

November 2010

October 26-November 1, 2010

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Turkey's Security Document Revised at National Security Council Meeting

The National Security Council (MGK) on Wednesday agreed to make radical changes to a document referred to as the "Red Book," in which the main threats to Turkey's security are outlined. Turkey's approach to its neighbors has changed with the revisions, which were drafted by a team of experts headed by Prime Ministry Undersecretary Efkan Ala. Syria, Bulgaria, Georgia, and Armenia are no longer among Turkey's list of external threats. The changes made to the National Security Policy Document (MGSB), which was drafted by the military in the past, are a sign that the government's priorities are now reflected in state policy. In addition, Turkey has for the first time referred to Israel's actions in the Middle East as a threat to Turkey. In the section on relations with neighbors and external threats, the document draws attention to the instability in the region caused by Israel and the possibility that Israel's actions may lead the countries in the region to engage in an arms race.

As for Greece, with which Turkey has come to the brink of war three times in the past over territorial disputes in the Aegean, Turkey still sees any Greek attempt to extend the country's territorial waters to 12 nautical miles as a *casus belli* (a cause for war). Turkey and Greece are at odds over the boundaries of their territorial waters and airspace in the Aegean due to the peculiar geography of the Aegean Sea, where some Greek islands are lined up along Turkey's western coasts. Aside from the "12 mile problem," Greece is not included in the "external threats" list. Iran, seen as a major threat in earlier versions of the confidential document because of its Islamic government and nuclear capacity, is no longer the number one threat for Turkey, although the document emphasizes that the Middle East should be cleansed of nuclear weapons.

Turkey's perception of domestic threats has also been revised with changes to the document, with religious reactionism no longer mentioned as a domestic threat. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) had been working on the changes for a long time and said the state should not see its citizens as potential threats. The military wing of the council agreed with the government on the issue and the famous "reactionary threat" was not cited in the new document. Instead, it mentions "radical groups exploiting religion," a term which under the Turkish Penal Code refers to groups that, by employing violent methods, use religion for destructive and separatist activities. The edited MGSB also contains new threats such as cyber terror, global warming, and the aging population of Turkey. /Sabah/

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TÜSİAD Takes Leadership Role on Kurdish Issue

One of the most influential business groups in Turkey is taking a new, hands-on approach to solving the Kurdish question in the country, promising a reciprocal visit to Diyarbakır after hosting members of the pro-Kurdish party. The Kurdish issue is the biggest problem facing the country and results from a lack of sufficient democracy in Turkey, Ümit Boyner, chair of the board of directors of the Turkish Industry and Business Association, or TÜSİAD, said Wednesday. She vowed that the group would continue its dialogue with the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, and work to help prepare a new constitution that would transform the country's "three dividers" - "identities, freedoms, and the separation of powers" - into "three unifiers." TÜSİAD is currently working out the specifics on its stance on a new constitution - how it should be made, what principles it should feature and how detailed it should be - and will share these thoughts with the public soon, Boyner said following her meeting with the BDP.

The pro-Kurdish party's co-leaders, Selahattin Demirtas and Gülten Kisanak, visited TÜSİAD on Wednesday accompanied by BDP vice leader Tuncer Bakırhan and Istanbul deputy Sebahat Tuncel. At a press conference after the meeting, Boyner thanked the BDP for sharing its opinions on preparing a new constitution for Turkey, a process to which Demirtas said TÜSİAD will make important contributions. According to Demirtas, the main problems to be addressed in a new constitution are "the Kurdish problem, freedom of speech, freedom of belief, and the freedom to organize." He also agreed with Boyner's statement that it is very important for nongovernmental organizations to be involved with the process and engage in dialogue with political parties. Sharing ideas and suggestions in this way was the reason for the visit with TÜSİAD, Demirtas added. TÜSİAD previously held a meeting in July 2009 with the Democratic Society Party, or DTP, the now-banned predecessor of the BDP.

