

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD
TURKEY

Weekly Report on Turkey's Political, Geo-Strategic, Economic and Social Issues,
Period: 27TH August to 3 September- 2010.

Submitted By: Aasia Khatoun khattak

Presentation: 1ST September, 2010

Report no.135

News Outline

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	3
POLITICAL NEWS	5
• Turkish public supports police authority over terror suspects, research shows	
• Turkish PM promises to create new constitution after elections	
• Expert: Turkey's national security under threat if wiretapping claims true	
• Erdoğan renews call for CHP to lift scarf ban after referendum	
Geo-strategic news	9
• Mrs. Erdoğan raises TL 3.5 million for Pakistan's victims	
• Businessman Tamince sends 43 tons of aid to flood-stricken Pakistan	
• Turkey says Armenia border won't open during NATO exercise	
• Azerbaijan: Five dead in border skirmish with Armenia	
• Turkey says solution to Karabakh key for stability in Caucasus	
• Denmark opens court case against PKK-affiliated Roj TV	
• Turkey reaches out to diaspora, decides to pay less to lobbying firms in US	
• UN envoy cautions against haste in Cyprus talks	
• I hope my visit will boost economic relations with Bosnia-Herzegovina, Gül says	
• Sea piracy threatens global economy, Rear Admiral Ertuğrul says	
• Top US, Turkish military officials to discuss terms of Iraq withdrawal	
• Turkey welcomes resuming direct talks between Israel-Palestine	
• Armenia dismisses Gül's 'silent diplomacy'	
• Turkey takes over command of int'l task force near Somalia	
• Turkey's referendum campaign not lost in translation	
• German shift from coal to culture leaves Turkish workers behind	
ECONOMIC NEWS	23
• Turkish inflation rate rises, ending three-month drop	
• Russia's Gazprom in talks with Turkish groups	
• Turkish stock surge could signal expected 'yes' vote	
Social news	27
• Istanbul welcomes 'Sweet 16' in the 2010 FIBA World Championship	
COMMENTARY	29
• A rising Turkey without Europe?	
• Who is pro-yes and who is pro-no?	
• Turkish-US ties hardly 'strategic' anymore	
• Referendum: no longer a done deal	
• An expert's view on why 'yes'	

- Turkish army debates from Baku to Baghdad
- Benefits of a strong 'yes' vote in the referendum on Sept. 12
- [Opinion] Iraq War Ends for a Second Time; Good for Turkey...

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

SUMMARY-POLITICAL NEWS

An overwhelming majority Turkish people is alright with the idea of the police having a stricter authority and limits some of their fundamental rights when there is suspicion of a terror link, according to a research published by a university. The data extracted from 55,000 face-to-face interviews show that Turkey third from bottom among European countries where the survey was conducted .

If allegations that Israel received detailed information about all GSM mobile phone systems in Turkey before the Turkish General Staff purchased a wiretapping system in 2007 are true, then Turkey's national security is under severe threat, a telecommunications expert has said.

SUMMARY-GEO-STRATEGIC NEWS

A group of Turkish Businesswomen (TİKAD) raised TL3.5 million on Saturday for Pakistan's flood victims, at a fund-raising dinner coordinated by the Prime Minister's spouse, Emine Erdoğan.

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said yesterday that Turkey will not open its border gate with Armenia temporarily during an upcoming exercise of NATO, signaling a reversal of earlier statements that it was under consideration.

Three Armenian and two Azerbaijani soldiers were killed in an exchange of gunfire along the northern Nagorno-Karabakh frontline on Tuesday in the latest skirmish between the two warring sides.

Davutoğlu said all borders, including the Azerbaijani and Armenian borders, must be opened for a region to be transformed into a prosperous area. "The opening of the Turkish-Armenian and Azerbaijani-Armenian borders will bring peace and prosperity together. We signed protocols last year due to this perspective and we wanted normalization among all countries in our region," The foreign minister added that one-sided normalizations will not be lasting and even though the normalization has not reached the desired level in the past year, there has been significant progress in the peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute.

After countless complaints and petitions from the Turkish government over a number of years, on Tuesday Denmark's public prosecution opened a court case against Roj TV charges of helping to promote the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

UN envoy has cautioned against rushing into a deal to reunify war-divided Cyprus, saying such an agreement could fall apart.

UN envoy Alexander Downer said on Tuesday that Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Derviş Eroğlu need to "take time and get it right" because any accord must be approved by both communities in separate referendums.

Turkey welcomed the resumption of direct talks between Israel and Palestine after the efforts of the US. Turkish Foreign Ministry stated on Wednesday that it was important to avoid unilateral acts which would negatively affect the process as well as to restore the land conditions throughout the talks.

Armenia has dismissed remarks by President Abdullah Gül that the Turkish-Armenian reconciliation process has entered a phase of "silent diplomacy" and ridiculed the president by saying that "Turks must be talking to themselves, quietly."

Turkey will command a multinational task force to fight piracy and carry out surveillance in the shipping lanes close to Somalia from Sept. 1 to Dec. 1, 2010, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Thursday.

As Germany's former industrial backbone tries to transform itself from a coal-mining center into an enduring European culture capital, the residents of the Ruhr region, including many Turks, risk being left behind.

SUMMARY-ECONOMIC NEWS

Turkey's inflation rate rose to 8.3 percent in August, reversing a three-month drop as food prices increased.

Russia's gas export monopoly Gazprom is looking for another entry into the Turkish market with an eye to eventually bidding for Istanbul's gas distribution network, according to sources.

POLITICAL NEWS

Turkish public supports police authority over terror suspects, research shows

Wednesday, September 1, 2010

ERISA DAUTAJ ŞENERDEM

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

An overwhelming majority Turkish people is alright with the idea of the police having a stricter authority and limit some of their fundamental rights when there is suspicion of a terror link, according to a research published by a university. The data extracted from 55,000 face-to-face interviews show that Turkey third from bottom among European countries where the survey was conducted

The majority of people, regardless of nationality, age, standard of living or other background, is likely to accept limitations on their fundamental rights when there is suspicion of terror-linked people or actions, a recent study has found.

A research note on how much people in European countries and Turkey trust police forces and to what extent they would agree that police are given more authority with regards to the time they keep suspected militants in custody has been published by Bahçeşehir University's Economic and Social Research Center, or BETAM. The data was extracted from the 2008 European Social Survey, with 55,000 face-to-face interviews in 28 countries. In Turkey, the survey was conducted by the Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey, or TÜBİTAK. Some 2,385 people were interviewed in 40 provinces.

The report said about 57 percent of people interviewed in Turkey claimed they strongly believed in the police and 69 percent said they believed the police should be given authority by law to keep a terror suspect in custody until the suspect is proven innocent. "There have been serious improvements in the Turkish police forces recently," Dilek Aydemir, a sociology expert at the International Strategic Research Organization, or USAK, told the Hürriyet Daily News and Economic Review on Tuesday in an interview, adding that there has been an increase in policemen's education and awareness on issues such as human rights. She also said the police's communication with the public has become more efficient.

Police in Turkey can keep a terror suspect in custody for two days. This length can be extended up to seven days with 24-hour extensions on the basis of criminal court decisions. The UK has the maximum allowed detention time in Europe, whereas Spain, which is similar to Turkey regarding its long-lasting fight against domestic terror, allows its police to keep a suspect under custody for five days.

Turkey is third from bottom among countries where the survey was conducted regarding public support for increasing the police's authority over the time terror suspects are kept in custody, although the figure is still high (69 percent). "This is very important," said Aydemir, adding that she would have expected the northern European and Scandinavian countries, given their strong defense of social rights and democratic freedoms, to be more concentrated at the bottom of the list.

"I believe that the police should be allowed to take the time necessary when dealing with suspected militants," Serdar Erdurmaz, an international relations expert at the International Relations and Strategic Analysis Center's, or TÜRKSAM, Middle East desk, told the Daily News. "But the laws must define the conditions under which this time can be extended [by the police] very well."

Recalling EU reports that have alleged human rights violations by Turkish police forces, Erdurmaz said it was important to behave sensitively and set up rules and practices that do not allow any violation of human rights, although the time for suspects to be kept in custody may be extended.

Meanwhile, Aydemir said she found the time period for the police to keep a suspected militant already too long. "I believe using proactive strategies [to tackle the issue] would be a much better approach," she said, adding that the whole process of participating in terror activities had to be examined more thoroughly and that people, especially children, who become part of this process in some way should be considered victims as well as casualties.

"However, the strategies [for dealing with the issue] have progressed in Turkey," she said.

A striking fact in the research is how people in Scandinavian and northern European countries, in parallel with the high level of trust in their police forces, show strong support of giving police more authority over the time terror suspects are kept in custody. "People believe that the risk [coming from a possible terrorist act] cannot be tolerated, thus they are likely to agree with whatever it takes to avoid this risk," Halil İbrahim Bahar, another USAK sociology and police expert, told the Daily News. He also said the feeling of being at risk, especially regarding threats from terror activities, is not real, but rather something perceived by people.

Bahar expressed his reservations at the methodology used in the survey, saying that it would have been better to ask only what people's trust in the police forces was, rather than asking for their trust in a number of other institutions simultaneously, although he agreed that the results gave hints to people's general tendencies.

In the survey, respondents were asked: "For each institution name I will read now, please give points from 0 to 10 to show how much you personally trust in the institution: Police." Zero meant no trust and 10 meant full trust and then the answers were broken down into high (57 percent, medium (23 percent), low (19.5 percent) and no answer (0.5 percent) categories.

Ebru Canan, the author of the research note, told the Daily News that they were planning to extend the study and look at people's tendencies over time, rather than for a certain year. "We intend to look at [other variables such as] whether people trust in their judicial system and whether terrorism is intensively present on their country's agenda, among others," she said.

Turkish PM promises to create new constitution after elections

Friday, September 3, 2010

ISTANBUL - Daily News with wires

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan promised Friday that his party would make a new constitution after elections in 2011.

Speaking at a rally in the southeastern province of Diyarbakır with a large group of deputies, Erdoğan said the Sept. 12 constitutional referendum would be one of the most important moments in Turkey's history and would open the doors to a new constitution. "People, democracy and freedoms will be the winners that day," he said, calling on locals to vote "yes" in the referendum. Erdoğan said the ruling Justice and Development Party,

or AKP, represents all segments of society in its attempts to improve democracy and freedoms in Turkey.

Referring to recent debate over whether Erdoğan would speak about Turkish unity in Diyarbakır, the prime minister said he has never made conflicting speeches in different parts of Turkey. “Our problem is the unity of Turkey, we work for that,” he said, adding that they believe those who say “no” in the referendum also deserve respect. “This is why we find a boycott undemocratic,” said Erdoğan.

Almost all the members of Cabinet and all the deputies from eastern Turkey were introduced to the stage before the start of the rally. There were 2,750 police officers on duty to provide security during Erdoğan’s visit.

Expert: Turkey's national security under threat if wiretapping claims true

If allegations that Israel received detailed information about all GSM mobile phone systems in Turkey before the Turkish General Staff purchased a wiretapping system in 2007 are true, then Turkey's national security is under severe threat, a telecommunications expert has said.

The Bugün daily quoted remarks from the expert yesterday, who preferred to remain anonymous since he is an on duty state official. “If this happened, it means that Turkey indirectly told Israel to ‘track and wiretap all phone calls, even those encrypted, through satellite.’ If these claims turn out to be true, our national security will be severely damaged. The communications of all high-level state officials -- from members of the government to bureaucrats -- can be illegally monitored and recorded,” the official told the daily.

The state official, who gave detailed information about the system known as the Thuraya Satellite Communications Monitoring or Interception System, said none of the three institutions which are authorized to wiretap phones are equipped with the system available at the General Staff’s Electronic Systems Command (GES). “The institution which has this system can wiretap thousands by bypassing the [Telecommunications Directorate] TİB and those who are tracked won’t notice anything at all,” he said.

The Taraf daily reported on Monday that Deputy Chief of General Staff Gen. Aslan Güner ordered the purchase of a wiretapping system from Israel to monitor members of the terrorist Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in 2007, but instead illegally wiretapped nearly 2,000 civilians, including prominent figures.

