



Washington

Selected News on Turkey

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Turkish, Israeli Officials Meet in Bid to Overcome Crisis

Seeking to capitalize on the diplomatic thaw provided by Turkey's fire-fighting assistance, Turkish and Israeli officials met again Monday in Geneva in a bid to revive bilateral ties, Turkish diplomatic sources have confirmed. The two-day talks between Turkish Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu and Yosef Ciechanover, the Israeli representative to the UN committee investigating Israel's deadly raid on a Gaza-bound aid flotilla, marked a second round of high-level talks since the May 31 attack.

Turkish diplomats declined to comment on the content of the Geneva talks, but the two sides were reportedly working on a formula to end the diplomatic tension, taking advantage of the opening provided by Turkey's dispatching last week of two fire-fighting planes to help extinguish a devastating forest fire in Israel. "If someone extends us a friendly hand for a solution to problems, we do not leave that hand in the air," a Turkish diplomatic source stated. "It is certain that the 'fire diplomacy' has encouraged the diplomatic contact. These kinds of situations sometimes help break the ice," another senior Turkish diplomat reported, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The diplomat reiterated the Turkish position, however, saying Ankara's conditions for restoring diplomatic ties - an apology for the flotilla raid and compensation to the victims' families - had not changed. Ciechanover was selected by the Netanyahu government to represent the country on the UN committee and was also sent to Geneva at the personal request of the Israeli prime minister. Neither Turkish nor Israeli sources confirmed that an apology is in the works.

Diplomatic sources said the climate was different Monday than it was during the first attempt at rapprochement following the flotilla incident, the secret talks in June between Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and Israeli Industry, Trade, and Labor Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer. "The time is different now," a diplomatic source said, adding that the fact that Netanyahu launched a personal initiative to promote diplomatic ties with Turkey is a reason to be optimistic.

The initiative comes after a telephone conversation between Netanyahu and his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, on Friday. In the conversation, the Israeli leader expressed his hopes that the Turkish fire-fighting assistance would be a gateway to improving bilateral relations. "The Turkish assistance is a very blessed act. I know that

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Prime Minister Erdoğan has decided on it personally. Israel will find a way to express its gratitude for the Turkish assistance," Netanyahu told the Israeli press following his conversation with Erdoğan in an initial signal that the Israeli government might be willing to use the opportunity posed by the disaster to normalize its troubled ties with Ankara. Though Erdoğan decided personally to send the planes to Israel in coordination with the Foreign Ministry, he said the same day that Turkey's humanitarian assistance should not be mixed up with other things and reiterated Ankara's well-known position on renewing ties. /Hurriyet/

Davutoğlu Holds Talks on Relations with Israel, Armenia in Washington

Turkey's foreign minister discussed relations with Israel and the resolution on the incidents of 1915 with leading U.S. congressmen in Washington, DC, on Tuesday. Diplomatic sources said Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu debated some main Turkish foreign policy topics with the members of the U.S. Congress, including Turkish-Israeli relations. Davutoğlu reiterated Turkey's expectation that Israel should apologize and pay compensation for its attack on the Mavi Marmara aid ship that killed nine Turks. The Turkish minister said the Israeli attack was a breach of international law, and stated that Turkey cooperated with the United Nations investigation commission dealing with the issue.

According to diplomats, Davutoğlu aimed to brief the congressmen on Turkey's perspective on several issues, and tried to learn the views of members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. During his meeting with members of the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Relations, Davutoğlu discussed the resolution on the incidents of 1915, which the committee adopted last March. The foreign minister argued the resolution might harm Turkish-U.S. relations and recalled Turkey's initiatives aiming to enlighten the incidents.

On Monday, Davutoğlu had a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, National Security Adviser Tom Donilon, and European Commissioner for enlargement Stefan Füle. Davutoğlu and Clinton reportedly discussed U.S. diplomatic documents recently posted on the WikiLeaks website, Iran, the situation in Lebanon, the fight against terrorism, NATO's Lisbon summit, and Cyprus. Clinton thanked Turkey for its previous efforts regarding Iran, while Davutoglu said Turkey cared about the meeting of the P5+1 countries with Iran, not about the venue of the meeting.

During his visit, Davutoğlu met Jeanne Shaheen, the head of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on European Affairs; John Kerry, the chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; Steny Hoyer, the U.S. House of Representatives majority leader; Richard Lugar, a ranking member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; and Howard Berman, the chairman of U.S. House Committee on Foreign Relations. Davutoğlu left the United States early Wednesday and proceeded to the Kazakh capital of Astana to attend the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or OSCE, heads of state and government summit. /Hurriyet/

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Palestinian Leader Meets with Top Turkish Officials

Palestine must become its own independent nation in order for peace to prevail in the Middle East, the Turkish president stated Monday, following a meeting with his Palestinian counterpart. Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas arrived in Ankara on Sunday for an official visit, meeting with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on Sunday and President Abdullah Gül on Monday. The visit occurred as Israel tries to recover from the biggest fire in its history. Peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, Turkey-Palestine relations, and regional developments were all reportedly on Abbas' agenda.

