Russia is planning to reduce its poultry imports year by year and completely stop importing after five years. This means that the Turkish poultry sector’s future lies in other markets,” the BESD-BİR head pointed out. She noted that poultry demand in Turkey has noticeably increased in the past few years. Daştan said Russia currently allows imports from only six Turkish poulterers and added that this number should be increased to at least 10.

According to Sait Koca, general manager of Beypiliç, one of Turkey’s leading poultry producers, a decline in poultry exports to Russia would not harm Turkish exporters since the country has several other alternative markets in which to sell their products. “Russia should first elaborate their demands. We do not know yet which poultry products they want to buy from us. They need to clarify these details.” The Beypiliç manager recalled that Turkey has increased its poultry

exports to Iraq. “Saudi Arabian officials are expected to hold talks to start poultry imports from Turkey in March. These countries and others in the Middle East, I think, have relatively higher potential in regards to poultry exports,” he told Today’s Zaman.

Observers argue that Turkish poultry exporters have a better chance of increasing their share in Russian poultry imports than other competing would-be exporters, with geographic proximity and high quality in production processes their two major advantages. In another opportunity for Turkish companies, Russia halted poultry imports from the US in August. Russia used to import some 600,000 tons of poultry annually from the US and now needs to compensate for this gap.

Mauritanian president calls for Turkish investment

Monday, 25 January 2010 11:09

Today's Zaman

The president of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, Gen. Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, has said Mauritania offers lucrative business opportunities in a number of sectors and has called on Turkish businessmen to invest in the country.

Abdel Aziz was in Turkey on an official three-day visit at the invitation of President Abdullah Gül, the first visit to Turkey by a Mauritanian president. Attending a meeting organized by the Turkish-African Business Council in İstanbul on Saturday evening, he said Mauritania would benefit from Turkey’s experience, especially in investments, to ensure the development of the country. Mauritania will work to boost the blossoming relations between the two countries, the president stated, adding that they will provide Turkish investors with all kinds of facilities. As a start, a Mauritanian embassy will be opened in Turkey, he said.

Mauritania offers lucrative opportunities for those who want to invest in the country, Abdel Aziz said. “Improving mutual relations will be beneficial for both sides in the near future. Mauritania has nearly 600 different types of underground resources. A number of these have not been processed efficiently until now. Only iron, copper and gold ores are being turned out so far. The country also has oil and natural gas resources, along with big opportunities for fisheries,” he said, stressing that there is a wide range of sectors in which to invest. Abdel Aziz called on Turkish businessmen to visit his country and establish relations with their Mauritanian counterparts. Tamer Taşkın, the chairman of the Turkish-African Business Council, which operates under the umbrella of the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK), stated that the aim of the council is to create a platform for Turkish and African businessmen to come together and establish relations. Currently, there are nine business councils under the Turkish-African Business Council. Of these, five are with southern African countries, while the remaining are with sub-Saharan countries.

“Over the last few years, improvements in economic and political relations with countries in Africa became the most important part of Turkey’s foreign strategy. The Undersecretariat of Foreign Trade put its strategy to boost economic relations with African countries into effect in 2003 and named 2005 ‘Africa Year’ as part of this strategy. Turkey became a member of the African Development Bank Group in 2008 and opened new embassies in six African countries, increasing the number of embassies in Africa to 20,” Taşkın stated, stressing that all of these positive political developments lead DEİK to further increase its targets related to African countries.

Speaking about the targets, Taşkın said they are aiming to increase the number of African countries with which Turkey has a business council to 54 in the long term, while the mid-term

target is to establish business councils in African countries where Turkey has embassies. “We hope to establish a business council with Mauritania, too, and we want the trade volume between the two countries, which is about \$20 million currently, to increase incrementally.”

Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON) Chairman Rızanur Meral stated that their aim is to see trade volume with Mauritania reach \$100 million by the end of the year. In 2007, the confederation sent a Turkish trade mission to Mauritania, he said, adding that they want to carry out high-tech projects in the country.

Russia, Belarus sign oil deal, resolve supply row

29 January 2010, Friday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Russia and Belarus signed a new oil supply deal on Wednesday, resolving a month-long row that had threatened to disrupt Russian oil flows to European Union members Germany and Poland. Russian and Belarussian officials said the new agreements guaranteed trouble-free supplies of Russian crude to Belarussian refineries at least until the end of September when the two sides would meet again to discuss potential changes to volumes. “The documents that were prepared are very balanced and are pretty compromising and are followed by our joint declaration that guarantees uninterrupted supplies. And this is what European customers expect from us,” Russia’s top energy official Igor Sechin said. The Belarussian spur of the Druzhba pipeline supplies about one-tenth of Europe’s shipments from west Siberia, going to Poland and Germany.

Supplies to Europe have not been affected this time but oil prices jumped at the start of the year after Russia suspended shipments to the two refineries in Belarus. Belarus gets over 20 million tons of oil from Russia annually for processing at its two plants but keeps only 6 million tons of refined products for domestic needs while the rest is exported to the West.

Sabancı expects growth in 2010 as unemployment lingers

29 January 2010, Friday

TODAY’S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Güler Sabancı, chairwoman of Sabancı Holding, one of Turkey’s leading groups, has said both Turkey and the global economy will improve in 2010; however, she has predicted that growth will be slow and that it will take more time to address the unemployment problem in Turkey. Sabancı, who was in Davos to attend the World Economic Forum (WEF), responded to questions from the Anatolia news agency on Thursday concerning the Turkish and global economy. “2008 was a year of crisis, while 2009 was a year of recession. I expect 2010 to be a year of growth both in Turkey and all over the world. I believe the growth rate will be slow; however, the influence of anticipated growth on unemployment is predicted by the majority at Davos to be small,” she said.

The Turkish economy is anticipated to enjoy a growth rate of about 3.5 percent, Sabancı said. However, she added that a stand-by deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) might increase this further. Underlining that the world has been through an important change, she cited the main theme of this year’s WEF as this change. “We are going to rethink, redesign and redo the economy from the beginning,” she added.

Citing unemployment as an important issue that needs to be rethought, she continued: “Unemployment exists throughout the world. Creating new employment opportunities with the help of international institutions such as the G-20 and the IMF in the coming period is the most discussed subject here at Davos. Resolving the unemployment problem will need more time,” she remarked.

Growth by itself might not be enough to solve the unemployment issue, Sabancı commented, adding that new models are being debated at the WEF.

Poultry sector could meet Russian demand if incentives in place'

29 January 2010, Friday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

The Turkish poultry sector will have no difficulty in meeting an anticipated 60,000 tons of demand from Russia for poultry products provided that price incentives are introduced by the government, Ömer Görener, the CEO of Banvit, one of Turkey's leading poulterers, has said. Speaking to the Anatolia news agency on Thursday, Görener said Turkey will be able to export around 60,000 tons of poultry to Russia but that the government should eliminate its “price disadvantage” with incentives. According to Görener, the Turkish poultry sector needs subsidies so as to sell poultry to the Russian market at “favorable prices.” He said Russia would offer a lower price for poultry imports than Turkish exporters had planned for and that the government should compensate for this gap with extra financial support. “EU countries, for instance, provide their poultry producers with a 400 euro subsidy per ton of poultry exports to Russia. This gives the producers the opportunity to maintain their competitive power in the market.” Görener said Russia mostly purchased chicken legs from Turkey.

He said increased imports to Russia would not affect poultry prices in the Turkish domestic market.

Following reports on Russia's intent to seek an increase in poultry imports from Turkey to 500,000 tons for 2010, sector representatives said meeting demand to this extent was not possible. Görener thinks Russia's poultry imports from Turkey will not exceed 60,000 tons this year. “Turkey has enough capacity to increase its poultry production without any need for new investment. What we are concerned about is whether the government will introduce any subsidies to help us overcome a price handicap,” he noted.

Noting that they have monitored the latest developments in the market closely, Görener said his company planned taking further initiatives to expand their presence in the Russian market.

Banvit is one of the six Turkish poulterers from which Russia currently imports.