According to Taraf, Gen. Güner, who was at the helm of the General Staff’s intelligence department in 2007, wiretapped nearly 2,000 civilians with a wiretapping system purchased for GES. However, according to a law that was passed in 2005, the ability to wire tap telephones was put under the authority of three institutions: the National Intelligence Organization (MİT), the National Police Department and the gendarmerie. A court decision is needed even for those institutions to wiretap a phone. When a court decision is issued for the wiretapping of a phone, it needs to be approved by the TİB. Thus, the GES does not have any legal authority to wiretap phones in Turkey.

The military officer who revealed Güner’s alleged illegal activities on condition of anonymity also told Taraf that before Israel sold the wiretapping system in question to Turkey, it received detailed information on all GSM mobile phone systems in Turkey. “All of Turkey’s GSM data is in the hands of Israel, and it can wiretap us whenever it wants,” the officer said.

Jurists say if the claims are true, Gen. Güner would have committed three crimes: illegally purchasing a wiretapping system, illegally wiretapping phones and providing Israel with all of Turkey's GSM codes.

General Staff statement found unsatisfactory

Transportation Minister Binali Yıldırım announced on Tuesday that he had ordered the ministry's Information Technologies and Communications Authority (BTK) to launch an investigation into the illegal wiretapping claims.

The General Staff gave some details about the initial findings of the administrative probe launched on Monday into the claims, stating that a judicial investigation has also been launched in order to determine whether the system was used for purposes other than wiretapping terrorists. The statement said the purchase of the system was all in accordance with relevant laws, but Taraf says the General Staff by no means have the authority to purchase a wiretapping system and wiretap individuals. A TİB official who spoke to Taraf on condition of anonymity said the General Staff committed a constitutional crime by violating the freedom of communication. The official underlined that the TİB was not informed about GES's wiretapping acts and added that directorate will investigate the claims.

The General Staff also said in the statement that the system was included in the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) inventory in May 2008 while Gen. Güner was assigned to the 4th Army Corps Command and that the general left his post in August 2007. Noting that this is true, Taraf maintained that Gen. Güner was assigned back to the General Staff as the deputy chief of General Staff in 2009 and that GES has been under his command as well. The General Staff argued that the technical equipment for the system was installed near borders to wiretap terrorists outside the country. However, Taraf says the system cannot wiretap phones at a distance of more than 30 kilometers. The daily also provided a document signed by Gen. Güner ordering the wiretapping of individuals inside Turkey as evidence.

Oran files complaint against Güner

Among the nearly 2,000 individuals whose phones were allegedly wiretapped through the wiretapping system in question were academics Baskın Oran and Doğu Ergil; former minister Fikri Sağlar; actor Kenan İşık; Equality and Democracy Party (EDP) leader Ziya Halis; Kurdish intellectual and author Orhan Miroğlu; Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) deputies Sırrı Sakık and Sabahat Tuncel; and former Democracy Party (DEP) deputy Leyla Zana.

Oran has been the first individual to file a criminal complaint against Gen. Güner. Submitting her client's complaint to the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office on Wednesday, lawyer Oya Aydın said the illegal wiretapping of civilians by a high-ranking military official is a crime which should be immediately investigated. The petition demanded that Gen. Güner and other military officers found to be involved in the scandal be charged with abuse of power, violation of privacy and violation of the privacy of personal communications.

03 September 2010, Friday

TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Erdoğan renews call for CHP to lift scarf ban after referendum

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has renewed his call for the Republican People's Party (CHP) to support efforts to lift Turkey's controversial headscarf ban once the Sept. 12 referendum is complete, in a move that tests the CHP's stance regarding the Islamic garment. Addressing CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the prime minister said: "If you are honest and sincere, we are ready to solve the headscarf problem. Let's sit together and take steps toward a solution on Sept. 13."

Erdoğan's remarks came during a Justice and Development Party (AK Party) rally in the northwestern province of Edirne on Tuesday.

Turkey's longstanding headscarf issue was swept back onto the agenda last week after Kılıçdaroğlu pledged to solve the issue if his party came to power. "I promise that the CHP will allow people to wear the headscarf. The prime minister will see. He couldn't manage it, but we will," the CHP leader vowed.

However, Erdoğan expressed doubts about the CHP leader's sincerity on the headscarf issue.

"Kılıçdaroğlu keeps backpedaling on his pledges. He goes to Batman and says his party will introduce a general amnesty [for members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)]. But when he returns to Ankara, he retreats from his pledge. Then he goes to Tunceli and renews his pledge for a general amnesty. In Kayseri, however, he says the contrary. He says he did not mean a general amnesty. And in İstanbul, he says that his party will solve the headscarf problem. But what happens next? Women wearing the black chador are kicked out of the CHP rally buses," the prime minister said.

In March 2009, CHP members attacked a woman wearing a chador who tried to get on Kılıçdaroğlu's bus. The woman was thrown from the bus, suffering minor injuries. The CHP's failure to appear sincere in its support for the lifting of the ban stems from past disappointments arising from previous promises it made to resolve the headscarf issue -- promises that went unfulfilled. In early February 2008, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party), with the support of the opposition Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), passed a constitutional amendment that would have lifted the ban on the wearing of headscarves on university campuses. However, upon an appeal by the staunchly secular CHP and its ally, the Democratic Left Party (DSP), the Constitutional Court ruled that Parliament had violated the constitutionally enshrined principle of secularism and annulled the amendment.

Erdoğan also slammed a CHP party member's recent calls for a compromise on the way the headscarf is worn. "It is not a must to cover the entire hair in the traditional style," CHP Council Member Sencer Ayata said, hinting that female students could be allowed to enter university campuses if they agreed to leave some parts of their heads uncovered. "What kind of freedom is this? Do they say similar things for uncovered girls? Do they discuss whether uncovered female students should wear stretch pants or baggy trousers?" he asked.

2 SEPTEMBER 2010

TODAYS ZAMAN

Geo-strategic news

Mrs. Erdoğan raises TL 3.5 million for Pakistan's victims

A group of Turkish Businesswomen (TİKAD) raised TL3.5 million on Saturday for Pakistan's flood victims, at a fund-raising dinner coordinated by the Prime Minister's spouse, Emine Erdoğan.

In a fast-breaking dinner, or iftar, Emine Erdoğan, urged guests to donate money to Pakistan: a country she said had helped Turkey during its War of Independence and after the Marmara earthquake in 1999. With similar remarks, State Minister Egemen Bağış also encouraged businesswomen to donate to help heal wounds in Pakistan.

Erdoğan will visit the flood-stricken country early September, personally delivering aid to the flood's victims.

During the fund-raising dinner, Semahat Arsel donated TL500,000, Süleyman Varlıbaş donated TL350,000, and Yiğit Bulut on behalf of Ciner Group donated TL300,000.

Erdoğan herself donated TL100,000.

In addition, Humanitarian Relief Foundaiton (İHH), a Turkish aid NGO, is expected to send a cargo plane to Pakistan today, carrying 35 tonnes of humanitarian aid – including medicine.

İHH presently has 15 workers in Islamabad and recently sent a train carrying 3,000 tonnes of humanitarian aid. The foundation presently provides hot meals to 5,000 people in worst-hit flood areas and meets the food needs of displaced families living in three schools in the capital Islamabad.

Meanwhile, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) secretary general Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu arrived in Pakistan on Sunday to kick-off a conference aiming to coordinate OIC member states' humanitarian response to flood-affected areas.

Pakistan's worst floods in decades have destroyed villages, bridges and roads, and killed up to 1,600 people. More than four million persons have been displaced by flooding and there is widespread concern for the country's recovery.

30 August 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Businessman Tamince sends 43 tons of aid to flood-stricken Pakistan

Famous businessman Fettah Tamince, the owner of the Rixos hotel chain, has contacted aid association Kimse Yok Mu to donate 43 tons of aid for Pakistan, which has been devastated by floods. Kimse Yok Mu's vice president, Eyüp Tok, explained that the first donation made from Turkey to Pakistan came from Tamince.

Tamince's donation included 650 tents, 500 camp beds, 2,000 carpets, 6,000 blankets, 100 generating sets and radio telephones, 13,000 cleaning products and packages of food. Tok also announced that aid distribution for Pakistan has been continuing since Aug. 16, especially in the states of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He emphasized that the organization has contributed 30 tons of food and water so far.

Flooding has killed more than 1,600 Pakistanis in the last couple of weeks and left 20 million homeless. So far Turkey has sent \$10 million in financial aid and 244 tons of relief support, including vaccines and other medical supplies, to Pakistan. Turkey has also sent a 42-member medical team, two fully equipped mobile hospitals, an ambulance and a truck for medical rescue efforts. The Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay) is also prepared to deliver 500 pre-fabricated homes and larger tents that will provide long-term protection for those affected by the floods.

28 August 2010, Saturday

Turkey says Armenia border won't open during NATO exercise

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said yesterday that Turkey will not open its border gate with Armenia temporarily during an upcoming exercise of NATO, signaling a reversal of earlier statements that it was under consideration.

“This exercise is for entirely humanitarian purposes and it is about extraordinary circumstances. As a NATO member Turkey will, of course, participate in it,” Davutoğlu told reporters in the Doğanşehir district of the central Anatolian province of Konya, when asked to comment about Azerbaijani opposition to a temporary opening of the Turkish-Armenian border. “As I have told the Azeri media earlier, opening of the border, even temporarily, is out of the question. Unnecessary rumors should be avoided,” Davutoğlu said.

Earlier in the day, Davutoğlu told an Azerbaijani television that there was no plan to open the border during the exercise. “Our approach [with regard to the exercise] is humanistic. But there is nothing on the agenda with respect to opening of borders, this is not an issue of debate,” Davutoğlu told Azerbaijan's ANS television.

Davutoğlu's statement is an about face in Turkish policy as Foreign Ministry officials have earlier confirmed to Today's Zaman that Ankara will participate in a disaster response exercise called “Armenia 2010” organized by NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center (EADRCC) slated for Sept. 11-17. Turkish plans to open the border during the exercise were met with protest from Azerbaijan, Ankara's regional ally and a key energy supplier.

In comments earlier this week, a senior Azerbaijani official has said opening the Turkish-Armenian border will neither be in the interests of Turkey nor Azerbaijan. Ali Hasanov, head of the Azerbaijani Presidential Administration Social and Political Department, told reporters this week that opening the Turkish-Armenian border will simply “untie the hands of the occupying regime [Armenia].”

Azerbaijan and Armenia are at war over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh territory, which Armenia currently controls, and Azerbaijan frequently vows to resume war if diplomatic efforts aimed at settling the protracted conflict fail.

Azerbaijan aims to economically deprive Armenia through keeping it out of regional economic projects, with a hope that the former Soviet republic will withdraw its troops from the Nagorno-Karabakh. In this framework, Azerbaijan, which is preparing for a war with Armenia as a last resort, also stridently opposes opening of the borders between Turkey and Armenia, claiming the doing so will revive the Armenian economy and thus strengthen the Armenian military.

Recalling that Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and President Abdullah Gül have repeatedly stated that the borders will not open until Armenia reaches a constructive position on the Nagorno-Karabakh, Hasanov said Azerbaijan believes the border will not open until all of the conditions are met.

Turkey shut down its borders with neighboring Armenia in 1993, in solidarity with its Turkic ally, Azerbaijan, to protest Armenian occupation of 20 percent of Azerbaijan's territory.

In contrast, Mehmet Fatih Ceylan, head of the Foreign Ministry Department for Eurasia, said in an interview with private Azerbaijani Trend news agency on Tuesday that borders

with Armenia will likely be opened during NATO exercises. He also said the NATO exercises could be cancelled if Turkey does not give its consent to the NATO convoy to pass through its borders with Armenia.

Ceylan said Ankara will reject the offer if NATO carries military equipment through Turkey's territory for exercises in Armenia. "Given that the exercises will take place in emergency situations, Turkey will likely open its border with Armenia only for the transportation of necessary equipment for the NATO exercises," he noted.

On the same day, Azerbaijani ruling party, New Azerbaijan Party (YAP) Executive Secretary Ali Ahmedov told reporters that falsified news is constantly being leaked about the opening of the border by Armenia and that they are purposely attempting to destroy Azerbaijani-Turkish relations. "I believe that Azerbaijani society should treat with respect and confidence statements made by Turkish ruling circles that the border will only open after the liberation of Azerbaijani lands," the official said.