In a joint press conference with Abbas following their meeting Monday, Gül said he had received a broad spectrum of information and consultations regarding peace in the Middle East and protecting Palestine's national unity. The Turkish president emphasized that the establishment of an independent Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, was crucial for achieving peace in the region. "We announced our strong support in September when the peace talks started. In order to improve the living standards of the 1.5 million people in Gaza, the blockades must be removed, and Israel must adopt new politics in order for aid to reach there with ease," Gül said. "Turkey's close cooperation and solidarity with Palestine will continue. Turkey will continue its social and economic support and aid to Palestine." In his statement at the press conference, Gül also expressed his satisfaction with Argentina and Brazil recognizing the Palestinian government.

This is Abbas' third visit to Turkey this year. He is expected to leave the country Tuesday and head to Greece on an official visit. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu also attended Sunday's meeting with Erdoğan, which was closed to the press. /Hurriyet/

U.S. Defends its Diplomats' Work after Erdoğan's Remarks

The U.S. State Department praised Turkey's stabilizing role in its region and beyond after Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan slammed Washington over some of its diplomats' comments in leaked cables and said the diplomats should be punished. State Department spokesman Philip J. Crowley also said U.S. ties with Turkey are not affected by the WikiLeaks release and defended the work of diplomats. Erdoğan said on Wednesday that the U.S. is responsible for allegations that he has bank accounts in Switzerland and Turkey is working on ways to seek legal action against diplomats who reported the claims in a confidential 2004 cable released by WikiLeaks.

When asked to comment on Erdoğan's remarks, Crowley said it is a diplomat's job to engage with other governments, private citizens and report back to capitals. "Those reports are ... most effective when they're candid, when they're frank, when they're direct," he said on Wednesday. "We're not going to change and we don't think that this will change the way that we approach our diplomacy and I doubt that this will change how other countries engage in their diplomacy." Crowley then underlined the importance of Turkey-U.S. ties, telling reporters at the press briefing that the U.S. has engaged Turkey significantly in pursuit of the two countries' bilateral relationship and their common interests in the region and around the world. "That is unaffected by what has been revealed here [by WikiLeaks]. Just in Lisbon, we engaged with Turkey constructively in advancing a concept through which NATO will embrace and adopt and

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build a missile defense system that can protect the entire alliance from one end to the other, including Turkey," Crowley highlighted.

Extolling Turkey's role in Iraq, Crowley said Turkey has played a very constructive role in encouraging the formation of a new government in Iraq, and that it will have an important role to play in helping to integrate the country, in addition to discussing Turkey's role regarding Iran. "Turkey has a tremendous interest in what happens with respect to the relationship between Iran and the international community. It was Turkey recently, and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu made clear to Secretary Clinton in their meeting on Monday, that Turkey has been encouraging Iran to accept the invitation of the P-5+1, and that meeting has been just announced and will take place next week in Geneva," the spokesman said.

Crowley said it is this kind of cooperation, mutual interest and mutual respect that will guide his country's relationship with Turkey, and most importantly, the two countries' common efforts to pursue areas of significant interest that the U.S. shares with the Turkish people and others in the region. "We have a strong relationship with Turkey. We are allies within NATO. We are friends. We are working closely together on a wide range of issues. That's not going to change, and that was the commitment that the Secretary and the foreign minister agreed to in their meeting earlier this week," Crowley concluded. /Today's Zaman/

Ankara, Washington Draw Up New Anti-Terror Action Plan

Ongoing cooperation between Turkey and the U.S. and Turkey against terrorism reached a new dimension last week, as officials from both countries met at the Foreign Ministry in Ankara to draw up a new action plan. In addition, in bilateral talks in Washington, both Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stressed their commitment to the continued alliance between the countries.

At the Foreign Ministry, teams headed by U.S. State Department counterterrorism chief Daniel Benjamin and Ambassador Reha Keskin-tepe put together the new action plan against the PKK and Al-Qaeda, which includes sections on economic and security measures. During the meeting, the Turkish side said that US contributions are crucial for successfully ending the fight against the PKK. Both sides affirmed their determination to deepen cooperation. /Turkish Press Review/

Gül Eyes Deeper Turkish Ties with Russia, Central Asia at OSCE Summit

Turkey's president, frustrated by "artificial" barriers to the country's long-held ambition of joining the European Union, is building closer ties with Russia and Central Asian states, where Turkish business is flourishing. Abdullah Gül, in an interview with Reuters, said accession to the EU remained a priority and that Turkey would play a key role in future energy supplies to Europe. But he explained his country is also playing an increasing role in ex-Soviet states.