As regards the expectations for exports, he said Turkish poultry exports could increase to 150,000 tons this year from 80,000 tons in 2009. Görener said they anticipated this amount could approach 200,000 by the end of 2011.

Turkish stock market up by 1.29 pc on Thurs

Friday, 29 January 2010 05:01

TIME TURK

Turkish stock market was up by 1.29 percent on Thursday.

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The Istanbul Stock Exchange (IMKB) National-100 index climbed 699.44 points and closed at 54,770.46 points at the end of second session.

Turkey's C.Bank Forex reserves down

Friday, 29 January 2010 04:59

TIME TURK

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The reserves were 72.5 billion USD on January 15.

In its weekly bulletin, the Central Bank said that Turkey paid back 732.9 million USD of foreign debt between January 4 and 27, 2010.

Turkey repaid 11.7 billion USD in 2009, and 15.7 billion USD in 2008.

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SOCIAL ISSUES

Heavy snowfall paralyzes life in Istanbul

Saturday, 23 January 2010 14:12

TIME TURK

Heavy snowfall and cold weather caused problems in daily life in the western part of Turkey on Saturday.

Snowfall started late Friday and led to several traffic accidents in Istanbul and other western provinces such as Tekirdag, Edirne and Balikesir. Snowy weather will continue along with strong winds, meteorologists said.

Highway officials closed the TEM highway from Istanbul to Edirne for cars. Only trucks and coaches are allowed to head to Edirne, officials said.

Meanwhile, bad weather conditions caused energy cuts in Istanbul. Technical problems have resulted in power supply shortfall in several districts of Istanbul, officials said.

Power cuts led to problems in gas and water supply as well. Authorities warned people to turn off their combi boilers when electricity is cut.

Seabus services from Istanbul to neighboring provinces Bursa and Yalova were also cancelled due to strong wind and snowfall.

Istanbul metropolitan municipality said that nearly 4,000 workers were fighting bad weather conditions since Friday night, adding that snow depth is expected to reach 10 centimeters in downtown Istanbul.

Municipality officials also said that hundreds of homeless people were provided with food, medical check-up and shelter in hotels and gyms.

Winter break starts for over 15 million students

Saturday, 23 January 2010 15:15

Today's Zaman

The first semester of the 2009-2010 academic year ended yesterday, and over 15 million elementary, middle and high school students throughout Turkey have received their report cards, marking the start of a two-week winter break.

Over 650,000 teachers will join the students on the school break, which ends on Feb. 9. Several students received awards after getting their report cards. In an Istanbul school, basketballs and volleyballs were given to students with high grades while successful students of Erzurum schools received various prizes, including books, from the governor, in a ceremony marking the end of the semester. Ali Çetin from Antalya, a leukemia patient, was one of the students who received a report card yesterday.

“Our son has overcome his disease but his health checks continue. He learned how to read and write thanks to the teacher appointed by the directorate. We are very happy,” Ali’s father told the Anatolia news agency.

A school in the village of Gözene, Hatay province, ran into some complications yesterday during the distribution of report cards because all the students have the same last name, Dadük. The 300 students finally got their report cards after teachers matched students by their school numbers.

First graders were identified by their names and parents’ names. Teachers told the Cihan news agency that when they called Ali Dadük to take his report card, about 20 students came up.

While most 11-year-olds are in fifth grade, Mehmet Avcı is completing first grade because his mother did not allow him to attend school, fearing something bad would happen to him.

Expressing his happiness at being able to go to school like other children, Avcı said he did not have any difficulties at school because his mother taught him how to read and write. His mother, Fatma Avcı (47), said, however, that she is not happy to have sent her child to school. “I don’t trust people. I lost almost all the people I love. I did not send him to school fearing something would happen to him on his way to school. He insisted on going to school, so I let him, but I continue to worry as much as ever,” she told Cihan.

Education Minister Nimet Çubukçu distributed the report cards of students attending the Kafkas elementary and middle schools in the Azerbaijani capital of Baku, where she is on an official visit.

Siberian cold front to affect all of Turkey this week, experts warn

Monday, 25 January 2010 11:00

Today's Zaman

The Marmara region, struck by heavy snow and wintry weather over the weekend, will see its heaviest snowfall yet on Wednesday, while the rest of the country will experience rainy and snowy days.

Temperatures across Turkey are expected to be 4 to 6 degrees Celsius, with frost affecting the coastal areas along the Mediterranean Sea and the Marmara region. Central Anatolia and eastern and northern Turkey will experience heavy frost conditions. Temperatures are expected to fall across İstanbul. This week is anticipated to be the coldest all winter, with temperatures falling to minus 20. The heaviest snow will start today in Russia and then move into Turkey's Black Sea region by Tuesday.

A statement from the State Meteorology Bureau said Turkey will enter a cold and rainy week. "Many parts of Turkey will continue to see low temperatures. Heavy rain is in the forecast for the eastern Marmara region, the Black Sea, southern and eastern parts of Central Anatolia, Eastern Anatolia and the Southeast," the statement read.

İstanbul Governor Muammer Güler also issued a warning, telling people to use public transportation instead of their own vehicles. Güler, speaking to the Anatolia news agency, said İstanbul was covered by heavy snow over the weekend that brought temperatures down to minus 3 degrees Celsius.

Güler also noted that gendarmes and other security units are on duty throughout the day, adding that police issued tickets to 356 drivers. Güler said police responded to numerous traffic accidents over the weekend in which 12 people were injured and a number of cars damaged. Underlining that necessary measures were taken to prevent the snow from affecting hundreds of homeless across Turkey, 200 people, including 11 children, were taken into government-run shelters.

Russian meteorologists issued an announcement regarding the cold weather and reported that Turkey's Marmara region and western Black Sea will be hit by the coldest weather and heaviest snowfall, while temperatures along Turkey's coasts will fall to below 15 degrees Celsius.

Freezing weather troublesome for thousands

Freezing conditions and heavy snowfall adversely affected daily life in İstanbul, which was covered by three to eight centimeters of snow over the weekend, bringing more chaos to its transportation network. People planning on vacationing during the winter break, which began for over 15 million students last Friday, have run into trouble with the increased strain on the city's transportation arteries. Many cancelled their bus tickets and turned to planes. The heavy snowfall led to a 20 percent drop in revenue for many bus companies.

İstanbul Ferry Lines (İDO) cancelled several ferries on Sunday due to adverse weather conditions and heavy snowfall. The European side of İstanbul, Edirne, Kırklareli and Tekirdağ also experienced power outs.

Meteorologists warn new cold front will hit Turkey

Tuesday, 26 January 2010 15:48

Today's Zaman

A second cold front moving into the country from the Balkans is expected to have serious repercussions in Turkey, meteorologists have said, while many cities across Turkey have seen snowfall and cold weather over the last week.

Temperatures this week will decrease by 3 to 4 degrees Celsius, while coastal regions will drop to as low as minus 20 degrees Celsius. Meteorologists warned drivers to be careful on the roads.

Many cities across Turkey have also been hit by heavy snow and a cold front. About 530 villages in the eastern Black Sea region, including Gümüşhane, Bayburt, Rize, Artvin and Trabzon, were closed to traffic due to the snowfall, which started in the evening on Sunday and continued throughout Monday. Officials at the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality said the Disaster Coordination Center (AKOM) continues to confront the adverse weather conditions. While the Bosphorus Bridge had problems on Monday, with the span closed to traffic for about one hour, the municipality reported that 3,500 employees and 750 vehicles are working in İstanbul to salt the roads.

The province of Ordu currently has one meter of snow on the ground. Teams are working to clear the roads, with streets in 322 villages closed to traffic.

In addition to the road problems, airlines are also affected by the cold weather. Some scheduled flights between İstanbul and Erzurum were cancelled after the eastern province was hit by heavy snow and wintry weather Sunday night.

The İstanbul Waterworks Authority (İSKİ) issued an announcement and warned that the temperatures will drop on Monday and for this reason, pipes may freeze. İSKİ also said pipes should be properly insulated to protect them from bursting.