In a statement in July, the Foreign Ministry stated that a possible border opening would only be for the purposes of the exercise, dismissing prospects for opening of the border as part of normalization in Turkish-Armenian relations. The statement said an "exceptional and temporary" opening of the border was under consideration in case Turkey is asked to allow the overland transfer of the material to be used in the exercise to Armenia. Other comments and reports regarding this issue do not reflect the truth," said the statement.

'End to violence is priority'

During his visit to Konya, Davutoğlu also said an amnesty for the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was not a topic of discussion for today. "The first priority is that the PKK lay down their arms," Davutoğlu explained. When asked about prospects for general amnesty for PKK members, something which main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu said he might support, Davutoğlu responded, "It would be appropriate to assess specific issues when the right time comes."

27 August 2010, Friday
TODAYS ZAMAN

Azerbaijan: Five dead in border skirmish with Armenia

Three Armenian and two Azerbaijani soldiers were killed in an exchange of gunfire along the northern Nagorno-Karabakh frontline on Tuesday in the latest skirmish between the two warring sides.

The Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense accused Armenians of attempting to cross the contact line that separates Azerbaijani and Armenian-controlled territories in the Western Azerbaijani province of Terter on Tuesday afternoon. It also said Armenian troops attacked Azerbaijani military installations.

The Ministry of Defense said three Armenian soldiers were killed and several others injured during the violent clashes between the two armies. Two 19-year-old Azerbaijani soldiers were also killed during the bloody firefight.

The clash follows conflicting reports about an Azerbaijani soldier who Azerbaijan says was captured this week by Armenian forces. Armenian authorities say he deserted, while the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense says he might have lost his way back to a military facility and "mistakenly" went to the Armenian side.

Armenia, however, dismissed the Azerbaijani statement on Wednesday, saying that "actually, it was quite the contrary." Armenian Defense Minister Seyran Ohanyan said an

Azerbaijani sortie was prevented after Armenian border guards took retaliatory measures and “the subversives” escaped, suffering losses, Armenian news portal Panarmenian.net reported on Wednesday.

However, in a habit of spreading misinformation, Ohanyan said, Baku reported two Armenian soldiers killed and one injured. “The Armenian army always keeps alert and any attack is repelled,” he added. The last such incident took place in late June of this year, when four Armenian troops and one Azerbaijani soldier were killed in an exchange of fire on the line of battle, just a day after Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and his Armenian counterpart, Serzh Sargsyan, met under Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group auspices to discuss the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process.

More than a decade of mediation led by Russia, France and the United States has failed to produce a final peace deal and Azerbaijan has said it may use force to try to regain control of Nagorno-Karabakh. Tension has increased since Armenia and its traditional foe Turkey, which has close ties with Azerbaijan, reached a historic rapprochement last year.

The dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia remains a threat to stability in the South Caucasus, an important route for oil and gas supplies from the Caspian to Europe.

02 September 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey says solution to Karabakh key for stability in Caucasus

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has said solving the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict is necessary to transform the Caucasus into a peaceful, stable and prosperous region. “There are certain bases of our strategy toward the Caucasus region.

We are going to great efforts to make it successful. In this vein, the resolution of regional conflicts, particularly the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict, is necessary to transform the Caucasus into a peaceful, stable and prosperous region,” Davutoğlu told reporters at Kars Airport on Wednesday during his visit to Ağrı and Iğdır.

The Caucasus is plagued by three perennial full-scale armed conflicts -- in South Ossetia and Abkhazia between Russia and Georgia and in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Frequent border skirmishes in Nagorno-Karabakh and the August 2008 war between Georgia and Russia are signs that the territorial conflicts in the region are not really frozen.

Davutoğlu said all borders, including the Azerbaijani and Armenian borders, must be opened for a region to be transformed into a prosperous area. “The opening of the Turkish-Armenian and Azerbaijani-Armenian borders will bring peace and prosperity together. We signed protocols last year due to this perspective and we wanted normalization among all countries in our region,” Davutoğlu noted.

The foreign minister added that one-sided normalizations will not be lasting and even though the normalization has not reached the desired level in the past year, there has been significant progress in the peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute.

02 September 2010, Thursday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Denmark opens court case against PKK-affiliated Roj TV

After countless complaints and petitions from the Turkish government over a number of years, on Tuesday Denmark's public prosecution opened a court case against Roj TV charges of helping to promote the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

The Turkish Foreign Ministry welcomed the move and in a written statement it stressed that the Danish government made the right decision, a decision "in line with its international obligations regarding the fight against terrorism."

"We expect that these terrorism-supporting media organizations that encourage the use of violence will be punished appropriately by the time the legal process is complete," the statement said.

However, according to Sedat Laçiner from the International Strategic Research Organization (USAK), the Danish move against Roj TV is 'too little, too late.'

"Since the very first day Roj TV was working as the propaganda arm of the PKK and promoting terrorism. If al-Qaeda opened a television channel in Denmark, they would close it immediately," he said. According to Laçiner, Denmark finally started to move against Roj TV because of pressure from Washington.

"Turkey was asking for help from the US administration to eliminate the PKK in Europe. The Americans applied pressure to Denmark," he told Today's Zaman. Roj TV broadcasts with a Danish broadcasting license, although it does not have any studios in Denmark.

Top Danish prosecutor Joergen Steen Soerensen said that Roj TV is helping promote the PKK, which is listed by many countries – including the US – as a terrorist organization. According to Soerensen, Roj TV has "persistently" aired shows consisting of interviews with PKK members and its supporters while also profiling skirmishes between PKK members and Turkish forces. The station's content was "aimed at promoting and supporting the activities of the terrorist organization PKK" and its political wing, Kongra-Gel, the prosecutor said.

The programs "must be regarded as having the characteristics of propaganda in support of PKK," Soerensen said. The charges came after "extremely comprehensive investigations" of the connections between Roj TV and PKK, he added.

Mesopotamia Broadcast A/S METV, a company supporting Roj TV that is not directed by any person – has also been charged. Danish Justice Minister Lars Barfoed said it was up to a court of law to consider Roj TV's activities. In a written statement, Barfoed said that he supported the prosecutors' request to bring formal charges against the backers of Roj TV for "promoting the activities of a terrorist organization."

Prosecutors also said they would ask the Danish Radio and Television Board to revoke the station's license – which was issued over six years ago – because of criminal violations.

The charges derive from Article 114 of the Danish Criminal Code which stipulates that it is a criminal offense to promote the activities of an individual, group or association that commits or intends to commit acts of terrorism.

According to Danish journalist Lasse Ellegaard from Information newspaper, the decision of the Danish government is linked to the appointment of former Danish Prime Minister Andres Fogh Rasmussen to the post of secretary-general at NATO.

Ankara had been opposed to Rasmussen's appointment to the position because of his inaction concerning the publication of cartoons insulting the Prophet Muhammad and his indifference to Roj TV's activities. Ankara gave the green light to his appointment to the top job on three conditions: he would apologize to the Muslim world, Roj TV's broadcasts were to be censored and a Turk was to be appointed to NATO as deputy secretary-general. Via the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Rasmussen increased his dialogue with the Muslim world. The Danish police launched an investigation into Roj TV, and Hüseyin Dirioz recently was appointed as deputy secretary-general at NATO.

Ellegaard added that Danish prosecutors are indicting the companies behind Roj TV but are not bringing charges against any individual person.

"This means Danish authorities are trying to make a soft landing. They don't want any riots on the streets, instead seek to merely cancel the broadcasting license," he said and added that Danish media were highly interested in the case because it could establish the boundaries of media freedom.

Danish-Turkish relations have long been strained over Kurdish groups based in Denmark. In 1995, a political arm of the PKK opened its fourth European office in Copenhagen, sparking protests from the Turkish Embassy. The office later closed due to a lack of resources. In 2000, Turkey protested that a Kurdish-language satellite television station, Mesopotamia TV, was allowed to broadcast from Denmark to Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. In 2005, Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan boycotted a news conference in Copenhagen to protest the presence of Roj TV journalists.

02 September 2010, Thursday
TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkey reaches out to diaspora, decides to pay less to lobbying firms in US

Ankara is preparing to pay lower fees for services received from two lobbyists currently representing the Turkish government in the United States while also planning to intensify and diversify its activities at the US Congress via support from the US-based Turkish diaspora.

The Turkish government is among the foreign clients of the Gephardt Group and Fleishman-Hillard, a leading strategic communications firm. Speaking to reporters in Washington on Monday, Turkey's Ambassador to the US Namik Tan said Turkey will soon pay 20 percent less in fees than it currently pays to the two companies.

The government's contract with the two lobbyists recently expired. The Turkish Embassy in Washington conducted performance assessments of the companies and persuaded them to accept a 20 percent reduction in fees in the new contracts to be signed.

The embassy, meanwhile, advised Ankara to approve the new draft contracts with the 20 percent reduction in fees. The government is expected to make its final decision on the issue in the coming days.

Eager to maintain closer contact with the Obama administration, Ankara, meanwhile, will adopt a new communications strategy on Capitol Hill, with Ambassador Tan defining this strategy as "meeting with all circles."

While admitting that the US administration has been having some difficulty persuading Congress to approve a request by Turkey for weapons procurement, Tan, however, said

claims suggesting the imposition of an “arms embargo” by the US against Turkey were “groundless.”

In addition to efforts to diversify channels of official communication with the US administration and attempts to get the US-based Turkish diaspora involved in unofficial lobbying activities, the Turkish government is also trying to restore ties with the Israeli lobby, which is seen as the main reason for the negative atmosphere at the US Congress vis-a-vis Turkey.

Accordingly, a Foreign Ministry delegation led by Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu — which last week had talks with several senior US officials from the departments of state, defense and commerce — also met with representatives of some Jewish organizations in the US capital.

01 September 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

UN envoy cautions against haste in Cyprus talks

UN envoy has cautioned against rushing into a deal to reunify war-divided Cyprus, saying such an agreement could fall apart.

UN envoy Alexander Downer said on Tuesday that Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Derviş Eroğlu need to “take time and get it right” because any accord must be approved by both communities in separate referendums. Cyprus was ethnically split in 1974 when Turkey's militarily intervened after a coup staged by supporters of a union with Greece.

Friday marks the second anniversary of the start of the UN-mediated negotiations that have produced limited progress, primarily on governance and a power-sharing deal under an envisioned federal system.

However, a wide gulf separates the two sides on other difficult issues, such as arrangements on private property lost during the war, the fate of 35,000 Turkish troops stationed in the north and the right of the Turkish military to intervene.

“There needs to be an agreement and it needs to be implemented successfully,” Downer said after Christofias and Eroğlu met at the now-defunct Nicosia airport inside a UN-controlled buffer zone.

“Both sides have to be able to sell it to the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities respectively,” he said.

Downer's remarks followed Eroğlu's earlier references to an end-of-year negotiations deadline. The envoy said the UN is pleased that Christofias and Eroğlu remain “very committed” to achieving an agreement. The two leaders agreed to hold intensive, day-long talks on Sept. 7 and 10, Downer added.

Numerous rounds of UN-sponsored negotiations in over three decades have ended in failure and observers think that another collapse could prompt the UN to abandon its mediation role, possibly leading to the island's permanent partition.

“It is clear, subject to a massive change of heart on both sides of the divide, that the United Nations will not be prepared to devote time to the Cyprus problem again if the current process fails,” said Tim Potier, co-head of the University of Nicosia's law department.

01 September 2010, Wednesday

I hope my visit will boost economic relations with Bosnia-Herzegovina, Gül says

Turkish President Abdullah Gül said Thursday there were deep rooted historic, cultural and humanitarian ties between Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Speaking in a press conference prior to his departure from Istanbul's Ataturk International Airport for Bosnia-Herzegovina, President Gül said that he hoped his current visit would boost economic and commercial relations and bring new life to mutual investments.

Members of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Presidency had visited Turkey in 2008 and my trip takes place in return of the Bosnians' trip to Turkey, Gül said.

During my visit, I will hold talks with members of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Presidency and other high level officials, Gül said.

I will address the Bosnia-Herzegovina Parliament and receive members of the Inter-faith Council, Gül said.

We will discuss relations between our two countries and exchange views on both regional and international matters, Gül said.

I will encourage all segments in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a country where painful memories still exist, to act in mutual understanding and cooperation prior to the general elections of October 3, Gül underlined.

Haris Silajdzic, President of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Presidency, and I will attend the Turkey-Bosnia-Herzegovina Business Forum in Sarajevo, Gül said.