Turkey is preparing to invest in Kyrgyzstan now there is a new government in place after the overthrow of the president and outbreak of ethnic violence in the ex-Soviet Central

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Asian state earlier this year. "It will be mainly economic and financial assistance. We are also carrying out various training programs," Gül reported on the sidelines of a summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in the Kazakh capital of Astana. Political leaders in Kyrgyzstan, which hosts U.S. and Russian air bases, agreed on Nov. 30 to form a coalition government and build the region's first parliamentary democracy.

Gül said the Turkic Cooperation Council, a new body that groups Turkic nations, would help strengthen ties with Central Asia, where Turkish firms are among the most active investors. "During the Soviet regime, there was a wall built between these lands and us. We used to keep our feelings concerning this part of the world deep in our hearts," Gül said. "Even though we speak a different dialect, we are speaking the same language. We have the same culture and the same faith."

Doubts about admitting a Muslim country of 74 million people have held Europe back from welcoming Turkey. Gül said the issue had become "politicized" and that "artificial" barriers were delaying the process. "Cyprus would be an example. Even though the Cyprus issue is quite obvious, certain parties are hiding behind it, using it as an excuse," he said. "We have started accession negotiations and we are very much determined to finish them." He said Turkey would play a crucial role in new energy supply routes to Europe, and that diversifying sources of oil and gas would make sense to European countries. "Resources coming from Russia being complemented by supply from the Caucasus, Central Asia, Iran -- if the political environment is suitable -- and the Middle East would be the normal option," he stated. "Turkey becomes a very important alternative energy route when I list all the supplier countries."

With Russia, Turkey is playing a leading role in trying to settle the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Gül said he discussed the matter with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev at the summit. In a small sign of progress, the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan said at the OSCE summit they were committed to seeking a final settlement. The OSCE pledged support to both countries and called for steps to strengthen a cease-fire. "Even though there is no breakthrough point at the moment, there are some positive steps taking place," Gül emphasized. "There is a silent, but very determined diplomacy." Turkey's efforts since 2008 to normalize its own thorny relations with Armenia added to the complexities by fuelling a sense of insecurity in Azerbaijan. "I sincerely believe that the de facto situation in the Caucasus is not in the interest of any one of us," Gül said. "Everyone should have perspective, cover the big picture." /Today's Zaman/

Turkey, Ecuador Boost Ties with Commercial Cooperation Deal

Turkey and Ecuador on Wednesday signed a Commercial Cooperation and Economic and Trade Partnership Protocol to help boost commercial relations between the two countries. The deal was signed by Foreign Trade Undersecretary Ahmet Yakici and Francisco Rivadeneria, Ecuador 's foreign trade and economic integration deputy minister. The deal is meant to boost economic ties between Turkey and Ecuador and facilitate more bilateral cooperation, especially in joint investments, said Yakici's office. /Turkish Press Review/

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Erdoğan, Obama Reaffirm WikiLeaks Won't Harm U.S.-Turkey Ties

U.S. President Barack Obama called Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on Saturday to voice his regrets over the release of U.S. diplomatic cables by WikiLeaks, saying the whistle-blowing website's recent disclosure of secret cables should not harm bilateral ties. "The president expressed his regrets for the deplorable action by WikiLeaks and the two leaders agreed that it will not influence or disrupt the close cooperation between the United States and Turkey," the White House reported in a written statement. "The leaders discussed the enduring importance of the U.S.-Turkish partnership and affirmed their commitment to work together on a broad range of issues."

The series of diplomatic messages released by WikiLeaks revealed a complex and difficult relationship between the United States and NATO ally Turkey, with U.S. diplomats casting doubts over Ankara's foreign policy orientation. Several Turkish officials, including Erdoğan, were angered by the WikiLeaks release of highly classified U.S. diplomatic correspondence. Obama's call to Erdoğan is seen as an effort to soothe Turkey.

Earlier this month Erdoğan accused U.S. diplomats of slander after leaked cables painted him as an authoritarian who hated Israel and led a government with Islamist influences. The prime minister also denied that he had secret accounts in Swiss banks, as claimed by a U.S. diplomatic cable. "I do not have one penny in Swiss banks... If this is proven, I will not stay in my post," Erdoğan declared. He urged Washington "to call to account" its diplomats, also saying his aides were looking into ways of legal action against the cables' authors.

Turkish sources said Obama also thanked Erdoğan for sending firefighting helicopters to Israel in an effort to counter the country's worst forest fires in history. Turkey's move came during a nadir in ties with the eastern Mediterranean state. /Hurriyet/

U.S. Lauds Turkey's 'Constructive' Role at NATO, OSCE Summits

Amid numerous recent reports saying that Washington is unhappy with Ankara's Iran policy, the Obama administration this week pointedly praised Turkey's role at recent international summits. Philip Gordon, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasian Affairs, on Tuesday described Turkey's role at last month's NATO summit in Lisbon as well as at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) summit in Kazakhstan two weeks ago as "constructive," while calling Turkey "a critical NATO partner" for his country.