Speaking Wednesday, Boyner said 2011 would mark the 40th anniversary of TÜSİAD and the group will hold many activities throughout Anatolia, including in Diyarbakır. The BDP has invited Boyner and the other members of TÜSİAD's ruling board to the southeastern city and hopes the organization will hold one of its next meetings there, Demirtas stated. "With this opportunity, we will call all domestic and foreign businesspeople and employers, particularly those with origins in the area, to come to Diyarbakır on the day TÜSİAD will be [there]," he said, asking all chambers of commerce and local governments to help attract investments to the Southeast.

Asked about the common denominators between the stances of TÜSİAD and the BDP, Boyner replied: "I guess the shortage of democracy; there are not many circles in Turkey that think differently on solving the problem of identities. I have never heard the statement, 'This should stay as it is,' from any political party. The important thing is how we will do it; [how we will] arrive at points that unite us. We saw that [the BDP and TÜSİAD] have very parallel thoughts on that." Answering another question, Boyner repeated the group's call to lower the 10 percent electoral threshold, which she said prevents the representation of different opinions in Parliament. "It is very important our language should be purified of violence," she added. "We should solve many problems of Turkey with a language that is reconciliatory, understanding of each other and building empathy." /Hurriyet/

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PKK Extends Ceasefire, Denies Involvement in Istanbul Attack

The outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, announced on Monday it would extend a truce until elections next year, a day after a suicide attack in Istanbul's Taksim Square wounded 32 people. In comments reported by the pro-Kurdish Fırat news agency, the PKK declared it had decided to extend a unilateral ceasefire that was first declared on August 13 until the country goes to the polls. "Our movement... has decided to extend the non-action process until the 2011 general elections in order to impose a democratic solution process and ensure that the parliamentary elections in Turkey take place in a healthy environment," the statement said. Turkey's next general elections have not been formally scheduled yet but Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said last month his party had earmarked the first week of June 2011 for the polls.

Fırat also reported the PKK leadership had denied responsibility for the blast in Istanbul's central Taksim Square on Sunday, which wounded 32 people. "It is not possible for us to carry out such an action at a time when our movement has decided to extend a truce process... We are in no way involved in this attack," said the PKK statement. Turkish Interior Minister Besir Atalay said investigators had obtained clues on the bombing, but more time was needed to make a definite conclusion. "We have findings... but we will make a statement once we are sure and after various dimensions [of the attack] have been evaluated," he told reporters. No one has been detained so far over the incident, he added.

The bomber blew himself up near a police patrol in Taksim Square as he tried to get into a police bus, wounding 15 officers and 17 civilians. No one was in life-threatening condition. The bomber used A4 explosives, a type that several PKK members were caught carrying recently in operations across Turkey, daily Milliyet reported. A senior security official said the evidence was leading investigators to rule out far-left groups. "The actual suspicion has focused on the obvious organization or some of its elements who are out of control or have split up from the group," the unnamed official said, referring to the PKK.

Senior PKK member Murat Karayılan last week said the group would no longer target civilians and wanted to extend the truce indefinitely if Ankara showed a commitment to a peaceful solution to the 26-year conflict. Kurdish attacks on civilians are claimed mostly by a shadowy group which the PKK says is beyond its control. Ankara insists the group is a front for PKK attacks on civilians. Boosted by its victory in a September 12 referendum on constitutional reform, Ankara has launched a cautious initiative aimed at cajoling the PKK into laying down arms. /Hurriyet/

Turkish FM Says Asia not Alternative to EU on China Visit

Growing ties with Asia are not an alternative to the European Union, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu stated, dismissing debates over a shift in Turkey's axis. "Our objective is full membership in the EU," Davutoğlu told a roundtable meeting during his ongoing visit to China on Monday. Davutoğlu attended a discussion about the contribution of Turkish-Chinese strategic cooperation to global and regional peace, met with Chinese academics, and later met with Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping at the Chinese parliament. During the discussion, Chinese academics questioned the foreign

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minister about growing debates in the West regarding the direction of Turkish foreign policy. Diplomatic sources said Davutoğlu highlighted that increasing ties with China were not an alternative to the EU.