Following my talks in Sarajevo, I will proceed to the City of Mostar, Gül said.

I believe my visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina will boost our relations, Gül also said.

During President Gül's trip, Director General of the Anadolu Agency (AA) Dr. Hilmi Bengi and Director General of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina News Agency (FENA) Zehrudin Isakovic will sign a cooperation agreement.

President Abdullah Gül will inaugurate the "AA Award Winning Photographs Exhibition" in Sarajevo and participate in a reception to mark the establishment of AA's new office in Sarajevo.

President Gül will be in Bosnia-Herzegovina for two days.

02 September 2010, Thursday

Sea piracy threatens global economy, Rear Admiral Ertuğrul says

The new Commander of Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151) Rear Admiral Sinan Ertuğrul said Thursday sea piracy threatened not only regional economy but global economy as well.

Rear Admiral Ertuğrul assumed his post on Wednesday with a ceremony held on Turkey's TCG Gokceada Frigate at Bahrain's Mina Port.

Speaking to the Anatolia news agency, Ertuğrul said that he will serve as the Commander of CTF-151 for a period of three months.

In the past few years, the number of incidents of sea piracy increased dramatically. Sea piracy poses a threat to the global economy, navigation and shipping, Ertuğrul stressed. Turkey supported the CTF-151 mission by sending officers. Turkey has displayed the necessary will to facilitate international security in seas by assuming active duties, Ertuğrul said.

CTF-151 is an international naval task force, set up in response to piracy attacks in shipping lanes off the coast of Somalia.
CTF-151 operates in the Gulf of Aden and off the eastern coast of Somalia covering an area of approximately 1.1 million square miles.
CTF-151 is a multinational task force established in January 2009 to conduct counterpiracy operations under a mission-based mandate throughout the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) area of responsibility to actively deter, disrupt and suppress piracy in order to protect global maritime security and secure freedom of navigation for the benefit of all nations. The command staff is composed of personnel from a number of coalition countries.
CTF-151 was established based on a decision of the United Nations Security Council. Every year around 33,000 ships cross the region where CTF-151 serves. 26 percent of all oil exports in the world go through the region. The region's contribution to the world economy is estimated to be around 380 billion USD.

02 September 2010, Thursday
TODAYS ZAMAN

Top US, Turkish military officials to discuss terms of Iraq withdrawal

Friday, September 3, 2010

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

As top military officials in Turkey and the United States prepared to meet Friday, Ankara indicated it would respond positively to the U.S. request to withdraw non-combat military equipment through Turkish territory.

“We look favorably on the transfer of non-military elements and technical material via Turkey,” Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Selçuk Ünal told a weekly press conference Friday. He emphasized that Washington had not made any request to withdraw weaponry through Turkey as it pulls combat forces out of Iraq.

“Our negotiations regarding the withdrawal of technical equipment are ongoing,” Ünal said without elaborating further.

The spokesman’s remarks on a topic that could influence future Turkish-U.S. relations came hours before Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff and President Barack Obama’s principal military advisor, began an official visit to Ankara late Friday after making a trip to flood-hit Pakistan. The high-ranking U.S. official was scheduled to meet with Turkey’s new military chief, Gen. Işık Koşaner, who took over the position of chief of General Staff on Aug. 30, and Defense Minister Vecdi Gönül. Turkish officials said Mullen also wanted to have a meeting with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, but that it could not be arranged due to scheduling problems.

Although the U.S. Embassy in Ankara said in a written statement that there were no set agenda items for Mullen’s “introductory visit,” it was commonly speculated that he would address U.S. requests for help moving equipment out of Iraq as well as the possibility of stationing an early warning and missile-defense system in Turkey.

Turkish media reported, without citing sources, that Mullen would ask for the return of heavy armaments belonging to U.S. forces – including tanks, heavy armored vehicles, long-range cannons, mobile radars and air-defense systems – to the United States via Turkey. He was also expected to ask for the deployment of an early-warning system and

missile batteries to Turkey and the extension of Turkey's Kabul Regional Command in Afghanistan for another year.

With the second largest military in NATO, Turkey is a critical member of the alliance, but its relations with the United States suffered in 2003 when the Turkish Parliament refused passage for U.S. troops into Iraq.

The landmark visit by Mullen, who is also the highest-ranking officer in the U.S. Armed Forces, comes after U.S. political and military leaders marked the official end of combat operations in neighboring Iraq. Some U.S. military equipment has already been transferred through Turkey since 2009 under an agreement that allows Turkey's Incirlik Air Base to be used by American forces as a "logistics hub." The U.S. pullout plans are proceeding despite high-level concerns over Iraq's readiness to defend the country on its own.

Turkey welcomes resuming direct talks between Israel-Palestine

Turkey welcomed the resumption of direct talks between Israel and Palestine after the efforts of the US.

Turkish Foreign Ministry stated on Wednesday that it was important to avoid unilateral acts which would negatively affect the process as well as to restore the land conditions throughout the talks.

The ministry added that international community and regional countries should make constructive contributions to the process.

The ministry also stressed that Turkey would continue to support efforts to restore fair, permanent and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

01 September 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Armenia dismisses Gül's 'silent diplomacy'

Armenia has dismissed remarks by President Abdullah Gül that the Turkish-Armenian reconciliation process has entered a phase of "silent diplomacy" and ridiculed the president by saying that "Turks must be talking to themselves, quietly."

Turkey is making different insinuations about alleged 'silent diplomacy.' You know, there is a Russian song with such words: 'I'm quietly talking to myself.' Turks may be talking to themselves," Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian said while talking to students at Yerevan State University on Wednesday, Armenian news outlets reported.

Noting that the Turks have not made any constructive steps since Oct. 10, 2009, Nalbandian said they were waiting for the Turks to get ready. "In contrast to the Turkish side, we do not make contradictory steps or statements," Nalbandian said.

Gül suggested that there were misunderstandings in Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan due to the Turkish-Armenian reconciliation process and said Turkish-Armenian relations had entered a period of "silent but decisive diplomacy," in an interview with the Azerbaijani APA news agency two days before his visit to Azerbaijan on Aug. 16-17. He also reiterated his earlier statement during his two-day visit to Azerbaijan.

Turkey and Armenia signed twin protocols on Oct. 10, 2009, in an attempt to normalize relations between the two countries. Armenia suspended the reconciliation process on April 22 of this year after Turkey pegged the ratification of the protocols to a

breakthrough in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. "Our steps are accepted by the international community, and we are fully internationally supported," the Armenian foreign minister said.

03 September 2010, Friday

Turkey takes over command of int'l task force near Somalia

Thursday, September 2, 2010

ANKARA – Anatolia News Agency

HURRIYAT

Turkey will command a multinational task force to fight piracy and carry out surveillance in the shipping lanes close to Somalia from Sept. 1 to Dec. 1, 2010, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Thursday.

"The Turkish government has reiterated its determination to deal with sea piracy which hampers international trade, sea transportation and threatens the maritime sector in Turkey," the statement said regarding Turkey's role with the CTF-151 task force.

The ministry released a statement Thursday saying Turkey had commanded the force between May 3 and Aug. 15, 2009.

The statement also said Rear Adm. Sinan Ertuğrul would assume the post of International Naval Task Forces Commander on Sept. 1 at a ceremony aboard Turkey's Gökçeada Frigate while it is moored at Bahrain's Mina Port. The frigate will act as a flagship of CTF-151 activities during Turkey's command.

Turkish Naval Forces have been sending ships to the region since February 2009.

In the past few years, the number of incidents of sea piracy has increased dramatically and sea piracy poses a threat to the global economy, navigation and shipping, Ertuğrul said.

Turkey's referendum campaign not lost in translation

Friday, September 3, 2010

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

Though unable to vote themselves, foreigners residing in Turkey are inundated by as much election propaganda as every other Turk.

Fluent speakers of Turkish who have observed the referendum atmosphere told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review how the situation looks to them from the "outside."

Asher Kohn, a U.S. citizen who has lived in the Arnavutköy neighborhood of Istanbul for the last three months, said the campaigns here were different from those in the United States as they are "much more in the street."

Kohn said streets covered with posters were not a strange political sight to him but vehicles driving around blasting music and propaganda definitely was.

"There are so many changes but it is just a 'yes' or 'no,'" he said. Nonetheless, he said, "It is the way to do it when you have a referendum."

Kohn is working for an advertising agency here and speaks Turkish fluently, having learnt the first time he came to Istanbul when he was an exchange student. He therefore sometimes follows the debates in the press.

"I think all parties are using different versions of history to show what the future will be: 'say no to another Sep 12' or 'say yes to the European Union.' Turkey will decide to

change its Constitution by how it perceives its history and what kind of a country it will be in the future,” Kohn said.

Fabio Grassi, an Italian historian who has been living in Istanbul since 1998, said the referendum atmosphere was not as all-consuming as he thought it would be.

“There are marches, rallies, [organizational] posters are being hung but I have not witnessed a bombardment of propaganda yet,” he said.

Grassi said someone who did not know there was a forthcoming referendum might not even notice it walking down the street unless they were careful. “Life seems normal, maybe it is the effect of Ramadan,” he said, adding that this is only his personal observation.

When asked if he thought voters had sufficient information regarding the ways they could vote, Grassi said, “Theoretically they could have.” He said there is enough coverage of the issues regarding the forthcoming in the media for who wanted to look for it.

“Probably, in Turkey, as in Italy and many other countries, a good percentage of voters vote ideologically. I mean, I do not think most of the voters have looked up carefully the chapters of the constitutional amendments; they will vote according to their political preference,” he said.

Grassi thinks this is an important referendum nevertheless. “It is an important referendum and obviously a political test,” he said, adding that the referendum will clearly define winning and losing parties in the Turkish political spectrum, because “you cannot partly win or partly lose in a referendum.”

Albanian citizen Ala Pjetri, who first visited the country as a student in 2003, has been living and working in Istanbul as an account manager since 2007. Like Grassi and Kohn, she is fluent in Turkish and able to observe the referendum process from domestic sources. Pjetri said the electoral campaigns in Turkey are “actually the same” as they are in Albania.

“People here in Turkey like to see one person and they go after that person and it is the same in our country as well,” she said, adding that if there is an especially charismatic leader then this overshadows what the actual politics are about in both countries.

When asked if she took any interest in the content of the debates, she said it is impossible not to, and she thinks people will vote accordingly to what their favorite leader says, rather than the content of the constitutional package.

“Turkey needs change,” she said, especially on legal issues. “The problem is the person who will make that change. I do not think it is the right time for change,” she added.

Pjetri does not believe in the sincerity of the current administration and thinks the changes are tailored to their needs. “This is not good for the country, according to my opinion.”

German shift from coal to culture leaves Turkish workers behind

Friday, September 3, 2010

IŞIL EĞRİKAVUK

DORTMUND - Hürriyet Daily News

As Germany’s former industrial backbone tries to transform itself from a coal-mining center into an enduring European culture capital, the residents of the Ruhr region, including many Turks, risk being left behind.

“Many towns in this region are located right around the coal mines, because the workers wanted to live close to their work. Yet, with the mines closing, there are no more jobs in these towns, especially for the Turks,” Haluk Köker, a former coal miner who is now a social worker in Hamm, one of the 53 cities or towns in the Ruhr area, told the *Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review*.

“The older generation was able to retire, but unemployment especially affects the young generation. They don’t know how or aren’t interested in moving into the creative jobs sector,” Köker said.

Until the mid-20th century, the Ruhr region was the center of Germany’s coal and steel industry. At its peak, 600,000 people were employed in the area’s 200 mines. Today, just four are active, employing roughly 30,000 people, many of whom are of Turkish descent. The German government has set 2018 as a deadline for ending its 2.5 billion-euro subsidies to the coal industry, though opponents are lobbying to postpone a final decision until 2012. The European Commission is moving in the same direction, planning to stop state subsidies for mines operating at a loss within four years unless they have a closure plan in place. “Our aim is to ensure a definitive closure of uncompetitive mines by Oct. 1, 2014,” EU Competition Commissioner Joaquín Almunia said last month.

From coal to culture

With the demise of its traditional industries looming, officials in the Ruhr Valley have long been working on an alternative development plan that would transform the region’s job base from heavy industry to a creative economy. Efforts over the past decade to turn many old industrial plants into cultural centers, cafes, museums and artists’ studios are being celebrated this year as the Ruhr city of Essen enjoys the spotlight – along with Istanbul and the Hungarian city of Pécs – as a 2010 European Capital of Culture.