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"Turkey played a very constructive role at the NATO summit and at the OSCE summit," Gordon told European journalists in a teleconference. "It's true that we disagreed about the vote on Iran [sanctions]. But we have always said that even strong friends and partners can have disagreements. And I think at Lisbon we showed ourselves to be good friends and partners in NATO."

Gordon added, "Turkey had strong views on a number of issues and represented itself on those views but came together with all the other allies to support the ambitious agenda that I've already described, including on missile defense, including on cooperation with Russia, and including on the new strategic concept. And we all agreed. And Turkey took a very constructive position and I think showed anyone who was doubting that it wants to play a constructive role and is a critical NATO partner of the United States. Similarly in Astana (Kazakhstan) we worked together and reached a common agreement. I think the series of summits only confirmed what we have been saying all along that even when we may have differences about which we are frank, we also have a lot in common and are going to continue to pursue our mutual interest." /Turkish Press Review/

Ankara Seeks Normalization in Ties with Israel by June Elections

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government hopes to have normalized relations with Israel by the June 2011 general elections on condition that compensation and an apology for the Mavi Marmara incident are obtained from Israel, officials have said. However, the same officials also stressed that reaching an outcome in ongoing efforts for the normalization of ties with Israel will not happen in a matter of days, while citing the balance of power in Israel's domestic affairs as the main obstacle to an imminent breakthrough in these efforts. "We support the talks that started in Geneva. We hope that Israel continues to display a constructive approach. Turkey's conditions are out there but it seems difficult for Israel to accept those conditions considering its domestic politics. It is unlikely that the relations will develop positively in the short term," Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Çiçek told reporters on Thursday.

Çiçek was referring to Israel's offer to compensate the relatives of Turks killed in the Mavi Marmara raid in May. Broached by envoys in Geneva on Sunday and Monday, the offer includes measures for patching up ties but appeared to have fallen short of Turkey's demand that Israel formally apologize for the deaths of nine activists. Meanwhile, Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu denied on Thursday that Israel offered to pay \$100,000 to the families of each of the men shot dead by Israeli marines during brawls aboard the converted cruise ship, the Mavi Marmara. "The citing of [compensation] figures or the matter of regret did not come onto the agenda," Davutoğlu stated.

"There is a debate on the wording, on the word 'apology'," Özdem Sanberk, a former Foreign Ministry undersecretary who represents Turkey at the UN inquiry panel for the flotilla incident and took part in the bilateral fence-mending talks in Geneva, told Agence France-Presse. "As far as it concerns the Turkish side, it has never negotiated a word other than the word 'apology'," he said.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Selçuk Ünal reiterated on Friday that no new meeting was scheduled, however, he indicated that this is not meant to indicate that the talks have stalled. "Contacts [with Israeli officials] will continue," Ünal told reporters at a press

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briefing while declining to elaborate on content of the Geneva talks. The rapprochement talks followed Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's dispatch of planes to help Israel battle a forest fire that raged out of control two weeks ago. Netanyahu had pledged to "find ways to express our appreciation" to the Turks. But Erdoğan, a frequent critic of Israel's Palestinian policies, on Tuesday signaled no flexibility in Turkey's terms. /Today's Zaman/

Turkish, Pakistani Leaders Co-chair Cooperation Council

The prime ministers of Turkey and Pakistan Tuesday co-chaired the inaugural session of the high-level cooperation council aimed at providing a unique platform to provide a long-term strategic direction to bilateral relations. "The meeting will prepare the ground for both countries to reach our common goals," Pakistani Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani stated in his address to the Turkish Parliament. He also expressed the hope that the mechanism would strengthen the relationship especially in trade and help the countries attain a \$2 billion trade volume in 2012. The Pakistani leader said the cooperation council would also strengthen democratic ties between Turkey and Pakistan and increase visits between the two countries' parliamentarians.

Gilani also conveyed his country's special thanks to Turkey, who extended a helping hand to the victims of recent devastating floods in Pakistan. "We were deeply impressed by Turkish people and children who rushed to the victims' aid. A student from Konya sent us her pocket money and her doll, while an old pensioner sent his salary... Turkish-Pakistani relations are very special," said the Pakistani leader, adding that Turkish feelings toward his country had always been warm and sincere. "No matter how far Jinnah Street in Ankara and Atatürk Street in Islamabad [are from each other], we are two nations whose hearts are close; we are just like one state made up of two nations."