Hasan Aslan, the general manager of the Antalya Directorate of Agriculture, noted that the wintry weather was causing concerns with farmers and stated that in order to protect themselves from financial hardship due to agricultural loss, they should carry crop insurance.

İstanbul Technical University (İTÜ) was closed on Monday and Tuesday due to heavy snow, while civil servants suffering from disabilities have been given three days' leave.

Meanwhile, snow at one of Turkey's most popular skiing centers, Bolu-Kartalkaya, has reached two meters, meteorologists said on Monday. There are currently 1.15 meters of snow on Bursa's Uludağ Mountain and Kayseri's Mount Erciyes, which are also among Turkey's most important winter tourism areas.

The weather in Uludağ dropped to about minus 15 degrees Celsius. Meanwhile, the Bursa Meteorological Bureau warned people who wanted to travel to Uludağ that they should have a chain for their cars.

The snow, which started in Kayseri on Sunday night and continues to be a problem for locals, caused about 50 villages to be closed to traffic.

Hotels at Kartalkaya were completely booked after it snowed in Bolu for three days. Stating that the skiing season is good this year, hotels are pleased with the heavy snow and cold weather.

Halit Ergül, the general manager of the Grand Kartal Hotel, said the snow, the semester break and the full hotels have all conspired to make for a good season, even though it began snowing later than expected.

Police officer challenges shelter official

A dispute broke out on Sunday night in Ankara between a police officer trying to help a homeless person in the freezing weather and a municipal worker who initially refused the person entry into a shelter for the homeless. Ankara police were out looking for homeless people sleeping rough to get them into shelters to prevent them from dying of cold. One officer found a homeless person with mental disabilities freezing under a bridge and took him to a shelter.

However, the municipal officer on duty said that he could not authorize entry because it was too late in the evening. An argument ensued, and the police officer pointed out that it was the institution's responsibility to take care of the man or he would have to be taken to a police station. The municipal officer relented, and the homeless man was admitted to the shelter, which is now home to 25 individuals. *Ankara Today's Zaman*

Ankara, İstanbul blanketed by snow, eastern Turkey suffers freezing cold

29 January 2010, Friday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Snow covered İstanbul and Ankara again Wednesday as chilly weather continues to disrupt daily life. İstanbul was covered by snow on Wednesday night. The districts of Şişli, Avcılar, Halkalı and Bağcılar were badly affected by the heavy snowfall while 10 centimeters fell on the Anatolian side of the city.

Ankara was also affected by heavy snow, which caused difficult driving conditions. Ankara Municipality officials reported that 13 graders, nine diggers and many employees were working continuously to keep roads open to traffic.

Ankara Governor Kemal Önal stated that holiday leave is granted to disabled civil servants in the event of adverse conditions. Ankara civil servants with disabilities have been given three days' leave due to the heavy snow, the governor told the Anatolia news agency.

The State Meteorological Directorate said the effects of a cold front moving in from Siberia had been felt across Turkey. The snow was expected to disappear by yesterday afternoon.

Subzero temperatures continue to affect the provinces of the eastern Anatolia region. While many parts of Turkey were affected by a severe cold front this week, Erzurum, in the eastern Anatolia region, experienced the coldest night in Turkey this winter when the temperature plunged to minus 34 degrees Celsius.

Temperatures in other areas were also chilly on Wednesday night: minus 29 in Ağrı, minus 21 in Ardahan, minus 17 in Kars, minus 14 in Erzincan and minus 19 in Iğdır, meteorological officials reported.

A total of 519 villages in the eastern Anatolia region,

Freezing temperatures don't stop Van fishermen

Temperatures as low as minus 15 degrees Celsius have not stopped fishermen in the eastern province of Van. Turkey's largest lake, Lake Van, which is also the fifth largest lake in Europe, has an abundance of pearl mullet, a fish found nowhere else in the world, which earn fishermen revenue during the winter months. The amount of pearl mullet in the lake has increased in recent years after fishing them was banned in spring and summer. Even though thermometers show temperatures as low as minus 15 degrees, fishermen start early in the morning and collect fish from nets they left in the lake the previous day. Stating that he including 177 in Tunceli, 165 in Erzurum, 98 in Bingöl, 35 in Muş, 24 in Kars and 20 in Ardahan were closed to traffic due to heavy snow. Road crews are working round the clock to clear roads and open them to traffic. has been fishing in Lake Van for the past 18 years, Fahrettin Akdeniz said they caught 30 kilograms of fish each day last week, while they caught 150 to 200 kilograms daily this week, adding that the number of fish in the lake has been increasing as the weather gets colder. Akdeniz further stated that more than 100 people work as fishermen in Lake Van.

Turkey pledges €920 mln for new stadiums if Euro 2016 football host

Thursday, 28 January 2010 16:12

TIME TURK

Turkish Football Federation adjoined a letter of guarantee, signed by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Turkish government pledged 920 million Euro, a vital financing for new stadiums to be built if Turkey is chosen to host Euro 2016 European Football Championship.

Turkish Football Federation, or TFF, adjoined a letter of guarantee, signed by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, to its application file which will be submitted February 15.

TFF picked nine stadiums in eight cities to host Euro 2016 matches. Ataturk Olympic Stadium and Seyrantepe Turk Telekom Arena, which is under construction, in Istanbul; and Kadir Has Stadium in Kayseri are the existing stadiums. Other stadiums planned to be built in Ankara, Izmir, Konya, Antalya, Bursa and Eskisehir would all be used in the tournament to be held in the summer of 2016.

TFF Chairman Mahmut Ozgener said Thursday that getting full political support was very important to show determination.

Government's pledge is of vital importance for the federation in its bid to host world's third largest sports event, Ozgener said in a statement posted in TFF website.

Turkey competes with France and Italy to host the 2016 UEFA European Football Championship after Swedish-Norwegian joint bid failed. The host country will be chosen in May 2010. Italy and France have both hosted the event twice.

Turkish government plans to make investments of 27.7 billion Euro to improve country's infrastructure, transportaion network, health and education system in the next five years.

Turkey Season' in France continues with theater and dance events

Wednesday, January 27, 2010

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

'Turkey Season in France,' which started July 1, will continue until March 31. Turkish dance and theater groups will be guests of Paris' famous theater stages during February. Paris' historic Odeon European Theater will organize a special week for contemporary Turkish theater while there will also be a special night for the master of Turkish literature, Nazım Hikmet "Turkey Season in France," a cultural program bringing over 400 Turkish dance and theater projects to France, will continue until March 31.

The event is organized by the Turkish and French foreign and culture ministries in collaboration with CulturesFrance and the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, or İKSÜ.

During February, there will be various theater and dance performances, including a dance performance titled "DoKUMAN" (Document) by Mustafa Kaplan and Filiz Sızanlı on Jan. 29 at the National Dance Center in Paris' Pantin commune.

After working for Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality's theaters for 10 years, Kaplan, a significant figure in contemporary Turkish choreography, formed the TalDans Group with Sızanlı. "DoKUMAN" is a joint production from the Linz 2009 European Capital of Culture, the Montpellier Dance Festival 2009 and the 0090 Kunstenfestival.

"Güneşli Pazartesi" (Sunny Monday), a production by Garajistanbulpro, will take the stage at Pavillon Noir, home to Ballet Preljocaj, one of France's most important dance groups, in Aix-en-Provence on Jan. 29. The play from Bedirhan Dehmen and Şafak Uysal depicts friendship among men.

A night for Nazım Hikmet

On Feb.1, Paris City Theater Théâtre de la Ville will organize a night in honor of the greatest name in 20th century Turkish literature, Nazım Hikmet. During the evening, theater actor Genco Erkal will read a poem written by Hikmet during his imprisonment.

“Ashura,” which was first produced by Öcül Avkıran and Mustafa Avkıran in 2004 and has become a favorite play at Garajistanbul, will meet audiences at the Haxogene Theater in Meylan on Feb. 2, Dyonisos Theater in Cahors on Feb. 4 and Perpignan Theater in Perpignan on Feb. 5. The play, which has been seen by audiences in 18 cities in seven countries, is a joint production from the International Istanbul Theater Festival, Zürcher Theater Spektakel, Rotterdamse Schouwbourg, Utrecht Stadtschouwburg and the National Theater of Northern Greece. The play features the story of Anatolian people through songs in 12 languages.