“No region in Europe represents change like the Ruhr area,” said Fritz Pleitgen, the president of Ruhr 2010 Ltd., which is organizing the year’s events for the region.

Among the transformed sites is Zollverein, a coal plant for 135 years that is today a major cultural center visited by thousands of people, and one that was awarded UNESCO cultural heritage status in 2001. According to city reports, cultural investments have created thousands of new jobs, sparked a boom in the creative economy and opened up new spaces and activities for area residents to enjoy.

High unemployment

Despite all these efforts, however, the Ruhr region today faces some of the highest unemployment rates in Germany, with 275,000 people in the area currently jobless. Two-thirds of the region’s unemployed have immigrant backgrounds.

“The creative jobs [in fields] such as design, film or cultural planning need a certain kind of education,” Claudia Kokoschka, the cultural director of Dortmund, another city in the Ruhr region, told the *Daily News*. “You need to reach people when they are still young. We have tried to do some collaborative projects and special programs, but we need to have that [type of training] in our education system.”

Christoph M. Schmidt, president of the Rhine-Westphalia Institute for Economic Research, agreed.

“Instead of concentrating on creative industries, the Ruhr region should make intensive efforts to nurture education,” Schmidt said. “The proportion of poorly qualified people here is far too high. Many young people have no opportunity to cope with vocational training. We must not lose touch with ‘educationally remote’ social classes.”

“They offered us some training programs so that we can move to into other job sectors,” said miner Halil Gülen, 34, who lives in Ahlen, another town in the area. “But I don’t know if I’ll be able to find a job even after that.”

Still others say it would be wrong to expect too much from the shift to creative industries. “The creative industries made up just 3 to 4 percent of employment, and could therefore only ever be part of the solution,” said cultural/political advisor Bernd Fesel, who also works for the Ruhr 2010 team. “We can only facilitate this process by bringing together creative people and city planners.”

Coal miners’ stories

Because of this, Dortmund cultural director Kokoschka believes the old industries still have a key role to play in the new Ruhr.

“I think the coal mines can remain as important factors for the region,” she said.

“Germany has really good mining techniques that it can benefit from. We should also invest in that.”

Such an investment would be welcomed by Ruhr miners who are worried about their futures.

“I came here when I was 16 and right away started working in the mines,” Mustafa Bal, a 47-year-old from the western Turkish province of Kütahya, told the Daily News.

Although the Auguste Victoria coal mine in Marl where he works is still active, it is likely to be closed within a few years.

“I am one of the lucky ones, because I will be able to retire in two years,” Bal said. “In Germany, coal miners can retire early because of our hard labor conditions, and that’s good. But I don’t know what I will do after that.”

ECONOMIC NEWS

Turkish inflation rate rises, ending three-month drop

Friday, September 3, 2010

ANKARA — Bloomberg

hurriyat

Turkey’s inflation rate rose to 8.3 percent in August, reversing a three-month drop as food prices increased.

Inflation accelerated from 7.6 percent the month before, the Turkish Statistical Institute, or TurkStat, said on its website Friday. It was forecast at 8 percent, according to the median estimate of four economists surveyed by Bloomberg. In the month, prices rose 0.4 percent.

The Turkish Central Bank on Aug. 19 predicted a “noticeable increase” in the inflation rate for the month, caused by a jump in the price of fruit and other foods. The bank’s governor, Durmuş Yılmaz, has kept the benchmark interest rate unchanged at 7 percent since November, even as the economy returned to growth after the global crisis, saying the core inflation rate is falling toward the year-end target of 6.5 percent.

“We will probably reach 9 percent by the end of September, but we are expecting a decline from there,” said Sengül Dağdeviren, head economist at ING Bank in Istanbul, before the figures were released. “The central bank has been warning markets about this increase beforehand and says it’s temporary.”

Yields on benchmark two-year lira bonds fell 5 basis points to 8.09 percent as of 10:05 a.m. in Istanbul, according to an ABN Amro index. The lira was little changed at 1.511 per dollar.

The central bank is unlikely to change interest rates and could resort to other tools instead to stem a rise in inflation, such as increasing reserve requirements to control credit growth, Dağdeviren said.

Growth slowing

Turkey's economic rebound, which began in the second quarter of last year, has slowed in 2010 and the central bank has warned of persisting risks to the recovery. Quarterly growth dropped to 0.1 percent in the three months through March.

The bank's preferred measure of core inflation, which excludes energy and food prices, fell to 4.2 percent in August from 4.5 percent a month earlier, TurkStat said.

The cost of goods leaving Turkish factories and mines rose 9 percent in the 12 months through August, compared with 8.2 percent a month earlier, the agency said. Producer prices rose 1.15 percent in the month.

Russia's Gazprom in talks with Turkish groups

Friday, September 3, 2010

BEGÜM GÜRSOY

ISTANBUL - Referans

Russia's gas export monopoly Gazprom is looking for another entry into the Turkish market with an eye to eventually bidding for Istanbul's gas distribution network, according to sources.

The company is currently in talks with Turkey's Aksa Enerji to enter the Turkish market, but its real aim is to join the bidding process for İGDAŞ, Istanbul's natural gas distribution network, sources say.

Turkey's biggest city natural gas distribution network, İGDAŞ, is also close to Thrace, from which Russian gas enters Turkey, meaning the natural gas supply would be easier for Russia.

Gazprom, which supplies most of Turkey's natural gas needs, signed a memorandum with Aksa last year but the two companies have not yet entered a partnership. The talks are on entering the natural gas distribution market together and the supply of natural gas, according to sources.

Aksa, which has a natural gas power plant in the southern city of Antalya and owns one third of Turkey's natural gas distribution system, serves 600,000 subscribers. The company's 2015 target is to reach 3 million subscribers.

Bosphorus Gas, another natural gas company, is also interested in acquiring soon-to-be-sold İGDAŞ. Aksa, meanwhile, has started preparations for a bid, according to sources.

Current deal expires in 2011

The deal between Gazprom and Turkish Petroleum Pipeline Corporation, or Botaş, for 6 billion cubic meters of natural gas will end by the end of 2011. According to the law, after the expiration of the deal, the private sector will be able to make separate deals.

Bosphorus Gas, which also owns a license to import natural gas, has requested an allocation of at least 1.5 billion cubic meters. Aksa, however, may also bid to take over the whole deal, while Botaş itself may once again bid for at least half of the amount.

Talks between Aksa and Gazprom may result in a partnership in cities where Aksa currently distributes natural gas, sources said. Sector representatives told business daily Referans that the Russian side has not reached a decision on what to do after the current deal expires, predicting that clarification on the issue may be seen in December.

In a statement on Thursday, Gazprom said it was in talks with Turkish companies Çalık and Aksa. With Çalık, the Russian giant will build the Salt Lake Underground Natural Gas Storage Facility, a first for Turkey.

Turkey is the second-largest customer for Gazprom after Germany. The company sells 23 billion cubic meters of natural gas to the country through the Blue Line and the Western Line.

Turkish stock surge could signal expected ‘yes’ vote

Friday, September 3, 2010

SEDA SEZER

ISTANBUL – Bloomberg

hurriyat

Hurriyat

Investors are betting Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will strengthen his hold on power in a nationwide constitutional reform referendum next week as stocks soar to a record high.

The Istanbul Stock Exchange, or ISE's, benchmark ISE-100 Index is up 11.8 percent since the start of June and 14.1 percent since the start of the year. The Turkish Lira has strengthened 7 percent from this year's low on June 7, while gains in bonds have cut two-year yields more than 16 percentage points to 8.09 percent from an all-time high in October 2008, according to an ABN Amro index.

Victory on constitutional changes, which include curbing the power of the military and top judges, would boost the prospects for the governing Justice and Development Party, or AKP, of extending its eight years of single-party rule.

A “strong yes” vote in the Sept. 12 referendum could lift stocks by 10 to 15 percent by the end of the year, said Ari Metso, chief executive officer of Helsinki-based Taaleritehdas East Asset Management.

“The probability for ‘yes’ is much higher than for ‘no’ in the referendum,” said Matthias Siller, who helps manage \$4 billion in stocks at Baring Investment Services in London. “I expect many people that wouldn't normally be the hardcore supporters of AKP to make a pragmatic decision. This will eventually lead to a situation where Erdoğan again scores victory.”

Opinion polls are not indicating overwhelming support for the referendum but 56 percent of Turks will vote in favor of the changes, daily Yeni Şafak reported Aug. 12, citing polls from Genar. The measures will pass with 53.4 percent of the vote, daily Star said Aug. 27, citing a forecast by research company Andy-AR Sosyal Araştırmalar Merkezi. In another poll, 45 percent said they would vote for the changes while 44 percent said they were against the measures, daily Akşam recently reported, citing research company A&G.

“The recent poll by A&G suggests the outcome may be actually closer than signaled by previous polls and caution is warranted,” Olgay Büyükkayalı, an analyst at Nomura International in London, wrote in an Aug. 31 note to clients.

Investors should hedge against a defeat for Erdoğan because the forecast “is a toss-up,” Merrill Lynch strategists and economists said in a report on Aug. 27, adding that a loss would make a coalition government more likely following the next election.

“A ‘no’ vote on the referendum would be a blow to the ruling AKP and would likely unnerve the market, which would then be fearful that the government would significantly loosen the fiscal purse strings in the run-up to parliamentary elections due by July 2011,” said Timothy Ash, head of emerging-market research at the Royal Bank of Scotland Group in London.

Fiscal rule shelved

The government dropped plans last month to implement rules limiting the budget deficit, raising concern Erdoğan is preparing the ground for more spending ahead of the election. Standard & Poor’s said Aug. 23 that Turkey’s sovereign rating may be raised should the government opt to save, rather than spend. The government appears reluctant to take advantage of the economic recovery to put budget measures in place ahead of general elections, S&P analyst Frank Gill said in a report.

A looser fiscal stance “would adversely affect Turkey’s credit fundamentals,” Moody’s Investors Service analyst Sarah Carlson said on Aug. 11.

Moody’s rates Turkey Ba2, two levels below investment grade, after lifting the country in January. Fitch raised its rating to BB+ in December, or one step below investment grade, and S&P boosted its ranking in February to BB.

All three cited budget management and the strength of Turkey’s banking system, which posted record profits last year and required no government funds after the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008. The budget deficit narrowed an annual 42 percent in the first seven months of 2010, Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek said Aug. 23.

Citigroup’s “base-case scenario” is for an Erdoğan win at the referendum, said Luis Costa, an emerging-markets strategist in London. “A strong ‘yes’ could be a point of support to the currency at this stage,” he said.

Templeton Asset Management’s Mark Mobius said he may increase investments in Turkish companies, without providing a timeframe, according to an e-mailed response to questions on Aug. 24. from Bloomberg News.

“The referendum is a minor point to be considered,” said Mobius, who oversees about \$34 billion as Singapore-based chairman of Templeton. “The referendum will probably have no impact on our view on the capital market in Turkey since the political environment will not change dramatically.”

“Turkish local assets are a big darling right now,” said Agnes Belaisch, a London-based emerging-markets strategist at Threadneedle Asset Management, which has almost \$100 billion under management. “It is the best story in the region.”

Belaisch is a former senior economist at the International Monetary Fund.

Turkey, Turkmenistan eye boosting economic relations

Turkey and Turkmenistan are seeking opportunities to boost their cooperation in various fields at a two-day fair that began on Monday and at a business forum held on the same day.

The 2nd Turkish Exports Fair was inaugurated by Turkmen Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers for Trade, Commerce, Textiles and Customs Hojamuhammet Muhammedow, Turkish Foreign Trade Minister Zafer Çağlayan and over a dozen

Turkmen ministers in Ashgabat yesterday. Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow also issued a statement to the gathering.

In his message, Berdimuhamedow expressed his happiness over the growing relations between Turkey and Turkmenistan and said Turkish construction companies have an important role in his country's development. He also said he believed the fair will offer new opportunities for businessmen to seal new partnerships. Çağlayan addressed the audience during the ceremony and said Turkey attaches great importance to its relations with Turkmenistan.

Turkmenistan's exports to Turkey increased by 52 percent in the first half of this year over the same period of last year. "We want Turkmenistan to start exporting products other than natural gas and cotton," Çağlayan said, adding that he is very happy that Turkmenistan saw growth even during last year's global financial crisis.