Gilani praised the Turkish government for its efforts to draft a comprehensive constitution, saying it would help strengthen democracy. Referring to a similar constitutional process in his country, he said, "We are proceeding on this road with inspiration from you." The Pakistani leader also highlighted that his country was facing threats from terrorism and extremism, adding that former leader Benazir Bhutto, whom he described as a courageous leader, died for this reason. "Terror is such a phenomenon that it recognizes no faith or border," said Gilani, adding that cooperation was key to tackling the threat of terrorism. After his address, Gilani met with Erdoğan and co-chaired the first meeting of the high-level cooperation council.

President Abdullah Gül decorated the Pakistani prime minister with a state medal of honor earlier in the day for the latter's contributions to friendly relations between Turkey and Pakistan. "Gilani's efforts are of the utmost importance for not only boosting regional and global peace, stability and prosperity, but also enhancing deep friendly and brotherhood relations between Turkey and Pakistan," Gül stated during the ceremony in Ankara. For his part, Gilani reiterated political will to further improve friendship between Turkey and his country, proclaiming, "Long live Pakistan-Turkey friendship." Gül hosted a luncheon in Gilani's honor at the presidential residence following the ceremony. Gilani also met Wednesday with Turkish business community representatives in Istanbul over a luncheon hosted by the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey, or DEİK. /Hurriyet/

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Belgian Term at Helm of EU to Close with No New Negotiation Chapter Opened

Belgian and Turkish officials on Thursday confirmed that it will not be possible to open a new negotiation chapter during the six-month-long rotating EU presidency of Belgium, which will finish at the end of this year. Belgium will hand over the presidency to Hungary on Jan. 1. An intergovernmental conference set to be held later this month for opening a new chapter is accordingly cancelled.

Belgian Foreign Minister Steven Vanackere, whose country will be the second since Turkey began membership talks with the EU in 2005 to fail to open a single negotiating chapter following Finland in 2006, said that Turkey's implementation of new competition rules was "a bit too slow," European Voice reported on Thursday. Arguing that the "momentum is still going on" in Turkey's bid to join the EU, Vanackere explained that opening the competition chapter was "a question of weeks and months at the beginning of the next presidency because a lot of work has been done."

Diplomatic sources in Ankara confirmed that it will not be possible to open the competition chapter, citing "technical reasons" for the situation. "The opening of the competition chapter has been delayed entirely for technical reasons, and it will not be possible to open it at a meeting on Dec. 22 as previously planned," diplomatic sources, speaking on customary condition of anonymity, told reporters on Thursday, referring to the planned intergovernmental conference. "Competition is one of the toughest chapters, and we are continuing our technical studies for opening this chapter. Even Croatia has not yet been able to close the competition chapter although they are expected to wrap up membership talks by mid-2011," the same sources said.

In its annual progress report released last month, the European Commission advised Ankara to mainly focus on three negotiation chapters: on competition policy, public procurement and social and employment policy. During the first six months of 2010, when Spain was the rotating president of the 27-nation bloc, only one new negotiation chapter was opened - and that only a day before Spain handed over the presidency to Belgium on July 1. At the time, thanks to outstanding efforts by Spain, a staunch supporter of Turkey's bid to join the bloc, a chapter was opened on food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy. At the time, Spain's efforts to overcome the resistance of certain other EU member states to take a step towards admitting Turkey into the EU was openly confirmed and appreciated by Ankara.

Turkey, which formally began accession negotiations with the EU in 2005, has so far opened talks on only 13 chapters. The EU suspended accession talks on eight out of 35 chapters in 2006 due to Turkey's refusal to open its ports and airports to traffic from Greek Cyprus. France, which opposes Turkish accession to the EU, is unilaterally blocking talks on five chapters, which it says are directly related to accession. Cyprus, for its part, announced last December that it would veto the opening of talks on five other chapters due to the continued failure by Turkey to open its ports and airports to Cypriot ships and planes. /Today's Zaman/

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Azerbaijan, Turkey to Start Military Equipment Production Next Year

Azerbaijan and Turkey will produce more military weapons and equipment starting next year as part of the two countries' increasing cooperation in this sphere over the past year. Azerbaijan's ANS Press news portal reported on Wednesday, based on information from military sources, that the two countries already signed a memorandum of intention a month ago to jointly produce some military equipment. Turkey together with Azerbaijan was also expected to establish an arms production company in Baku as part of Turkey's military cooperation with the neighboring country, which remains at war with Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The report says the memorandum of intention has already been signed between the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense Industry and Turkey's Otokar company over the manufacture of armored units. According to the agreement, necessary military parts will be imported from Turkey. In the first stage of production, the two countries will produce infantry/attack weapons. The later stages of military cooperation will include production of ammunition and exporting military equipment. Turkish and Azerbaijani delegations are also expected to hold talks in late December to seek ways for more cooperation in the military-industrial complex.