Meanwhile, “Sur le Seuil” (In the Cradle), a French play written by journalist and writer Sedef Ecer and directed by Élise Chatauret, will take the stage at Fécamp Théâtre Le Passage on Feb. 4 and 5.

Starring Ariane Brousse, Frederique Mathieu, Tilbe Saran, Serra Yılmaz and Camille Voitellier, the play won awards from France’s most significant theater organization, Centre National de Théâtre (National Theater Center) in 2008.

Turkish theater week

Paris’ historic Odeon European Theater will organize a special week for contemporary Turkish theater. During the week of Feb. 13 to 19, Işıl Kasapoğlu, Zeynep Oral, Marc Sémo, Nedim Gürsel, Uğur Hüküm and Arnaud Littardi will deliver speeches during a panel discussion titled “Turkey, A Political Theater.”

COMMENTARY

Constitutional change: all or nothing

BÜLENT KENEŞ b.kenes@todayszaman.com

29 January 2010, Friday

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) recently drafted a bill to reduce the waiting time needed to hold a referendum on constitutional amendments from the current 120 days to 45 days, and it is apparently seriously considering overhauling the 1982 Constitution, drafted by the military dictatorship after the Sept. 12, 1980 coup.

The current Constitution ensured military tutelage over democratic politics and institutionalized damage done to this nation’s rights, freedoms and democracy.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan ordered a commission of academics and experts to draft a civilian constitution ahead of the parliamentary elections held on July 22, 2007, but this initiative later failed to culminate in concrete results, creating much disappointment and despair for people who had high hopes for it. We really hope he takes it seriously this time. We also hope that this initiative to draft a civilian constitution makes sure that Turkey evolves from a third-class “national security state” or a “semi-military republic,” where all sorts of restrictions on rights and freedoms are in place, to a true democracy, etching Erdoğan’s name in history.

Unfortunately, the words “constitutional change” do not ring the same in everyone’s ears in this country. Some believe amending only those articles of the Constitution that are problematic in the face of current problems will suffice. But Turkey has been playing the game of amending the Constitution for almost 30 years and keeping itself busy with trivial issues. Indeed, every government that assumed office since 1983, after the end of the direct military regime, frequently introduced constitutional amendments to Parliament. Almost all articles of the Constitution,

excluding those serving to preserve the main philosophy, spirit and fundamental issues that enable the military coup to maintain its tutelage over democracy (which are mostly related to the lawless position of the top judiciary and military within the system), have undergone amendment.

But, obviously, it is impossible to obtain a contemporary, democratic, pluralistic, participatory and libertarian civilian constitution by occasionally introducing limited amendments to a constitution that was drafted with a primitive, fascist, subversive and tutelary mentality, i.e., which was essentially tainted with despotism. If this had been possible in this way, I think we would have already attained a civilian and democratic constitution with all those amendments. However, we know well that this is not the case, and we can see that the Constitution has already been turned into a patchwork of incongruities and inconsistencies by introducing only palliative retouches to a constitution prepared by a military dictatorship and without tackling its despotic spirit and tutelary skeleton.

Then, if itemized, partial and on-demand constitutional amendments do not help this country get rid of the primitive military tutelage, what should be done instead is crystal clear: This Constitution must be given a drastic overall overhaul with a civilian, democratic and liberal perspective so that no constitutional amendment will be needed, at least in the near future. That is, we will dump into the darkness of history this distorted and perverted Constitution whose every institution is designed with an outdated mentality and which can no longer support Turkey but provides obstacles to the progress it deserves with its wording and spirit. In its place, we must draft a constitution that is civilian and democratic in its working and spirit and that is in harmony with today's pluralistic, participatory and liberal mindset.

Without abolishing in the constitutional and institutional sense the constitutional and institutional tutelary system introduced by the military coup of Sept. 12, 1980, it does not seem likely for Turkey, which certainly has the potential to take off rapidly, to jettison the problems that have been causing difficulty for some time. Take the Kurdish issue or the non-Muslim minorities issue or the fundamental rights and freedoms issue as an example. The real reason behind all of these issues is this institutional tutelage and the subversive Constitution that sustains it. Efforts to settle these issues without tackling the spirit of the tutelary, despotic Constitution will only serve, as they did in the past, to save the day and will not have lasting and sustainable consequences. Note that if you do not reposition the Constitutional Court as it should be in a contemporary democratic government by the rule of law via a new constitution, you cannot introduce democratic standards to the structure of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) as required by the rule of law. Without removing the army's shadow on politics, you cannot achieve a democratic judiciary or a fully functional Parliament and executive power. If you fail to give a truly civilian nature to the civilian judiciary, you cannot impose contemporary legal norms on the military judiciary. If you cannot inspect expenditures related to the defense budget or if you refrain from making the military accountable to civilian authorities or if you cannot contain the military judiciary within universal legal norms, your efforts to identify and penalize the juntas or illegal networks including military officers will prove futile. Any progress you seem to make in terms of dealing with such illegal networks will amount to nothing at the hands of the odd mentality that dominates the top judiciary, which is indebted to the military coup of Sept. 12, 1980 for its existence.

In sum, Turkey's democratic, liberal and civilian groups should realize the bitter truth: that the constitution-amending game we have been playing for the last 30 years has come to the point of "all or nothing." Everyone should know that it is not possible to reform the judicial system by

leaving out military-civilian relations or to introduce universal democratic standards to military-civilian relations by ignoring laws restricting freedoms or excluding the judiciary.

We should not deceive ourselves by assuming to have changed the Constitution only by amending a number of articles. We should not waste the country's precious time and energy in such flawed reform efforts. Instead, we should either allocate all our energy to completely change this primitive, fascist and tutelary Constitution or leave everything as is and accept that we live under a subversive regime and come to terms with it. Modifications do not serve anything but to keep everything as it is in this country.

The regime's disease

ETYEN MAHÇUPYAN

e.mahcupyan@todayszaman

29 January 2010, Friday

The military has never been so willing to overthrow the government. First we learned about coups planned between 2004 and 2007. These were interconnected and intended to lay the groundwork for an eventual military takeover.

Then the Kafes (Cage) action plan, which was apparently on the military's agenda in March of this year, was brought to light. And finally we had the opportunity to be informed about the Balyoz (Sledgehammer) action plan, which had been planned in painstakingly finer detail in early 2003. We were even able to listen to audio recordings about this plan.

For the general public to be able to learn about these plans and abortive coups, two prerequisites had to obviously be fulfilled, which is the case today. The first prerequisite was the existence of a newspaper that had the courage to publish said documents. The second is the existence of military officers who had the courage to leak said documents.

It is also clear that there is a military staff that wants the army to return to its real duties and that opposes keeping the country under military tutelage. The reason behind this is that a state of military tutelage spoils the army from the inside and enables unsuitable and unskilled people from becoming career holders as promotion and reassignment criteria in the army become increasingly dependent on political views and attitudes toward the coup process. This implies the exclusion of many military officers who see military service as a "career" and perhaps have the potential to pursue an international career in their own field. On the other hand, it would not be surprising if such intense efforts to plan and stage a coup were to create a "political" opposition within the army. Let us recall that in the last two elections, the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) had a crushing victory even in polls that were set up near military housing areas. As for all of the coup attempts that have been exposed thus far, they all share an interesting aspect. Each coup attempt foresaw provoking and manipulating the Muslim segment of society and thereby proving the existence of a "pro-Shariah" movement, which would then be used as justification to overthrow the government. This is actually not a new strategy. The military used a similar scenario in 1997 when it overthrew the Welfare Party (RP) through a military intervention on Feb. 28. Television channels and newspapers were filled with terrifying examples of reactionaryism during that time. But we have now learned that all those stories were fake and that people were hired to carry them out. We also know "Islamists" were made to look guilty in the process leading up to the death of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, a process in which many non-Muslims were targeted, and in the 2006 Council of State attack. The Cage plan also focused on the same point.