The foreign minister's meeting with the Chinese vice president, who is expected to become the president of China in two years, took place in parliament's Xinjiang Uighur hall. The Turkish-Chinese relationship was strained due to ethnic unrest in the autonomous Xinjiang region in 2009. Turkey has cultural and linguistic bonds with the Turkic people in the region, known as East Turkistan in Turkish.

Davutoğlu said Turkey wanted to establish a bridge of peace and friendship with its kinsmen based on the territorial integrity and political unity of their host countries. "This is also valid for the Uighur Turks," Davutoğlu said, according to the diplomatic sources. The Chinese official replied that his country had 56 different minority groups living together in peace and harmony but stressed that Beijing was against the activities of extremist groups.

Davutoğlu kicked off his week-long China trip in the Xinjiang region, visiting Kashgar and the capital, Urumqi, considered important symbolically given Turkey's bonds with the Uighur population. The foreign minister also renewed Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's proposal to establish an organized industrial region in Urumqi, according to diplomats.

While hoping to protect the rights of the Uighur Turks, who have several associations in Turkey, Ankara is also placing importance on raising the level of its relationship with China to a strategic partnership. "It is time for history to become normal. The Silk Road should be revived," Davutoğlu said. Diplomats, however, say that mechanism will be different from the current strategic partnerships with Syria and Iraq. The Chinese vice president said Beijing had the same view and that it was time to put words into action. The foreign minister will meet with his Chinese counterpart Tuesday and give a lecture at a Chinese university on Turkish foreign policy and Turkish-Chinese relations. /Hurriyet/

Clinton Hails 'Dynamic' Ties with Turkey in Republic Day Message

Amidst suggestions that a rift over a planned NATO missile defense system will be a new test in bilateral relations between Ankara and Washington, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has praised the existing partnership between the NATO allies, calling the bilateral relationship "broader and more dynamic today than ever before." Clinton's powerful description of her country's bilateral ties with Turkey came on the occasion of the celebration of the 87th anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey.

Clinton's written celebratory message released by the State Department on Thursday came on behalf of US President Barack Obama and the people of the United States. "In the 87 years since Mustafa Kemal Atatürk set out a new vision for the Turkish people, Turkey has risen to become a leading economic power and an important presence on the world stage. The opportunities for Turkey to lead in the 21st century are even greater," Clinton stated. According to Clinton, visits paid to Turkey in the spring of 2009 by herself and Obama are signs of Washington's recognition of the importance of a strong

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partnership between the two nations, a partnership which she said is "based on mutual respect, mutual interests and mutual responsibility."

The NATO partnership, regarded as a key aspect of bilateral relations, found its place in the message. "As NATO allies, we also stand shoulder to shoulder to help create a safer and more secure environment for future generations, in Afghanistan and around the world," Clinton said. "We look forward to continuing to work closely with Turkey toward our shared goals and aspirations," she added. /Today's Zaman/

ECHR Orders Turkey to Pay 15 Million Euros in Cyprus Case

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) fined Turkey on Tuesday with more than 15 million euros in 19 cases filed by Greek Cypriots for their abandoned properties in the northern part of the divided island of Cyprus. The cases concerned the applicants' complaints that the 1974 Turkish military intervention in the northern part of Cyprus deprived them of their homes and properties. In judgments issued in September and October 2009, the ECHR already upheld the view that there had been a continuous violation of Article 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights in all 19 cases, which covers the protection of property, and of Article 8, which covers the right to respect for private and family life, in 11 of them. The question of the application of Article 41, which covers just satisfaction, was reserved for a later date. In its judgments released on Tuesday, the court held that Turkey was to pay a total of 15,001,498 euros in pecuniary and non-pecuniary damages and 160,375 euros for the costs and expenses of the trials.