Military cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkey first emerged in the early 1990s with an agreement signed between the Azerbaijani and Turkish governments on military education. Since then, the Azerbaijani and Turkish governments have closely cooperated on defense and security. Azerbaijan adopted a \$3.12 billion military budget on Oct. 22 of this year, the largest military budget in the region. /Today's Zaman/

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Turkish, Israeli Officials Meet amid Row over Cyprus Maritime Accord

The Israeli ambassador to Ankara visited Turkey's environment minister Wednesday to express Israel's gratitude for Turkey's assistance during a recent fire, following Ankara's angry response to a new oil exploration deal between Israel and Cyprus. Sources said the Israeli-Cypriot deal was not discussed during the meeting between Environment Minister Veysel Eroglu and Israel's Gaby Levy. The visit was simply a gesture to express Israel's thanks to the Turkish government after it sent two firefighting planes to help contain a serious forest fire in northern Israel. While the fire aid prompted both sides to seek ways to normalize relations, which were strained by an Israeli commando raid on a Gaza-

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bound Turkish flotilla on May 31, the deal Israel signed with Cyprus last Friday drew adverse reactions from Turkey.

In a statement, the Foreign Ministry criticized the deal as an "unfortunate development," calling it "null and void" because it disregards the rights and jurisdiction of Turkish Cypriots. The deal delineates an exclusive economic zone between Israel and Cyprus and will allow both countries to move ahead in the search for energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean. Last week, Foreign Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioglu summoned the Israeli ambassador to the ministry to convey Turkey's displeasure over the matter. "These kinds of agreements are directly linked to the sovereignty issue, which is one of the indispensable components of the ongoing comprehensive settlement negotiations," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement, referring to talks between Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders aimed at reunifying the island. "The Greek Cypriot administration does not represent in law or in fact the Turkish Cypriots and Cyprus as a whole. Therefore, agreements signed by the Greek Cypriots with countries of the region are null and void for Turkey."

Israel is not the first country to sign such a deal, as Cyprus has already concluded similar agreements with Egypt and Lebanon. "It is our earnest expectation from the international community and especially from the countries of the region that all would avoid supporting Greek Cypriots' unilateral activities that would have a negative impact on the comprehensive settlement negotiations," stated the ministry. "Turkey, along with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), will continue its efforts, through diplomatic and political channels, to protect the rights and interests of the Turkish Cypriots." In an interview with Agence-France Presse, Israeli Infrastructure Minister Uzi Landau brushed aside the Turkish criticism, saying, "The agreement with Cyprus clearly defines our rights in the Mediterranean." /Turkish Press Review/

Turkish Government, Pro-Kurdish Party Quarrel over Autonomy Proposal

The Turkish prime minister has harshly criticized the main pro-Kurdish party's demand for autonomy and the broader use of the Kurdish language, accusing it of "sabotaging the democratization of Turkey... Turkey's common language is Turkish. Any initiative to change this reality cannot be accepted. This is a matter of social peace and unity," Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan told parliamentary deputies late Sunday during budget talks at the Parliament. Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, co-chair Selahattin Demirtas responded to Erdoğan on Monday: "He cannot stop the change with threats and insults," Demirtas told reporters in the southeastern province of Diyarbakır, adding that they were ready even to die in the struggle. "We are trying to deepen the brotherhood while the prime minister is deepening the division."

Erdoğan on Sunday was tight-lipped about BDP proposals under the title of "democratic autonomy," which envision a semi-autonomous Kurdish region with its own parliament, flag and self-defense force. Outlined in a draft by the Democratic Society Congress, or DTK, an umbrella organization of pro-Kurdish groups, the proposals prompted investigations from a local court and the Supreme Court of Appeals.

"Bringing these issues into the public debate will never serve democracy, freedoms, social peace or brotherhood," the prime minister stated. Noting that Turkey will hold

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general elections in June, Erdoğan accused the BDP of trying to redesign domestic politics in line with terror organizations' approaches, a reference to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which is listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union. "It's a great unfairness to introduce these unserious projects as the demands of my Kurdish brothers. To what extent do the owners of these proposals represent my Kurdish citizens? How much of [Turkey's] East and Southeast do they represent?" the prime minister asked.

Reiterating that he will never acknowledge the PKK and its affiliates as representatives of Turkey's Kurdish population, Erdoğan argued: "Those who talk about democracy and freedoms are preventing my citizens from using their citizenship rights. They are doing this through threats and pressure." He added that the government will never allow "any sort of surgery" to divide Turkey.

Criticizing Erdoğan for fueling nationalism through his statements, Demirtas said Monday that the BDP was trying to defend people's right to use their mother tongue freely. "This is not racism or ethnic division. It's to protect a banned language. We believe in democracy and peace," he declared, arguing that the projects put forward by pro-Kurdish groups aim to prevent division in the country. "But if the ruling party is determined to insult Kurds and drive them away from the state, they should come clean and openly say it," Demirtas said. "His [Erdoğan's] comments will only make the Turkish nationalists happy. The prime minister seems to want to walk hand-in-hand with the nationalists ahead of the general elections; this is his choice. What he is doing will just deepen the crisis."