The most recently discovered coup plan, named Sledgehammer, also details activities that would be carried out in the name of the Muslim segment, including bombing two mosques. The sole purpose of the plan was to finish off the AK Party government. The Sledgehammer plan was created a few months after the election and includes information on the structure of the government to be set up after the AK Party and provides names of individuals that would be assigned to key positions in the bureaucracy, including the judiciary and diplomatic service. It also provides a list of journalists “to be used” and a list of journalists “to be arrested.” But in order for this scenario to be put into practice, the army must first go “into the field.” In other words, all public order services must be transferred over to the army in order for the explosions to take place and the Muslim segment to be manipulated. So it’s better if the country is first brought to the brink of war, and what better candidate is there than European Union member Greece? The Sledgehammer plan foresees increasing tension in the country and provoking Greece to shoot down a Turkish jet. To be on the safe side, if the Greek side doesn’t shoot down a Turkish jet, then the Turkish army will have to down one of its own jets. Describing such a preposterous plan, developed with the cooperation of close to 150 military officers, as a “war game” is a sign that we are facing a situation that must immediately be brought to an end. The issue isn’t just about the army wasting its energy on maintaining tutelage over politics. All these plans have to do with creating a false reality. We have an institution that is not only incapable of fulfilling its essential duties, but one that creates a false perception of Turkey, that perceives an ever-larger part of society as a threat and that creates conspiracies which include using weapons against its own citizens. We have a regime that has become ill. This situation must change at once. The solution is to urgently amend laws that exempt the army from civilian supervision and to create a new constitution that will restructure the high judiciary.

Is Erdoğan right in his complaint?

FATMA DİŞLİ ZIBAK

f.zibak@todayszaman.com

29 January 2010, Friday

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who frequently complains about the way some columnists write about his Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government, directed criticism toward some columnists who he said were provoking the government to do certain things.

Speaking at his party’s parliamentary group meeting, Erdoğan, without elaborating, said: “I beg their pardon, but some columnists are trying to provoke us. Do not provoke us. We know very well what we are doing. When we set off on our way, we set out knowing what we will do.”

Erdoğan’s remarks sparked a debate among columnists about what he could have meant by these statements and whether his complaints are justified.

Milliyet’s Aslı Aydıntaşbaş finds Prime Minister Erdoğan’s complaint entirely reasonable as she says it is very easy for some people to demand radical things when they are not in charge of the changes to be made. “Remove Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ from power! Dissolve the army! Abolish obligatory military service!” she cites as the radical demands of some circles. Aydıntaşbaş says that despite all its sins, shortcomings and wrongdoings, the Turkish military is the basic element of Turkey’s power and prestige. Considering the region in which Turkey is located and the global order, she says, the Turkish military is an institution that cannot be replaced. “If you put the military aside, there will be no Turkey left,” she says. In her view,

Erdoğan does not want to dissolve the Turkish military but wants to facilitate its transformation into a democratic order and have a mentality change, a modern structure and a new mission. “One of the most reasonable partners Erdoğan can have is the current command in the General Staff and Başbuğ because the important thing for Erdoğan is not to create tension but to get good results. His goal is not chaos but change. That’s why I find his complaint just,” adds Aydıntaşbaş.

Talking about the speculation over what Erdoğan could have meant by his statement, Sabah’s Nazlı Ilıcak says he could have emphasized the fact that as the person who has responsibility, he knows what he is doing and is taking steps carefully. “We journalists will continue to write what we think about certain issues and make our proposals. Erdoğan can benefit from them as much as he wants. He can also say it is easy for others who are not in charge to demand certain things. Making proposals to the government from a newspaper column is very different from being in the shoes of the government and carrying out those proposals by facing all the challenges,” says Ilıcak.

According to Star’s Mustafa Erdoğan, the prime minister is disturbed about articles thjat stress that the government should behave like a Western democracy when the control of the military by the civilian authority is in question. Erdoğan says the prime minister thinks such articles do not strengthen his hand and put the strategy he has in mind, which desires balance among state institutions, in a difficult position. “I think instead of making critical remarks about the few columnists who are responsible, Erdoğan should concentrate on at least taking the necessary measures that do no pose any risks to his strategy,” suggests Erdoğan.

Why isn’t a single military officer being suspended?

HÜSEYİN GÜLERCE

h.gulerce@todayszaman.com

29 January 2010, Friday

The Republican People’s Party (CHP) administration, and especially Deniz Baykal, insist on continuing to walk down the wrong path they’ve embarked upon. They turn to lies, thinking the entire society has lost its memory. This is called a “poisoning of the mind stemming from dismay,” and its first symptom is lying.

Junta supporters and Ergenekon supporters, including those in the media, have all taken a sip of this poison. They keep telling one lie after another, ignoring the voice recordings and documents that have been discovered. The second symptom of this poisoning is the expectation that something is “definitely going to happen at the last minute.” But they experience a bigger shock after every expectation and shred of hope. For example, the Taraf daily’s publication of the Sledgehammer plan with all of its details was a big shock for them. Now the indictment related to Poyrazköy has been accepted. It makes references to the Cage Operation Action Plan and includes information on plans to assassinate, attack by means of arson and threaten non-Muslims. In other words, it mentions a plan envisaging carrying out bombings against civilians and specifically students at the Rahmi M. Koç Museum. Let us recall that on May 10, 2009, dynamite was found in a submarine at the Koç museum.

Let us recall that the Cage Operation Action Plan was dated March 2009. But what did CHP leader Baykal say during his party group meeting on Tuesday? “The last coup d’état in Turkey took place on Sept. 12, 1980. There is no coup or anything like that, there is just coup ‘trafficking.’ The Sledgehammer coup plan was supposedly prepared in 2003. Seven years have

gone by. Many commanders have come and gone, but none of them saw it.” He talks about it as if recounting a fairytale.

March 2009 wasn’t too long ago; it was just last year. That means the junta was and is still alive because no action has been taken against it. It seems as though coup plans are modified every month according to the latest situation. They are constantly being updated.

This is a fact that Baykal, junta supporters and media advocates cannot and do not want to see. For example, this Cage action plan was discovered after a code on a CD belonging to Ergenekon suspect retired Maj. Levent Bektaş was deciphered. According to this plan of a junta within the naval forces, non-Muslims would be attacked and Muslims would be blamed in the hope of increasing foreign pressure on the Justice and Development Party (AK Party).

Acts that would be carried out under the plan’s “shaping public opinion” section included making threatening phone calls and sending threatening letters to Agos daily subscribers, publishing subscriber lists in the national press, publishing news stories about Agos and having columnists write about the paper. The most terrifying part of the plan was in the section titled “action.” Bombs were to be detonated in various neighborhoods of the Princes’ Islands off the coast of İstanbul.

Prominent minority right advocates were to be assassinated, bombs were to be detonated on docks with ferry services to the Princes’ Islands, a couple of selected popular non-Muslim businessmen and artists were to be kidnapped and arson attacks on cars, houses and shops in areas with a dense non-Muslim population were to be carried out on a frequent basis. Following coordinated acts with cell leaders, all sabotage, kidnapping and assassination plans would be blamed on targeted organizations.

Telling lies, distorting goals and proclaiming the coming of a “civilian coup,” despite all the coup plans and formations that have been exposed, will not protect the status quo. To the contrary, acting as if nothing has happened and thinking that they can save the barrel if they throw away a few rotten apples is only dragging them into a quagmire. As for Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ, it’s hard to understand him, too. How much longer are we going to see the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) suffer? In Section 8 of Law 657 on Civil Servants, employees under suspicion can be “removed from duty” for the sake of a sound trial. This is a precautionary measure taken against civil servants whose continued work is problematic. We wonder if there is nothing problematic with keeping military officers whose names have been mentioned in junta and coup plans on duty.