The Strasbourg court, in a March ruling, recognized the Immovable Property Commission (IPC) of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) as a valid domestic judicial remedy whose jurisdiction extends to Greek Cypriots. The ECHR judgment means that Greek Cypriots will not be able to launch court cases against Turkey at the European court prior to seeking redress with the IPC and sets a precedent for approximately 1,500 property cases pending at the European court. The ruling is significant in that for the first time a Turkish Cypriot commission has been recognized by Europe's top human rights court, boosting the international legitimacy of the TRNC. However, Tuesday's judgments are concerned with applications that were announced as admissible before the March ruling. Turkish Cypriot officials recently told reporters that the March ruling has considerably increased the number of applications by Greek Cypriots to the IPC. /Today's Zaman/

Progress on Nagorno-Karabakh Talks Fuel Optimism for Turkey-Armenia Deal

Progress on the Nagorno-Karabakh talks could help jump-start suspended efforts to reconcile Turkey and Armenia, Turkish diplomatic sources said over the weekend. "We're closely monitoring the process between Armenia and Azerbaijan," a senior Turkish diplomat told reporters. "The progress will open doors for a more comprehensive peace in the entire region, including between Turkey and Armenia." Meeting last week in the southern Russian city of Astrakhan, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan and Azeri President Ilham Aliyev agreed to exchange prisoners of war and victims' bodies.

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Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, who mediated the talks, said he expected more progress during the next bilateral meeting between the two parties, to be held on the sidelines of an Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) gathering. "Turkey hopes that the Astrakhan summit will make positive contributions to the solution process by adding momentum to efforts to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute," said a Turkish Foreign Ministry statement Sunday. "We also hope that steps taken on humanitarian issues will be supported with concrete initiatives. Turkey is determined to fully support initiatives that help lay the groundwork for compromise between the parties." /Turkish Press Review/

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Iran Suggests New Nuclear Talks be Held in Turkey

Iran said on Sunday it had informed Ankara that Tehran is ready to hold talks in Turkey with the P5+1 over its controversial nuclear program. European Union foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton, spearheading the negotiations with Iran for the world powers, last month proposed to hold the talks starting November 15 in Vienna, where the UN nuclear watchdog is based. "In the last two or three days, we informed our Turkish friends that we agree to hold negotiations in Turkey," Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki told reporters Sunday. Karim Bagheri, the deputy of Iran's nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili, had visited Turkey on Thursday. Jalili informed Ashton in October that his country was prepared to resume nuclear talks after November 10 at a time and place agreed by both sides, according to the state news agency IRNA.

Mottaki said the Islamic republic was "very optimistic" about the next round of talks. "I hope we will reach an agreement soon over the date and the contents," he stated. "We are very optimistic the discussions will start as soon as possible, as the overall approach of Iran is positive and constructive." Iran has always insisted the talks be held on its package of proposals given to world powers before the October 2009 round of talks. That package talks of overall global nuclear disarmament. But world powers insist the talks focus on Iran's nuclear program.

French daily Le Monde reported on Thursday the United States was mulling to offer the transfer of 2,000 kilograms of Tehran's low-enriched uranium to Russia for the Islamic republic's Bushehr nuclear power plant, built by Moscow. The U.S. proposal also calls for the transfer of another 1,200 kilograms of Tehran's LEU to Russia and France, as offered in October 2009 for the Tehran Research Reactor, a facility making medical isotopes.

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The report adds that Washington plans to propose shifting the 30 kilograms of 20 percent enriched uranium that Tehran currently has produced and intends to convert into fuel for the Tehran reactor if world powers fail to deliver. But Mottaki said Wednesday that any swap of nuclear fuel must be based on an agreement it signed with Brazil and neighboring Turkey in May. Brazil and Turkey brokered a modified agreement on a fuel exchange but the United States rejected it, arguing the deal failed to take into account additional uranium enriched since last year. /Hurriyet/

Davutoğlu Pushes for End to Iraq's Political Deadlock

In a bid to push neighboring Iraq's political leaders to overcome the political deadlock that has gripped the country for the past eight months, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu on Sunday urged all Iraqi political groups to gather around the same table to form a government. During a hastily planned one-day visit, Davutoglu stopped in Arbil, the capital of the autonomous Kurdistan region, before proceeding on to Baghdad. "We hope to soon see all Iraqi ethnic and political groups gathered around a table to pave the way for the formation of a government in this country," Davutoğlu said in Arbil ahead of talks with the president of the Iraqi Kurdish region, Massoud Barzani, and the region's prime minister, Barham Salih.