Demirtas also used a religious reference to criticize the prime minister, accusing Erdoğan of "defying Allah." "Erdoğan says, 'I will make you all similar, my nation is one, my language is one,' whereas Allah says, 'I created every one of you different,'" the BDP co-chair said. "Mr. Prime Minister, which holy book says that? How is this being a Muslim?"/Hurriyet/

In Historic Deal with Turkey, Syria Pledges Amnesty, Jobs for ex-PKK Members

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Syrian Prime Minister Muhammad Naji al-Otri, during his visit to Turkey early last week for the second meeting of the bilateral High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council, signed a historic deal regarding how members of the terrorist PKK in northern Iraq will be treated. Under the agreement, PKK terrorists and leaders in northern Iraq will be encouraged to settle in Syria, which is planning a general amnesty for PKK militants. Syria is also promising an employment scheme for those who want to come back from northern Iraq and reintegrate into Syrian society. If these militants can be relocated to and kept in Syria, this would ease Turkey's anti-terrorist task tremendously, said a senior security official who asked not to be named. The deal also marks a historic point in relations between the two countries. Syria was the PKK's number one supporter in the region until 1998, when Turkey threatened war. In recent years, Syria and Turkey have declared the PKK a common enemy.

The two countries also took steps towards even deeper bilateral cooperation, to the benefit of both themselves and the region, by signing 11 cooperation agreements in various areas. "Welcome home," Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu told visiting Syrian

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officials. "The cooperation between Turkey and Syria," explained Davutoglu, "constitutes a model for the entire region, which has been closely watching its success, for if it succeeds, this will not only affect ties between our countries, but will also improve the unfortunate destiny of the region." Eleven government ministers from the Turkish side and 13 from the Syrian one participated in the talks.

The cooperative spirit between the two neighboring countries has rapidly spread across the region, with many countries taking initiatives to start similar high-level strategic cooperation mechanisms among each other, Davutoglu said. "We have held very frequent meetings with Syrian officials over the last year, and in this time have made perhaps a decade's worth of progress," he added. "The Turkish-Syrian friendship will endure forever. No provocation or external factor will be able to harm this friendship. In time, the whole world will also see the wonderful fruits of this friendship." Also speaking at the meeting, Syrian Assistant Vice President Hassan Turkmani stressed that Erdogan and Assad's vision has helped cement the friendship and cooperation between Turkey and Syria. /Turkish Press Review/

Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan to Hold Joint Military Exercise

Turkey will hold a joint military exercise with Afghanistan and Pakistan in March 2011, the leaders of the three countries reportedly decided during a trilateral summit held Friday in Istanbul. Turkish diplomatic sources, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the situation, confirmed the plans. "Development [of our countries] is a strategic tool to maintain peace, stability and serenity," Turkish President Abdullah Gül stated Friday in his opening speech at the summit, which followed a meeting of Central Asian countries belonging to the Economic Cooperation Organization. Security and development were the main issues discussed at the trilateral summit. In his speech, Gül emphasized the three countries had to provide a positive environment for private investment and strengthen cooperation in the fields of air transportation, commerce and energy.

In addition to the training exercise, the heads of state also decided to establish infrastructure for audiovisual conferences as well as a natural disaster emergency operation center. Four main decisions were made regarding security issues including joint military drills, the fight against terrorism, a joint program on police cooperation and one on the fight against drug trafficking. An "ideas platform" will also be launched in order to increase communication and cooperation among researchers, academics and media outlets in the three countries. The leaders also agreed to launch a cultural exhibition that will highlight the heritage of the three countries and strengthen cultural ties. "Friendship among the people of our countries has deep historical roots," Gül said in his speech, adding that relations between the three countries have progressed and gained momentum since the first trilateral summit, held in Ankara in 2007.

The fifth trilateral summit took place directly after the 11th ECO Summit. Previous summits have focused on a variety of topics, including dialogue and mutual security, economic cooperation, security and education. Afghanistan has meanwhile asked for Turkey's technical assistance in increasing project-development capacity; the Afghan president told Gül that his country has decided to become a partner of the ECO Commerce and Development Bank. /Hurriyet/

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UN Extends Cyprus Mission Despite Turkey's Objections

Arguing that it ignores the Turkish Cypriot presence on the divided island, Turkey on Tuesday cast the lone negative vote on a UN Security Council resolution extending the mandate of the UN Peacekeeping Force on Cyprus (UNFICYP). Council resolutions, from the one first setting up the UNFICYP to subsequent extensions of its mandate, are still being drafted "as if there is only one side on the island," Turkish Ambassador to the UN Ertugrul Apakan said at the meeting. "There has not been a joint and constitutional government representing the whole of Cyprus since 1963," he argued. "For over 47 years, treating the Greek Cypriot government as the government of the whole island has been the main obstacle to finding a just, lasting and comprehensive solution."