Çağlayan also said that there are no obstacles to Turkish Airlines (THY) launching direct flights between Ankara and Ashgabat. He called on relevant authorities to come together in Ankara to discuss the prospect of those flights. He then attended the Turkish-Turkmen Business Forum Meeting. Addressing the audience there, Çağlayan expressed how important the two countries are for each other.

"Since Turkmenistan is Turkey's gate to Central Asia and Turkey is Turkmenistan's gate to Africa, opportunities need to be effectively used," he said, adding that Turkey is ready to share all of its experience with Turkmenistan. He, however, reminded that Turkmenistan applies a visa regime for Turkish businessmen and said this should be ended in order to open the door to more investment. "We cannot explain to our businessmen why Turkmenistan requires a visa from them at a time when we abolished visas with Russia," he said.

31 AUGUST 2010

TODAYS ZAMAN

Social news

Istanbul welcomes 'Sweet 16' in the 2010 FIBA World Championship

Font Size: Larger|Smaller

Friday, September 3, 2010

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News

As group matches are wrapped up and losers head home, games of much greater consequence will soon begin in the knockout stages of the 2010 FIBA World Basketball Championships. The tournament comes to Istanbul this weekend as red hot Turkey draws France, while three other intriguing matches are also set to played over the weekend. After a about week of thrilling games across four groups in four cities, it is now time for the knockout rounds of the 2010 FIBA World Basketball Championship.

Four games this weekend will see the tension and thrill of the win-or-go-home matches kick off, as all remaining matches are to be played at Istanbul's brand new Sinan Erdem Dome.

Turkey, one of only three teams that managed to remain unbeaten in the group stage of the tournament, beat China Thursday to win the first ranking in Group C. With victories over Ivory Coast, Russia, Greece and Puerto Rico, the host-team has proven to be one of the hottest teams of the tournament.

As Group C winner, Turkey will meet France, who lost to New Zealand 82-70 Thursday. Following a bright start of three wins in the tournament, France lost its pace and finally had to settle for the fourth spot.

Interestingly, New Zealand needed at least a 12-point win over France to take third spot in the group, and that deficit was provided with a three-pointer that came in the final 10 seconds of the match.

French coach Vincent Collet was not happy to be drawn against red hot Turkey.

"We wanted to avoid Turkey, so it's a very big disappointment," France coach Vincent Collet said. "We wanted to lose by 11 or less to avoid Turkey, but even that we couldn't do, not doing the foul on the last possession. We got what we deserved. We played very, very bad, right from the beginning."

"I don't know why we lost our spirit," Collet said, adding that his youthful team lost momentum Wednesday in a 69-55 loss to Lithuania

"When you lose the first game you show what kind of team you are," he said. "And unfortunately, what we showed today was not the face I was hoping to see from this team."

Unlike France, Turkey actually improved with each win and following Wednesday's victory over Greece, the "12 Giant Men" finally started to be numbered among the favorites of the tournament.

Center Oğuz Savaş, who was the top scorer in Turkey's 87-40 demolition of China, said the team was happy with how the tournament had fared so far.

"We played well and executed a good level of tempo in our games, and eventually won the group," said Savaş. "I hope we maintain the same level in our future games and continue our success."

If Turkey manages to beat France on Sunday, it will take on the winner of the Slovenia-Australia match.

On Saturday, Serbia will meet Croatia. The former Yugoslav states share a bitter rivalry, with sporting events between the two nations historically marred by fan violence, meaning security will need to be on high alert.

But still, the more interesting match will be the other quarterfinal match-up between Spain and Greece.

On the final day of the groups, Russia beat Greece to take the second spot in Group C. However, the Greeks were accused of losing the match on purpose, trying to avoid a possible future match-up with the United States.

TalkBasket website quoted Russian team coach David Blatt as saying: "The Greeks should be ashamed. What we saw was comedy, not basketball. Greeks shot to miss, on the other hand my players played with passion."

Turkey's coach Bogdan Tanjevic was critical of the Greek side as well. Tanjevic was watching the game, which was played before the China match at the same arena, from the stands and after the match went to the Greek bench to protest the unsportsmanlike effort. Tanjevic ironically clapped and told center Ioannis Bourousis, "Congratulations, you did the same thing for the second consecutive year," referring to Greece's dubious loss to France at last summer's EuroBasket.

The harsh words resulted in Bourousis moving towards Tanjevic and saying something to him. As the exchange became more heated arena security guards had to come between the two.

After the Turkey vs. China match, Tanjevic was asked about the event. “I congratulated the Greeks for their efforts – a joke,” he said. “Then Bourousis started kicking some bottles at the Greek bench. I was heading towards Blatt to greet him. He [Bourousis] is watching too much cinema. It's not the Berlin or Venice festival here, but the World Championship.”

Although Greece managed to avoid the United States challenge until the final, the alleged efforts can be deemed as having backfired, since they drew to play Spain, which finished second in Group D, Saturday anyway.

The winner of the Serbia-Croatia and Spain-Greece matches will meet in the quarterfinal. The United States, who also completed its group matches unbeaten, will meet Angola Monday. The Russia-New Zealand match will be played the same day.

The final quarterfinalists will be decided Tuesday, with Lithuania, the third team with a perfect record, meeting China, and Argentina taking on Brazil.

A limited number of tickets for the games are still available through Biletix (www.biletix.com) and all remaining games in the tournament will be played at the Sinan Erdem Dome in Istanbul's Ataköy.

COMMENTARY

A rising Turkey without Europe?

Font Size: Larger|Smaller

Friday, September 3, 2010

FADI HAKURA

hurriyat

In the midst of European antipathy regarding Turkish accession to the EU, Turkey is attempting to chart an alternative path to secular democracy and economic prosperity. Yet Turkey should go one step further and question the unbridled axiom that, without Europe, it is destined to the scrapheap of Muslim radicalization or unrepentant nationalism.

Since the end of the Ottoman Empire, the conventional wisdom that Europe is Turkey's ultimate savior implies that Turkey is unable or unwilling to become a liberal democracy absent of external agency. This fallacy is not rooted in cultural or political realities, but is an accident of history.

While the European Union accession process is comatose, Turkish society is undergoing a transformation to greater democracy, secularism and socio-economic rejuvenation. Surveys indicate that Turks favor a more spiritual vision of Islam, greater public accountability of government officials and state institutions, and a deeper engagement with the global economy. Not dissimilar to Western democracies, the population wants civilian authorities to deliver employment opportunities, high quality education and a world-class healthcare system. The ideological battles of yesteryear attract scant attention at best.

India's economic success offers a sobering challenge to the belief that a Turkey unaffiliated with Europe is doomed to eternal stagnation. Only three decades ago, it was fashionable to envision India as an economic basket case condemned to low annual growth rates. Hindu culture was falsely seen as antithetical to economic growth, in sharp contrast to the galloping economic expansion of non-Hindu Southeast Asia.

Replace Hinduism with Islam and Turkey finds itself in a similar position to India. Culturally, the unspoken assumption goes, Turkey does not have the wherewithal to resolve the Kurdish problem, embrace a new civilian and democratic constitution, solidify secularism among a Muslim-majority populace nor accept social freedom as a bedrock of society. Yet, this viewpoint betrays the achievements of nation-building after only 87 years of Turkey's existence, a mere drop in the ocean of history. In fact, unlike the Balkans, Turkey has largely succeeded in integrating a diverse group of ethnicities after the disintegration of former Ottoman glory. It is also establishing a functioning legal system, entrenching quasi-secular and democratic traditions, and forging a class of entrepreneurs who are making waves in markets in Europe, Middle East, Russia, Central Asia and Africa in the areas of construction, agriculture and textiles. This in no way suggests that Turkey does not face major challenges. It surely does. To start with, Turkey has failed to adequately address the disenchantment of a significant segment of its Kurdish population over cultural rights and poverty. Its winner-take-all politics, which is dismissive of minority views; reactive nationalist sentiments; mistrust of non-Muslims; and enduring obsession with social control at the level of the ruling elite are at variance with a diversifying and modernizing Turkey. In other words, Turkey's society and business community are uncharacteristically steaming ahead of its politicians in terms of adopting modern political and social values. Urbanization, economic globalization and democratic progress are changing societal outlook and traditions.

Despite its forward, albeit sometimes halting dynamism, Turkey is still categorized as a conflict-ridden country – whether between Turks and Kurds, Islam and secularism, or East and West. Witness the raging debates over Turkey's alleged abandonment of Western alliances in favor of an Eastern orientation. These debates ignore public opinion, which surveys suggest prefers international cooperation with Europe, and particularly Germany, rather than with Saudi Arabia, Iran or Russia. So, there is little risk of an Eastward-looking or a religiously politicized Turkey in the absence of a credible EU accession process.

Europe is committing a major error in casting Turkey aside. Turkey stands out as a real beacon of hope and inspiration to many countries, both Muslim and non-Muslim, fashioning a future relying on its own wits. For Turkey, however, a reduced dependency on the European Union will finally debunk the myth that only Europe can spur the liberalization of Turkey and, by extension, of the Arab countries of the Middle East.

- *Fadi Hakura is a United Nations Global Expert (www.globalexperfinder.org).*
This article was written for the Common Ground News Service.

Who is pro-yes and who is pro-no?

Font Size: Larger|Smaller

Thursday, September 2, 2010

MURAT YETKİN

hurriyat

I am with those who believe opinion polls do not reliably reflect outcomes. We are talking about an atmosphere for the last few elections where people thinking “If he/she is a tattletale, I might be in trouble with the government” do not give accurate answers,

according to Adil Gür, the owner of a research company that has made to-the-point assessments of polls.

There is no reason to believe polls in which “yes” votes are estimated to be 58 percent or “no” votes 52 percent.

The general view in politics in Ankara is:

- 1) “Yes” votes are in the lead by a narrow margin;
- 2) This is not yet a difference that cannot be made up or a point of no return; and
- 3) Therefore, the struggle continues in full speed and heat.

The race may come to a boil in the final week before the Sept. 12 referendum. The government might apply new economic measures to increase “yes” votes, as it decreases interest rates for craftsmen’s credit. On the other hand, the main opposition Republican People’s Party, or CHP, and the Nationalist Movement Party, or MHP, may seek new political ways to increase votes as the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, tries to find more support for “boycotting” the referendum.

In any case, we are talking about a race-to-the-last-minute here.

For this is not a race of yes-and-no. The percentages of “yes” and “no” at the ballot box on Sept. 12 are critical for parties.

Therefore, as veteran politician Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç started to voice months ago and reiterated a couple of times, his “60 percent” guess is not in vain.

For the last few weeks in the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, camps, no one has entertained such a guess. But Arınç was actually talking about a target when he uttered 60 percent.

He has not openly expressed it, but it is in fact the AKP’s strategic target for the 2011 elections.

A 60 percent level, one or two point less included, of “yes” votes will be a victory for the governing party. It will also be alarming for the 2011 elections. Politically speaking, it will be a Pyrrhic victory not to satisfy anybody.

To see this, we should examine the yes-no-boycotting camps closely.

The x-ray of groupings

1) Boycotting: There is one face of the coin in this simplest case: Most of the BDP votes belong to voters who in fact would have voted “yes” if they would have headed to the ballot box. On the other hand, as the number of votes cast drops, “yes” votes will be more likely, according to the latest opinion polls.

2) Yes: There is no common denominator among those who would vote “yes.” We are talking about here people who will say “yes” for different reasons Sept. 12; some will because they are Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s supporters, some to punish the judiciary and the military, among which there could be the CHP or MHP’s supporters, some because they are close to the Saadet (Felicity) Party, or SP, and some pro-BDP.

And they will most likely not unite around such a specific goal. Another likely result from this could be that the pro-yes group in the Sept. 12 referendum will not vote for the AKP in the 2011 elections.

3) No: There is a common ground for the pro-no bloc. And that is no matter what Erdoğan does, even if he brings the moon and stars down, they will not have a change of heart. We are talking about a deep-rooted spirit of being pro-no here. So, “no” votes will reflect “definite nos” to the AKP and Erdoğan in the elections, will signal the amount and

percentage of votes to the CHP and the MHP and some “yes” votes of the CHP and MHP supporters will be gained back from the AKP.