Burqa Rule

NICOLE POPE

n.pope@todayszaman.com

29 January 2010, Friday

A French parliamentary committee set up to study the burqa, or full facial veil, has just delivered its conclusions after months of research and hundreds of interviews.

The ruling Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) had initially foreseen a law criminalizing the facial veil. Falling short of backing this approach, which the commission recognized would be difficult to implement, it recommended instead a parliamentary resolution making it clear that any religious garment covering the face is considered an assault on human dignity and therefore not welcome in the French Republic.

This outcome will no doubt fail to satisfy those who wanted a major crackdown, while still managing to alienate many French Muslims, who feel they are being unnecessarily picked on since such garments are only worn by a few hundred Muslim women in France.

The full facial veil makes its wearer socially invisible and presents a challenge in liberal societies where interaction between men and women is considered normal. Security and women's rights are the two main arguments most often invoked in the debate. School teachers cannot hand pupils over to unidentified strangers claiming to be their mothers, advocates of a ban pointed out. While feminist arguments are invoked in support of a prohibition, the issue is made more complex by the fact that those who choose to hide themselves under full covering in Western Europe rarely fit the stereotype of the oppressed woman. In fact, the facial veil tends to be worn by modern young women who choose it as a way to express a different identity, often against the advice of their families. Jean-François Copé, head of the UMP parliamentary group, apparently conscious of this reality, advocated a ban precisely out of a concern that, as he told *Le Monde*, the burqa might become a chic fashion accessory.

Why young women should choose to render themselves invisible in their quest for a social identity is, of course, a question worth examining, but bans, sanctions and condemnations are unlikely to provide satisfactory answers. Nor does it fall within the remit of a parliamentary commission to interpret Islam and decide which particular garment fit its prescriptions.

For all the consultations that took place in France, it is hard to shake off the impression that politicians are still talking above the heads of those most directly concerned. In fact, the exchanges bear strong similarities with the heated polemic over the "turban" that divided Turkey a couple of years ago. At the time, the discussion often appeared limited to intellectual and political spheres and rarely involved the women most directly concerned.

It is no coincidence that this reflection on the place of Muslim religious symbols in French public life takes place just as France is busy debating its own national identity. Concerned about their country's place in the world and the decline of its cultural influence, some French people now appear to define their own values against those of an immigrant "other." To what extent this malaise, also felt in other parts of Europe, creates a sense of rejection among migrant communities and fuels radicalism is, of course, an important issue.

It is worth noting that France's clumsy attempt to deal with the integral veil has not been universally welcome in the Western world. In fact, many intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic have expressed their opposition to the French approach. The French Socialist Party (PS) too has distanced itself from the process.

Just like the recent ban on minarets in Switzerland, the French parliamentary recommendations will no doubt be seen in Muslim countries as yet another example of creeping Islamophobia. While the criticism is justified, it is unlikely that we will see much debate in the media of the Muslim world on the validity of forcing women to cover up in Afghanistan, preventing them to drive in Saudi Arabia or flogging a teenage rape victim while her assailant got off scot free as was recently the case in Bangladesh.

It is partly these excesses and the absence of a challenge from within the Muslim world that continue to undermine Islam in the eyes of many Westerners. Minority phenomena such as the burqa are seen as part of a broader radical movement, which represents a threat. While Westerners must combat prejudice and stereotypes, it also falls to Muslims to find ways of changing these perceptions.

We forgot everything, even the Kurdish Initiative

Thursday, January 28, 2010

MEHMET ALİ BİRAND

HURRIYAT

The agenda this time has hit a blown on everyone, everything.

We change it very often but I've never seen one that has made all us to practically forget about anything, considering the latest developments on the Turkish Armed Forces, or TSK.

Since the TSK is one of the untouchables in this country, claims against the military always attract the public. This time, content of the claims has increased the pleasure of attraction.

Questions like "Is the Balyoz (Sledgehammer) Operation an imaginary scenario indeed or is it a real coup plan?" have incredible provoked curiosity and rumors among people. From people who seek revenge to people trying to benefit from past experiences, or people acting for the sake of democracy or those who are frightened to lose laicism and to be governed by a religious system, almost all sects of society are alarmed and discussing the plan.

Democratic Initiative long forgotten

On top of the forgotten listen is unfortunately Democratic, or Kurdish, Initiative.

Until Taraf daily began to publish the Sledgehammer Operation plans, we kept talking about the Kurdish question and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, terror.

The initiative was victimized by mostly different tactics within the PKK and heavy pressures of the opposition.

But it is not finished yet, just halted for a while. The initiative will be revived in the days to come and given a start again.

There are so many different reasons for this stagnation period of the initiative:

- The government is not well prepared for the initiative, has failed to prepare the public mentally.
- The Republican People's Party, or CHP, engaged in fierce opposition.
- Kurds were confused as the PKK decision makers had differences of opinion so failed to take necessary steps.

What I was curious about was the TSK's attitude, what they did and did not raise objections to. I found during my explorations in Ankara that the TSK adopted more "understanding" attitude contrary to the opposition.

It is said that the TSK did not oppose to the initiative completely in the National Security Council, or MGK, meetings, neither in one-on-one talks between the Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ and President Abdullah Gül or Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. However, it seems that the TSK has some reservation on some of the details.

A top level official saying, "Soldiers is the one who really want a solution. They are the one who sees dangers involved and which directions we are being dragged into," was eager to emphasize the following:

"... Well preparedness and thorough explanations will not bring success to the Kurdish initiative. So, the government has finally realized this very well..."

I hope the government finds the best solution method soon...

* * *

Enough indeed with rhetoric over the 'aggrieved'

I agree with the CHP's criticisms against the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, at times, but disagree at others.

One the CHP's criticisms that I do agree with is the AKP's tendency to play with rhetoric all the time.

He is right!

The AKP is playing the aggrieved card brilliantly, exploiting feeling of mercy among people and keep scoring.

I think at this point, it's better to add that laic circles are doing everything in order for the AKP to play the aggrieved. Perhaps, they are unintentionally helping the AKP to increase credibility.

I wouldn't know if the AKP administration senses this but the public is tired with the play.

Baykal's remarks find audience. The AKP should take concrete steps and do whatever is necessary.

What do you think? Do you think the AKP will take action?

I don't think so.

Erdoğan will keep on complaining since he uses the situation masterfully. He will not give up on this, at least until the elections. On top, had any of the other parties not do the same, if they could've a chance? Let's question this.

Still, it is enough with playing the aggrieved.

Working as partners in Afghanistan

Wednesday, January 27, 2010

DAVID REDDAWAY

HURRIYAT

This is an important week for Afghanistan. It is also an important week for the regional governments and wider international community that are determined to help the Afghan government and people achieve political stability and economic prosperity. Turkey and the United Kingdom are due to play a key role, working together as we do on so many other issues. The terrorist attacks in Kabul on Jan. 18 were another appalling illustration of why we must remain committed to this effort. No political aim can justify such violence. The peaceful majority of the Afghan people should not be subjected to this sort of atrocity. They want our help. They need our help. They deserve our help.

Turkey has a lot to offer. The country has deep and longstanding ties with Afghanistan. Its support to Afghanistan today is substantial, including development assistance; strengthening stability through its Provincial Reconstruction Teams; training and capacity building; and political support through backing dialogue between Afghanistan and its partners. Turkey makes a real, very positive difference.

As a major regional player, Turkey of course has a strong national interest in Afghanistan's stability, security and prosperity. The British government strongly supports Turkey's efforts in coordinating and strengthening regional support for Afghanistan at this crucial time. The trilateral (Afghanistan/Pakistan/Turkey) summit and regional conference Turkey hosted in Istanbul this week rightly put Afghanistan's regional partners at the forefront of the international effort to support Afghanistan. British Foreign Secretary David Miliband has been invited to the conference as an observer. This will enable him to ensure that the international conference on Afghanistan hosted jointly in London on Jan. 28 by Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Afghanistan's President Karzai, and the U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, complements the regional commitment and the Afghan government's own efforts to develop Afghanistan's security, development and governance in President Karzai's second term.

As Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said when he visited London recently, this set of interlinked conferences will send a strong international message of commitment that we are together in supporting the Afghan people and their future.

We must not lose sight of the fact that this effort is not just about Afghanistan. The implications go much wider. Building Afghan stability is central to a long-term vision for the region and for the international community, in which extremism, violence, intolerance and criminality have no place.

We in the U.K. welcome and support the work being done by Afghanistan and Pakistan – aided by Turkey and the international community – to tackle these threats. Terrorism bred in the instability of the lawless border regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan has already hit other countries hard, including the U.K. Criminality seeps across borders, with the drug trade and its associated blights of organized crime, exploitation and violence undermining our societies and the rule of law. In a globalized world, all problems are shared problems. We simply cannot ignore what happens in Afghanistan.

This month's conferences in Istanbul and London mark a new stage as the international community shifts toward a more supportive and better coordinated role in Afghanistan. We recognize the importance of the task. We don't underestimate the challenges. We are determined to stay until the job is done; until Afghanistan can secure itself; and until the Afghan forces are ready to take full control. We hope this day will come soon, and everything we do – including this week's conferences – is designed to help reach that point. Afghanistan, fortunately, has many friends. The U.K. is proud to be in the front rank, despite the cost and sacrifice involved, and to be working as partners with our friends in Turkey and in the region.

As the military answers for internal threats...

Wednesday, January 27, 2010

SEDAT ERGİN

HURRIYAT

The subject of an imaginary military exercise by the 1st Army Commandership in March 2003 was a scenario on possible internal threats in which separatists, far-rightist (religious backwardness) groups and hard-liner leftists assumingly stir up a revolt in Istanbul and its vicinity.

The Balyoz (Sledgehammer) Plan plots – revealed by daily Taraf – remain as claims for now. However, officials have mostly confirmed the news stories published in Taraf are parts of a military drill scenario.

Therefore, I believe the said plans seem to be accurate. Apparently, relevant documents were leaked by a military officer in 2003.

Tanks in Sultanahmet Square

Taraf published an official presentation and relevant charts of the scenario the other day. The presentation seems to be supported with photographs and graphics. In the detailed plans, we see how military units of the 1st Army Commandership deal with a possible insurgency in Istanbul and its suburbs.

Staff officers in the 1st Army Operation department designed an in-depth operation plan as they were told. The operation scenario takes place under martial law.

In addition to the military's intervention, tanks on both sides of Istanbul take to the streets. The 1st Armored Brigade's tanks are involved in operations to bring law and order to the Gazi, Eyüp,

Sultanbeyli and Fatih neighborhoods. Check points are set up, TEM and E-5 highways and central points in the city such as Beyazıt, Sultanahmet, Gülhane, Aksaray, Bakırköy and the Gazi district are taken under control.

A detailed plan reflects the locations of tanks to be deployed: Üsküdar Demokrasi Square, Ümraniye Alemdağ Street old District Governorship Building, Kadıköy İskele Square... Concentration points for the detained are selected to be Burhan Felek Sports Arena in Üsküdar, Şükrü Saraçoğlu Stadium in Kadıköy, Netaş Guest House in Ümraniye and the Vefa Stadium in Karagümrük. The place for cross-examinations, according to the plan, is Ümraniye Prison.

210,000 people a mass threat in Istanbul

One of the striking documents in the presentation is an evaluation document about “Possible Threats and Capabilities of Internal Threats.” The total number of people the far-leftist groups can influence is given as 30-40,000 in the document. The number of people who can be affected by separatists is 50-60,000 as the number of people most likely to be influenced by far-rights and the religious is uttered as 100-110,000.

* A total of 210,000 people in Istanbul represent a potential for a mass revolt in Istanbul according to the scenario. And the number of militants to influence the masses is given as 400-500. It is possible to say many people we run across in the street are part of this scenario without being aware of it.

A new look to internal threats

Despite the disturbance caused, this is just a scenario on paper. As long as laws grant the Turkish Armed Forces, or TSK, the authority to defend the country against possible internal threats, the TSK will unavoidably make similar plans considering the notion of threat described in the National Security Political Documents and create scenarios.

As soldiers around the world approach the issue through security concerns, they have a tendency to maximize threats in order to lower risks.

But of course there is one point making things more difficult. As far as law and order is concerned, the situation in Turkey is not a piece of cake. Most recently not only suburbs in Istanbul but also critical points in the city have faced serious security weaknesses. Thus, officials do not have the luxury to act like everything is just fine.

Still, the scenario plotted by the 1st Army Headquarters reflects the need for reviewing “internal threats” in a new perspective, and that’s undeniable. This new perspective, however, should be more reasonable and balanced yet remain realistic.

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

Concealing the obvious

Thursday, January 28, 2010

YUSUF KANLI

HURRIYAT

The second leg of the intensified day-long talks between the Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders were to end Wednesday afternoon.

Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat – who has pinned his hopes for re-election in April 18 presidential polls to a success in at least on one of the headings being negotiated for the past 18 months – and Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias agreed to continue the talks with a fourth day-long meeting on Friday.

The meeting will be held in the hopes they reach an agreement or at least a partial agreement on the thorny “governance and power sharing” heading before the United Nation’s secretary-general, Ban Ki-moon, travels to the island for a two-day trip in a last-ditch effort to encourage the talks.

Talat declared in front of cameras with a grim face Wednesday evening that of the three headings to be discussed during the two rounds of intensive talks, no discussion had been held so far on the “EU matters,” “economy” headings and on the “governance and power sharing” heading, however, a partial agreement might be possible by Friday evening.

The statement of Talat was obviously a confession that put aside his deflated target of reaching an agreement on three of the six negotiation headings – governance and power sharing, economy, EU matters, property, territory and security and guarantees. Perhaps there will only be a partial accord or a “convergence paper” on the governance and power sharing heading. In reality, while confessing failure, Talat was still trying to conceal the bitter truth that has become obvious for people following the Cyprus talks process closely. Even in the “governance and power sharing” issue, the two sides are still far apart.

For example, the two sides have not yet reached a common understanding whether the new federation would be established by “two federated units” as Greek Cypriots say, or by “two constituent states” as Turkish Cypriots say. The description of how and by whom the new federation will be established is of course important as it clearly demonstrates how the Greek Cypriot side perceives their Turkish Cypriot partners: not as a state, but as a “unit.”

Under this heading, the two leaders have so far developed an understanding that the future federation will have a rotating presidency. How the presidency will rotate between the two constituent states remains a problem although an agreement on the issue eventually appears to be discernible.

Yet, the discord on how the president will be elected persists even though Turkish Cypriots have agreed to a great extent to the “weighted cross-voting” demand of Greek Cypriots.

Such an agreement would come provided the Greek Cypriots agree to compromise in some other areas, such as the establishment of a single aviation authority with two Flight Information Regions, one for each constituent state. Another agreement would be that until Turkey joins the European Union, Turkey should be accorded similar rights as Greece enjoys in Cyprus as a member of the EU. That, of course, included the famous rights, that included the right of free circulation of labor and capital, right to settlement and right to own property.

The two leaders have agreed that the new federation will have one international identity, one citizenship and one sovereignty. Yet, there is no accord from where that sovereignty will emanate, what residual sovereign powers the constituent states will retain and on the hierarchy of norms.

There is no convergence between the two sides either on the powers of the constituent states as regards foreign relations, external economic, commercial contacts and cultural relations, including sports, arts and education.

What the two sides have so far developed full understanding on is nothing new and, indeed, for the past two decades or so – or ever since the two sides started talking about a two-chamber legislature – there is a full understanding on the lower chamber.

In this understanding, the two communities of the island would be represented on the basis of population ratio or on the 7:3 basis, while in the higher chamber the two constituent states would be represented with an equal number of senators.

At the end of their fourth full-day meeting this week, which will occur the day Ban visits the island, that will be all the two leaders can herald as a success in that anticipated “convergence paper.” But, will that be a success? Or, would that not be yet another effort to conceal the obvious: a fiasco...