Apakan also charged that the resolution failed to reflect the views of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who said in a recent report that the ongoing Cyprus talks cannot be opened and that a critical window of opportunity is rapidly closing. "We believe that the resolution should have carried a stronger message towards this end," said Apakan. In the resolution extending the peacekeeping mission through next June, the council also urged Cyprus' leaders to press stronger on negotiations to reunify the island. /Turkish Press Review/

Thai FM Calls Turkey a Strategic Partner During Visit

Turkey and Thailand are strategic partners and can improve their ties further because they are committed to each other, Thai Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya said, marking an official visit to İstanbul and Ankara on Dec. 22-25, his second trip to Turkey in 2010. "My coming here is precisely to reaffirm to each other that we can be excellent partners," he told reporters. Piromya, who met with Turkey's foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, on Friday, said they agreed that they are strategic partners. The two countries celebrated the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2008 and they intend to increase mutual high-level visits in the near future.

Recalling that Davutoğlu has plans to visit Thailand in early 2011, Piromya said the two countries were working to finalize a joint plan to improve cooperation in various fields. The Thai foreign minister also stated that both Turkey and Thailand can play a strategic role in their regions. "There is political will and determination to finalize the agreements. All we need to do is to convert these agreements into action." There are already 13 agreements between the two countries, from avoiding double taxation to agriculture, tourism and trade. There are more agreements that the two countries plan to sign, especially in the areas of defense, education and science. "We have agreed to sign those in the course of 2011," he explained. "It's not only the question of signing agreements, it's incumbent upon us to make the agreements work."

Piromya stressed that Thailand needs Turkey to get into south and southeast Europe, Central Asia, Africa and the Middle East. "Turkey is doing a lot of business in those countries, especially in construction and energy transportation," he said. He added that through Southeast Asia, Thailand is linked to the Indian subcontinent, northeast Asia,

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New Zealand and other countries in the Pacific. "So Turkey can come to Thailand and go to the sub-regions around us," he said. The trade volume between the two countries is \$1.3 billion. Turkey imports natural rubber, textiles and auto parts from Thailand, which imports steel and steel products and chemicals from Turkey. /Today's Zaman/

Turkey's State-run Broadcaster to Launch English Language Channel

The state-owned Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) will work on launching a channel in 2011 that would broadcast in English, TRT General Manager İbrahim Şahin has said. Speaking to the Anatolia news agency, Şahin discussed TRT's plans for next year. Having announced that they will have a new education channel by January, he noted that they would focus on launching a separate channel in English, which, he added, is akin to a "national duty" for them.

"This is because Turkey has grown so large and become an effective power in its region. We, however, cannot publicize that because promoting it to non-Turkish speakers can only be in English. It is a universal language now. Everyone understands at least a little of it. We can now say all countries have established a channel [in English] and started promoting it like that. I think we lag a little behind in that regard," Şahin stated.

TRT has been engaged in an intensive campaign to start broadcasting in non-Turkish languages. As part of that campaign, two separate stations broadcasting in Kurdish and Arabic were launched in the past two years. Şahin told Anatolia that now is certainly the time for an English channel. "We have established many channels, but we still do not have one broadcasting in English. That means we have something missing as part of our efforts to promote Turkey. We have been postponing it because we wanted it to be of the highest quality. Our only task apart from routine work now will be to focus on the channel in English," he said. /Today's Zaman/

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Washington

Selected News on Turkey

TUSIAD Highlights

TUSIAD, together with the Turkish Informatics Foundation (TBV) and main sponsor Turkcell, on Monday announced the winners of the 8th annual "eTurkey (eTR) Awards" at a ceremony held at the Turkish Parliament. Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali Sahin presented the awards.

The General Directorate of Security's online "Vehicle Registration and Driver's License Transactions" project won the Public Sector e-Citizen Services category, while the General Directorate of Forests' "Forest Fire Early Warning System" took the Public Sector e-Services category. The Public Sector e-Business Services category was awarded to the General Directorate of Environmental Management's "Online Environmental Permits" project.

Other categories focused on the understanding of the modern state, transparency, and social responsibility practices. These "e-government" awards were established by TUSIAD and TBV to reward and raise awareness on the use of technological applications for e-government services. Speakers at the ceremony included Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali Sahin, Turkish Minister of Transport Binali Yildirim, TUSIAD Chairwoman Umit Boyner, TBV Chairman Faruk Eczacibasi, TUSIAD Board Member and Chairman of the Information Society and New Technologies Committee Erman Ilıcak, and Turkcell General Manager Sureyya Ciliv.

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