The 47 percent psychological threshold

Therefore, if the “no” votes out of the ballot box Sept. 12 exceed 47 percent, the figure that brought victory to the AKP in July 22, 2007, general elections, it is possible to say that the likelihood of the AKP’s forming a single-party government following the 2011 elections decreases. (We could even say “above 45 percent” after pulling it down a few points as we did with the 60 percent estimation...)

“No” votes around 47 percent indicates how impossible it is for the AKP to catch up with itself in the 2011 elections. Unless “yes” votes reach 60 percent Sept. 12, there may not be a single-party AKP government in 2011. This is what the political equation shows.

Turkish-US ties hardly 'strategic' anymore

Font Size: Larger|Smaller

Thursday, September 2, 2010

SEMİH İDİZ

HURRIYAT

Senior diplomats from both countries are trying to put a positive spin on it, but it is clear that Turkish-American ties have not been the same since Turkey voted against the Iran sanctions at the Security Council. The Mavi Marmara incident, on the other hand, increased the tension in Turkish-Israeli ties, which was in the doldrums anyway since the famous incident in Davos.

This in turn has had an added disruptive effect on Turkish-American ties.

One could even say at this stage that the normalization of Turkish-Israeli ties has become a kind of a precondition for the normalization of Turkish-U.S. ties, and until that happens it seems that Ankara’s relations with Washington will not carry the “strategic value” they may have had in the past. Relations will instead be managed on a “case-by-case” basis with each case being evaluated on its own merits.

Put another way, we are a long way off from the day when Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said in Washington, after a visit there shortly after Barack Obama’s presidential victory, that Turkish-U.S. ties would be entering their best period ever. What we have arrived at today seriously belies that contention.

Let alone being the best relations ever, if there is not careful management of the adverse situation that exists this could end up being one of the worst periods in Turkish-U.S. ties. The problem here is not so much with the U.S. administration, of course. The administration, even at the worst of times, has to maintain a working relationship with Ankara for a host of objective reasons.

For example, Iraq and Afghanistan provide vital reasons for maintaining ties as best as possible under prevailing conditions. Therefore, Washington and Ankara have little interest in a further deterioration of their ties. But Turkey’s problem is not so much with the Obama administration as it is with the U.S. Congress. The situation in the Congress vis-à-vis Turkey has changed radically today.

Turkey’s position on Iran and Israel, as well as the close ties the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, enjoys with Hamas has clearly angered many members of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The fact that Washington has still not managed to have its candidate for ambassador to Turkey endorsed by Congress is a clear reflection of this situation. Reports indicate that Ambassador Francis Ricciardone is considered by some Congressmen as the wrong candidate for Turkey because he is expected to be too soft on the AKP government. Past U.S. administrations have been able to use their weight and sway Congress on Turkey and have generally been successful. This time though it seems that this may not be possible. There is said to be a tangible desire among some Congressmen, even those who used to support Turkey in the past, to see the AKP government punished for the line it has taken on issues of vital importance to the U.S.

Press reports have also appeared indicating that President Obama warned Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during the recent G-20 summit that he may not have much leverage left over Congress to push things through that Turkey wants. Some are even suggesting that this Congress will not give the necessary go-ahead for Ankara to purchase Predator B, or Super Cobra-type military hardware from the U.S. because of the anger against Turkey.

Turkey has reportedly now launched a new lobbying effort in Washington especially directed towards the U.S. Congress. The aim appears to be to try and explain Ankara's position on Iran and Israel and to convince Congressmen that both Turkey and the U.S. are actually aiming for the same things, just employing different means to achieve this. It is not clear, however, whether Congressmen will be convinced as long as Turkish-Israeli ties remain where they are and the AKP government's close ties with Iran and Hamas continue. It must have been noted in this context that Ankara did not officially condemn the latest terrorist attack in Hebron, which was subsequently praised by Hamas. Ankara welcomed the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian talks with an official statement from the Foreign Ministry but warned that "unilateral actions which could negatively affect the process should be avoided." It was not clear, however, what was meant by the term "unilateral actions." It is more than likely that the reference here was to the resumption of illegal settlements by Israel.

A Turkish saying has it that "the cheese vessel will not move with words alone." What it basically means is that you have to put your money where your mouth is. From the perspective of some of the Congressmen that have seriously turned against Turkey, this means that lobbying alone with sophisticated arguments aimed at trying to sway minds on Capitol Hill will probably have limited effect.

What will change the mood however are concrete things such as a normalization of ties with Israel, a different tack on Iran and the AKP's distancing itself from Hamas. But achieving these today appears extremely difficult seeing as the Erdoğan government has engaged itself in such a way, as far as these topics are concerned, that any appearance of stepping down will rebound on the AKP in terms of its constituency.

This is the last thing the government will want to do in the highly charged political atmosphere that we have in Turkey today and which will no doubt continue until next year's parliamentary elections. Therefore it should come as no surprise to anyone if we have more serious turbulence in Turkish-U.S. ties in the months ahead, given that these ties still have to run the gauntlet on a host of issues, including the Armenian genocide resolution, which is expected to rear its head again in the coming months.

In the meantime the Obama administration and the Erdoğan government will try and muddle through in an effort to ensure that ties are not totally disrupted, given the many

vital issues that make it essential that both countries are still cooperating. The bottom line, however, is that this can hardly be called a “strategic relationship” anymore.

Referendum: no longer a done deal

ANDREW FINKAL

TODAYS ZAMAN

In times of peace, Papa Nietzsche tells us, the war-like man attacks himself. What he neglected to add was that the merely argumentative man holds a referendum. As anyone in Turkey who has turned on the news, or merely stepped outside to be accosted by vans broadcasting speeches and political jingles, is well aware, the country will be going to the polls shortly to decide whether to approve a package of constitutional reforms.

The decision they will be asked to make is to vote “yes” for the whole deal or to stamp the “no” side of the ballot paper. Not surprisingly, in a country given to political fissure, this choice appears to have cleaved the nation in two.

The view of this column, not to mention those with whom I share this editorial page, is “why all the fuss?” If you stroll down the list of changes, there is nothing to raise so many hackles on so many necks. The amendments range from measures which supplement the rights of the individual (changes to Article 51 would repeal a clause that bars membership in more than one labor union, or to Article 20, which give individuals the right, in principle, to see their personal information protected) to the well-intentioned -- giving the state the obligation to protect children from abuse and violence. One of the amendments allows for the establishment of a parliamentary ombudsmen -- someone to hear citizens’ complaints. Where is the harm in that?

Of course there are changes to the legal system and the debate is whether this allows for desirable political oversight over judicial appointment (as is the case in many other countries) or opens the door to undesirable political patronage. There are also measures which put the military more firmly under civilian control. Again the view here is that these are changes which Turkey, as a mature democracy, will have to make sooner or later.

But all things are never equal. The opposition’s main objection to the referendum is not the substance of the individual clauses but the overall intention of the government to increase its executive authority. “We are on the way to becoming a one-party state,” a high up in the Republican People’s Party (CHP) told me. They see a “yes” as an endorsement which the government does not deserve. The same is true of some (but not all) of Turkey’s Kurds, who see no reason to reward a government that has raised expectations which it then failed to meet.

The problem is that the government, either from choice or necessity, has taken up the opposition’s challenge. If you listen to the prime minister’s speechifying, it is clear he, too, is asking for a “yes” vote less on the merits of the reform package than as a general endorsement of his party’s performance. Turkey is improving, he tells his audiences. Don’t let the jealous “naysayers” get in the way.

At the heart of the matter is the 1982 Constitution, which the reform package sets out to amend. This is a document that bestows great powers on those who hold the reins of state. Its authors never sought to create a system of checks and balances because they assumed they or their successors would always be in charge. They never envisaged that a

political movement would be able to wrest the steering wheel from their hands. And knowing from firsthand experience that an enormous amount of control is embedded in the Constitution, they are justifiably fearful. From one perspective it is like Frankenstein's monster getting the wrong brain.

Those of a liberal persuasion know that what the country needs is not amendments but a new constitution which allows governments to govern but protects the rights of the citizen. The government has promised this but it is a promise it knows will be difficult to keep. The government also needs to address the genuine fears that it cannot tolerate opposition. The prime minister's recent admonition to business leaders, á la Geordedubbya, that they should stand up as either with him or against him, is not just rhetorical excess but cause for concern. However, the opposition also needs to include the words "responsible" and "constructive" somewhere in their job description. All of which goes to explain why a referendum which should have been a done deal is becoming a close-run contest.

An expert's view on why 'yes'

YAVUZ BAYDAR

In the land of incomplete deeds, it may become frustrating to distinguish right from wrong, the sound from the irrational, and short-term gains from long-term achievements. This is the case with the upcoming referendum, more than anything else at the moment -- a case study of where Turkish society is in terms of rational behavior and political maturity.

In the jungle of shouting matches, labeling madness, below-the-belt rhetoric, borderline racism, pure dogma and scholastic thinking, it is even tougher to design a liberal position on the value of a "yes" vote. The difficulty is that, as I have experienced in more than enough cases throughout the summer, even the most learned affiliates of the "no" camp, or the boycotters, act impatiently and are unwilling to discuss the very matter to be voted on: the reform package itself.

Those who cut it short by saying "I do not like the Justice and Development Party [AKP] and so I shall vote 'no'" are the most honest ones. The problem in establishing a civilized debate without voices being raised is the others, who cynically refer to areas that the limited package does not cover, or resort to sheer concerns that the judiciary will be subordinated to the current government.

One of the liberal experts is Professor Serap Yazıcı (Bilgi University), whose assessment of the referendum package -- which she did for the liberal think tank the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) -- is now out for reading. Being cautiously critical of some parts of the reforms, Yazıcı convincingly argues that, if approved, changes to the Constitution will contribute to the spirit of discussing and adopting a brand new one, strengthen the rule of law further, and help speed up democratization. She finds that the package adds a number of new rights to the Constitution, expands some of the rights already existent, introduces positive discrimination as a new constitutional right, and enhances the guarantees of the rule of law -- lifting impunity in some parts of the bureaucracy and judiciary.

According to Yazıcı, although insufficient, the package brings the Constitutional Court closer to its modern counterparts elsewhere and aims to reconstruct the criticized

Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) in sync with models implemented in the (democratic) world.

The most interesting part of Yazıcı's report is at the end, where she responds to some major FAQs about the reform in the high judiciary, symbolized by the Constitutional Court and the HSYK.

On the changes to the method of electing judges in the court, Professor Yazıcı is most critical: It would be much better, she argues, if Parliament is given powers to elect them in a way that would project the will of the voters, as practiced in Germany or Hungary, or, although different in nature, in France. Despite that, she sees progress in the detail that Parliament will have a say in the election of three of the 17 judges, as envisaged. She disagrees with the criticism that the package enhances the powers of the president in the composition. The number remains the same in total, she argues.

On the HSYK reform, Yazıcı is positive: Referring to the figures of the EU on the high number of judges and prosecutors, she thinks it is positive that the overall number of members, reflecting the swollen corps of judiciary staff, will increase from five to 22. This will at least weaken cooptation and discrimination within, she believes.

How about the preserved position of the minister of justice and the undersecretary of the ministry within the HSYK? Yazıcı reminds critics of the point that the Venice Commission did not find the existence of such a position wrong, but adds that the minister and his deputy will have radically stripped powers in the three sections the HSYK will be divided into. "The envisaged changes ... address the massive criticism that has been directed at the board in the past 30 years," she says.

Would consensus not be better? Yazıcı's response is clear: Although the opposition has constantly talked about a new constitution, it as a whole refused to participate in parliamentary efforts, to influence the AKP to include more encompassing content. And, finally, it may be healthier to bring the package not as a whole but in fragments to a vote, would it not? Referring to Article 175 of the current Constitution and the Venice Commission's Code of Good Practice in Referendums, Yazıcı sees no basis to the arguments that Parliament cannot present "internally linked" reforms in the referendum as a whole because, she argues, the changes are all about human rights, the rule of law and standards of democracy, linked similarly in the EU's 2009 Progress Report.

The assessment is available on TESEV's website. What makes it especially valuable -- not only because Yazıcı is one of the most impartial constitutional experts and an excellent academic, but also, as part of the Özbudun Commission that prepared a full draft (later shelved) in early 2008 -- she has not let any bitterness come in between and blur her judgment, which shines with a very cautious optimism for the future, not with overjoyed partisanship.