Or, shall we hope that the leaders who failed to achieve anything tangible over the past 18 months will come out Friday’s last eight-hour talks with a miraculous settlement deal?

A verdict, not necessarily justice

Thursday, January 28, 2010

BURAK BEKDIL

HURRIYAT

“Justice you shall get in heaven; here, you can only get a verdict.” That line is framed in the office of Constitutional Court rapporteur Osman Can, the jurist hero of liberal Islamists, Islamist liberals and their paragenetics. Mr. Can loudly boasts of his liberal political views and regularly captures several column inches in government-friendly newspapers.

Another jurist hero in the large pool of Turkish Pravdas has been Hasim Kilic, president of the Constitutional Court, ironically the only non-jurist member of the 11-judge chamber that rules on Turkey’s most contentious issues. A quick search would give you an encyclopedia full of endless praise for Mr. Kilic, the conservative liberal judge who isn’t a judge – and, by the way, does “conservative liberal” not sound rather like an aluminum pizza?

When, in 2008, Mr. Kilic appeared as the only judge who voted against a decision that found the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, guilty of violating the Constitution’s secular principles, a column in this newspaper referred to him as “the only righteous judge.”

When, last month, Mr. Kilic joined the 10 other members and voted in favor of a verdict that banned the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party, or DTP, I looked for similar praise for him – naturally in vain. Is the man a part-time righteous judge, then? We’ll probably never know. But when announcing the verdict against the DTP, Mr. Kilic said there was irrefutable evidence that proved the party was involved in pro-terrorist activity. So are we wrong to think that the words and independent vote of “the only righteous judge among a chamber of judges” should be credible enough to justify the verdict against the DTP? The yellow press would not comment. Last week, Mr. Kilic once again joined the “non-righteous judges” when another unanimous verdict was announced. This time, the Constitutional Court ruled to overturn a law that allowed civilian courts to prosecute military officers. Perhaps Mr. Can is right to think that “justice we shall only get in heaven; here we can only get a verdict.” So we got a verdict, not necessarily justice.

Although civilian jurisdiction for military personnel is too visibly a breach of the Constitution’s Article 145, we probably unanimously agree – except for the 11 judges, including Mr. Kilic – that military officers should be tried in civilian courts for crimes outside the sphere of their professional duties (duties that should in no way include plotting and/or committing coups d’état). No doubt that would be logical, more democratic and closer to the justice we shall get in heaven. But this is only part of the picture.

The principal maxim of the pro-government elite regarding the several legal proceedings against military officers (and the non-military opponents of the government) by civilian judges and prosecutors has been a loud “there may be human-rights violations and injustice, but let’s lynch

them all for the sake of democracy!” Only a few moderate voices have admitted that human rights and fair trials are indivisible. Now, two things:

In response to criticism that his government has never in the past seven and a half years fulfilled its pre-election pledge in 2002 to remove parliamentary immunities, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has often implied that stripping politicians (well, he means his party members, does he not?) of the legal shield against prosecution may cause unjust trials and politically motivated verdicts.

In reality, he may be right. Mr. Erdoğan, rightly or wrongly (and probably rightly), argues that without these immunities his party members could be unfairly prosecuted by judges with hostile political thinking.

It’s all fine if the prime minister thinks so. But if the Turkish judiciary is, as admitted by the prime minister, so politically biased, there must be bias in – at least – two ways. If there are anti-government judges who would give AKP deputies “a verdict,” and point to heaven for justice, there must also be other judges who would have a fetish about jailing officers and wink at them, pointing to the same dictum: Go seek justice in heaven.

Why should the military officers trust a judiciary the prime minister does not trust? More importantly, why should we, as ordinary people who don’t have either the parliamentary or the military immunities against prosecution, trust a judiciary that neither the government nor the military trusts?

Sadly, both the prime minister and the officers have good reasons not to trust a particular branch of the judiciary. Turkey will not be inching toward genuine democracy if officers are tried in hostile courts the elected do not trust for political reasons. Injustice is injustice, whether inflicted upon the politicians or the generals.

Gov’t determination on democratic initiative splits PKK in two

29 January 2010, Friday
ERCAN YAVUZ ANKARA
TODAY’S ZAMAN

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government’s strength of purpose in continuing its democratic initiative, which was launched last year to settle the country’s long-standing Kurdish issue, has led to dissidence among the top administration of the terrorist Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

According to information provided by intelligence units, the disagreement among the PKK’s top leaders, which started with the government’s initiative, deepened following the closure of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) by the Constitutional Court in December of last year, when a controversy erupted over DTP deputies’ resignations. Deputies of the now-defunct DTP first announced that they would resign from Parliament in protest of the court’s ruling but they reconsidered their action and decided to continue to serve.

While Murat Karayılan, the chief operative of the PKK, and high-level PKK commander Cemil Bayık thought the resignations were not correct, other leaders including Duran Kalkan, Mustafa Karasu and Ali Haydar Kaytan supported the deputies’ resignations and planned to launch a movement which would include them. In the end, the jailed leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, had the last word and the deputies established a group in Parliament after the independent

İstanbul deputy Ufuk Uras joined 19 former DTP deputies. However, even if this decision was favored by Öcalan, some PKK leaders were disturbed by the deputies staying in Parliament. Another development that led to a difference of opinion in the PKK administration was the recent series of operations against the Kurdish Communities Union, Turkey Council (KCK/TM), an organization that allegedly functions as the urban arm of the PKK and that is thought to have served the interests of Ergenekon, a clandestine terrorist organization charged with plotting to overthrow the government. On Dec. 18, Öcalan complained via his lawyers about extensions of Ergenekon in the PKK. "I noticed the links of some within the organization [PKK] with Ergenekon," Öcalan reportedly told his lawyers. On the other hand, another wing of the PKK's administration, known as hawks, have slammed the operations and regard them as a trap by the AK Party for the PKK.

Kalkan, Karasu and Kaytan, who are among the hawks, believe that the government's initiative is a plan to dissolve the PKK and they think Öcalan, who was expected to announce a roadmap in August for a solution to the Kurdish issue but did not, took this decision after discussing the issue with the government.

Over 1,500 children still missing in Turkey

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

29 January 2010, Friday

A total of 1,657 children who have gone missing throughout Turkey over the past 10 years have yet to be found, the Security General Directorate announced on Wednesday

The topic of missing children returned to Turkey's agenda last week when two girls went missing in Bingöl. The cousins were found dead five days later.

Speaking at a press conference, the head of the directorate's public order department, Özer Zeyrek, said 1,095 of the missing children are girls while 562 are boys, adding that about 700 of them are children who ran away from institutions run by the Social Services and Child Protection Agency (SHÇEK).

Zeyrek also said 1,462 of the missing children fall into the 13-18 age group while the rest are 12 years old or younger. A considerable number of missing girls in the 13-18 age group ran away due to a love affair, he claimed.

When asked if the figure is considered to be high, Zeyrek said no because the figures cover the past 10 years and include those who ran away from SHÇEK facilities as well as those who were later found by their families which then did not update officials about the situation.

Dismissing claims that they begin searching for missing children 24 hours after receiving notification, Zeyrek said a search begins as soon as officials are notified.

To make the tracking of missing children easier, an online database will be established after a protocol is signed by the State Ministry for Women and Family Affairs, Zeyrek said.

Kayseri kids still being sought

Three children from Kayseri went missing during the Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice) in late September of last year when they went out to collect candy. "We've been searching for the Kayseri children since eid. The Security General Directorate has formed special teams to look for them. The Kayseri Police Department, the Security General Directorate and police teams in

other provinces are continuing their search efforts. All possibilities are being looked into,” he said, adding that news claiming the search for the children has stopped is incorrect.

A newborn baby was kidnapped from a hospital in Bitlis by a woman who introduced herself as the baby’s mother. Zeyrek said the baby is also being sought. “We have a description of woman as well as of the car she drove away in. Search efforts continue,” he added.

Upon a question from a reporter over concerns that children who went missing in Bitlis and Kayseri were kidnapped by an organ mafia, Zeyrek said they have no leads to that effect but have not ruled out the possibility.