01 September 2010, Wednesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Turkish army debates from Baku to Baghdad

HASAN KANBOLAT

TODAYS ZAMAN

Any statement made by the Turkish military is always considered as an important event both inside and outside the country, and attempts are often made to read between lines. If the statement comes from the chief of General Staff, this tends to produce greater interest.

In this respect, the speech delivered by Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ, who retired on Aug. 30, during the ceremony in which he handed over the post to Gen. Işık Koşaner on Aug. 27, was important. There was an added importance to this speech as it came at a time when the Turkish military has been in the spotlight in debates and criticisms across the country. Başbuğ's message was positive and conciliatory and emphasized democracy, and he stayed within the borders of the military sphere, touching on political problems only with respect to their impact on security issues. He did not opt for placing the military at the center of the country. He did not stress the military's "duty to protect and watch over the republic." He did not breach into domestic politics by hurling warnings at the political power. He did not create tunnels of fear.

In democracies, speeches by a chief of general staff are not considered as important as they are in Turkey. However, it is obvious that Turkey is increasingly parting ways with its image as a multiparty democracy under heavy military tutelage. Now, the military institution can be discussed without fear. Members of the military can be taken to court. Military operations can be questioned.

Turkey is entering a new era. The status of the military in Turkey, the changes it is undergoing and its upheavals are being monitored closely by Turkey's neighbors. The Middle East, the Balkans, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, the Caucasus and Central Asia are observing the changes to the Turkish military more closely than Turkey and the Euro-Atlantic world realize.

I was in Baku with Azerbaijani intellectuals. They are closely monitoring the change in the Turkish military and the investigations of retired and active duty military officers. They believe that the Turkish democracy's move to dispense with the military tutelage will turn a new page for democratic development, not only in Turkey but also in Azerbaijan and Turkey's other neighbors. Yet, they have concerns as well.

They have made allusions to the Red Army. According to the Azerbaijani intelligentsia, a few years ago, before the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, there were increased criticisms and pressures against the Red Army. As a result, the Red Army's teeth were removed. It was intimidated. It was pinned against the wall. It was confined to the barracks. Thus, the Red Army was unable to take effective measures during the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Thus, the disintegration occurred with the lack of any intervention from the military. Azerbaijani intellectuals argue that the Turkish army is a guarantor not only for Turkey but also for the entire region, including Azerbaijan. A strong Turkish military is a major assurance for the unity and stability of countries in the region including Turkey and Azerbaijan. For this reason, operations against members of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) should be conducted with a view to introducing democratic confines to the military, but should not intimidate or flabbergast it, they argue.

I was in Baghdad with Iraqi bureaucrats and in Kirkuk with soldiers from the Iraqi army. Although they are not fluent in Turkish, they regularly watch the news bulletins on Turkish TV. They are very sensitive to developments in Turkey. There is a great love for Turkey in Iraq. Turkey has treated all Iraqis equally without discriminating between ethnic, religious or political groups since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and it has offered health services to wounded Iraqis. This seems to have had a profound impact on the Iraqi people. Iraqi officials and soldiers are closely monitoring the debates about the Turkish military. The Iraqi people see Turkey as a haven in which they can seek refuge at times of

crisis or disaster. Iraqis suffered from the pressures from the military and the intelligence during the time of Saddam. They were traumatized by the lack of stability and order stemming from the removal of the military after the invasion in 2003. Iraqis today experience the great damage to their country by instability and disorder. They regard the operations against the retired and active duty military officers in Turkey as a sign of the strength of the democratic system in the country. Still, they tend to ask, "What will be the outcome of this process?" They do not want the criticisms against the military to amount to its weakening as they see the Turkish military as a guarantor for the unity and integrity of Iraq.

I had similar impressions from intellectuals from the Balkans, Russia and Central Asia. Turkey's environment is quite sensitive to the developments in Turkey. Turkey is continually renewing itself. As a result, as the Turkish democracy improves and is institutionalized and as long as the Turkish army is strong within a democratic framework, then countries in the region will feel comfortable.

31 August 2010, Tuesday

TODAYS ZAMAN

Benefits of a strong 'yes' vote in the referendum on Sept. 12

SAHIN ALPAY

Readers of this column already know that I will vote "yes" in the referendum on constitutional amendments to be held on Sept. 12. I am convinced that, if adopted, these amendments will move Turkey towards consolidation of a liberal democracy instead of a kind of democracy where the state elites with the military in the lead have the last say in the direction of the country.

When the proposal for the amendments were first put forward by Parliament members of the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) last March, I wrote that if I were a Parliament member I would vote against two of those 26 amendments concerning the composition of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK), arguing in favor of a greater weight of Parliament rather than the president in the appointment of the members of these bodies as stipulated in the proposed amendments. I added, however, that my vote would still be "yes," in the event the amendments, failing adoption by Parliament, would be subject to a referendum, arguing that the proposed amendments introduce broader democratic representation than the current Constitution. I have also argued in my columns that the constitutional amendments package would not be sufficient to consolidate a democracy on European norms, and that adoption of an entirely new, civilian and democratic constitution is absolutely necessary.

After following with what is being said and done during the referendum campaign, I am now even more convinced that the adoption of the package has a vital bearing on the continuation of normalization of the regime in Turkey. I can now see even more clearly that an eventual rejection of the package would result in the seizing of the initiative by those political forces who favor reinforcement of the tutelary regime, and demand acquittal of those responsible for plotting military coups against the democratically elected government.

I surely respect the choices of those who will vote “no” or boycott the vote. After all democracy is as much freedom of expression as it is majority rule. Those who will vote in favor have, however, a fundamental difference of opinion with those who will vote against or boycott the vote. The former want Turkey to consolidate a democracy based on European Union (EU) norms, while the latter favor continuation of “a la turca” democracy under bureaucratic, military tutelage. For the latter, securing Kemalist secularism, that is state control of religion and restrictions on religious freedoms, is more important than democracy. For the latter, the regime should abide not by principles of liberal democracy but an authoritarian reading of Kemalism, that is, secular nationalism. Turkey is unfortunately some years away from reaching a broad-based consensus on the principles of a liberal and pluralist democracy as defined by the Copenhagen Political Criteria of the EU.

After following with what is being said and done during the referendum campaign, I am now even more determined to say “yes,” for the following reasons: First, adoption of the amendments will indicate the presence of a majority in favor of an entirely new, civilian and democratic constitution, and give the start signal for the campaign for a constitution that will secure not only individual freedoms but also the free expression of religious and ethnic identities the country so badly needs.

Secondly, adoption of the amendments I believe will help the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) to tidy up, and sever its ties with the bureaucratic tutelage regime. This would mean that there would be a broader and stronger will in the country to solve the countries basic problems like the Kurdish question, and establishing the supremacy of civilian rule.

Thirdly, adoption of the amendments will help those within the ranks of the governing AKP who are in this or another way attached to the status quo to come to their senses or help the party to clear its ranks from such elements. These elements within the party have played the major role in the failure of the amendment to subject the initiation of party closure cases to the permission of Parliament, and are not a bit aware that putting an end to the tutelary regime also requires that discriminative and racist views and practices are no longer tolerated.

Fourthly, adoption of the amendments will mean Turkey taking a big step towards normalizing democracy. This will enable the public opinion to focus not on the military’s or the judiciary’s interventions in politics, but on the performance of the elected governments.

Finally, I am now even more determined to say “yes” because if the amendments are adopted, social pressure on the governing AKP to negotiate with the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) to solve the Kurdish problem and bring to an end the armed insurgency led by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) will increase, thus opening the way for an increasingly democratic and prosperous Turkey that sets a shining example for its entire region.

30 August 2010, Monday

TODAYS ZAMAN

[Opinion] Iraq War Ends for a Second Time; Good for Turkey...

Thursday, 2 September 2010

By CENGİZ ÇANDAR

U.S. President Barack Obama has announced that the Iraq War is “over.” Since the last U.S. combat units are supposed to leave Iraq at the end of August, Obama met his promise to the American people and declared the “end” of war.

This Iraq War had been ended before, again by the statement of an American president. Obama’s predecessor, George W. Bush, who is the one behind the battle, said in a speech from the flight deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln warship in the Pacific Ocean on May 1, 2003, that “major combat operations” had ended, declaring the liberation of Iraq in the aftermath of the collapse of the dictatorial regime in the country.

Therefore, the Iraq War has been ended twice by two American presidents! Following the first declaration by Bush, Iraq turned into a bloodbath and tens of thousands lost their lives. More interestingly, clashes occurred not between the occupying U.S. troops and the Iraqi people, but between the Iraqi Sunnis and Shiites.

However, the military losses of the “occupier force” American troops in the bloodbath increased accordingly as they had repercussions on U.S. national politics. Obama stepped into the White House with the promise to withdraw.

That’s right. Obama kept his word. Now only 56,000 non-combat troops, out of 144,000 including combat units, remain in Iraq as of the end of August 2010. And the rest will leave Iraq by the end of 2011.

Non-combat troops will stay one more year in U.S. military bases located outside Iraqi cities, train Iraqi security forces and assist in counter-terrorism operations. A year later, as “non-combat” troops evacuate Iraq, civilian security groups will sign on to “fill the gap” and train Iraqi police.

No matter how many times the battle ends, obviously a brand new page opens for Turkey, too.

One of the most widespread opinions in 2003, when American forces were in and out of Iraq, was that the U.S. would be Turkey’s neighbor for at least 50 years.

It was asserted that the U.S. settling in Iraq would engage in activities to divide Turkey and this could be achieved through the Kurds.

Such attitudes found an audience, and fallacies such as the book titled “Metal Storm” broke sales records.

After seven years, which is next to nothing in the line of history, the power that was to be Turkey’s neighbor for at least 50 years has quit and left “non-combat forces” behind in Iraq.

Another view voiced by anti-Americans, who are ignored today, was that America wouldn’t be Turkey’s neighbor in Iraq. Iraq would remain owned by Iraqis; according to them, the north of Iraq belonged to Kurds and could remain so. In this view, Turkey should’ve, therefore, made strategic calculations to get closer primarily with Kurds and Shiites, rising as a key player in the Iraqi story.

Even if Turkey pays attention to relations with Sunni Arabs in Iraq for historical and social reasons, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu’s plans for diplomatic ties with Iraq are mostly based on the reality of a “new Iraq.”

Turkey today has various relations with all political actors in Iraq at different levels.

Britain, as a winner in World War I, had taken Iraq away from Turkey and created a new country and state with three Ottoman divisions, Basra, Baghdad and Mosul.

Although the British influenced Iraq, they couldn’t remain forever and left the country.

So, Turkey continued its relations with Iraqis for decades.

And in essence the Americans are no different from the Brits. They have to leave Iraq, too.

For Turkey, the difference between Iraq after the British and Iraq after the Americans is that the latter is more advantageous for Turkey.

About a year ago, Turkey and Iraq signed 48 agreements in Baghdad covering many different areas from environment to oil, from transportation to communication, trade to politics and culture. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Iraqi counterpart, Nouri al Maliki, have confidently used the slogan, “As of today, we are two states, one government.”

With Saddam Hussein, it was impossible to bring Turkey-Iraq relations to this point. Two weeks after signing these agreements in Baghdad, Davutoğlu went to the capital of the northern Iraq regional administration, Arbil, and opened a Turkish consulate. Iraq is a federal state and the “Kurdistan Regional Administration” is adjacent to Turkey. And a Kurdish-descent president remains in the seat in Baghdad.

Iraqi officials who share a common ethnic background with at least one-fifth of the Turkish population are governing Iraq. For geographic reasons, Iraq, among other neighboring countries, has the highest potential of integration with Turkey in the future. In Saddam’s Iraq, it was impossible to have this “strategic integration perspective.” Don’t pay heed to the fact that no new government has been established since the March elections, with a possibility of “instability” following the U.S. pullout. All are a matter of conjuncture.

What is important is that it’s been understood once more that Iraq belongs to Iraqis. The “war” has come to an end for Americans for the second time. Turkey’s historic role has become critical again due to the rapprochement of Turkey with Iraqi Kurds. The war’s end is a tremendous “strategic advantage” for Turkey following the collapse of the Saddam regime in Iraq.

*Cengiz Çandar is a columnist for daily Radikal, in which this piece appeared Tuesday. It was translated into English by the Daily News staff.

Thursday, 2 September 2010

By CENGİZ ÇANDAR

TODAYS ZAMAN