Davutoğlu reiterated Turkey's support for Barzani's initiative to bring together the leaders of the four alliances who succeeded in elections in Iraq, saying Turkey was "very interested in the initiative." Barzani invited all political blocs to meet in Arbil on Monday in a bid to resolve the crisis that has left the country without a new government since its March 7 legislative election. "I'm in Arbil to discuss and possibly give advice to Baghdad and Arbil on the issue of forming a government, which we hope will happen soon," Davutoğlu explained. Ahead of his flight to Arbil, Davutoğlu held separate telephone conversations on Saturday with the foreign ministers of Iraq's other neighbors, Turkish diplomatic sources reported.

In Baghdad, in addition to Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, Davutoğlu was scheduled to hold talks with al-Iraqiya list leader Iyad Allawi, whose bloc won the most seats in parliament yet was short of the outright majority needed to form a new cabinet; Iraqi Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, a prominent Sunni leader and a frequent visitor to Turkey; Deputy Prime Minister Rafi al-Issawi, the head of al-Iraqiya bloc's negotiating committee; Ammar al-Hakim, the head of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq; and the UN's special envoy to Iraq, Ad Melkert. Davutoğlu's visit to the neighboring country came only days ahead of a planned meeting of the Iraqi parliament, which is set to elect a speaker on Thursday -- a move that could break the eight-month-long political deadlock and lead to Maliki's reappointment as prime minister.

The Sunni-backed cross sectarian al-Iraqiya bloc won the most seats, but Maliki's faction has since combined with other Shiite groups and reached deals with minority Kurds that may keep him in power. Last week, in a sign that some in al-Iraqiya no longer believe it can form a government, one of its lawmakers said a group of up to 30 of its parliamentarians intend to back a government led by Maliki. /Today's Zaman/

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Istanbul Conference Discusses Regional Remedies for Afghanistan

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu called on private firms and countries in the region to cooperate on opportunities in the broader region to help improve life in Afghanistan on Wednesday, saying a democratic and prosperous Afghanistan will contribute to regional development. Davutoğlu spoke at the opening of the 4th Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) in İstanbul, where he noted that three-way meetings between Turkey, Pakistan, and Afghanistan largely contributed to regional development efforts in Asia and emphasized that economic development should be prioritized to bring about peace in the region. Praising Afghanistan's important democratic achievements, Davutoğlu said the country could play a significant role in transferring energy resources, while placing special emphasis on Afghanistan's geographical location in boosting trade through facilitating the free movement of people.

The conference was co-chaired by Afghan Foreign Minister Zalmay Rassoul and Davutoğlu. A business forum and academic platform for Afghanistan convened on the sidelines of the conference. Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov and Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Fathollahi, along with senior officials from Pakistan and India, participated in the plenary session of the conference. Businessmen and representatives of donor and other international organizations dealing with issues in Afghanistan were also present during the meetings.

Davutoğlu underlined that Turkey has coordinated efforts within a regional framework for the development of Afghanistan and that opportunities for cooperation must be pursued to mutually enhance trust. Davutoğlu stated not only insufficient infrastructure but also unemployment and insufficient health resources and services are persistent problems that need to be addressed. Davutoğlu also called on the private sector to become actively involved in these activities, thanking the Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) and the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK) for organizing the business forum on the sidelines of the conference.

Rassoul said in his speech at the opening of the conference that Afghanistan is taking steps with the international community, but that regional efforts would continue only with international assistance. Rassoul added that it is important to hold the conference at a time when terrorism, the drug trade, and human trafficking are expanding, and spoke about schools, hospitals and other infrastructural improvements his government spearheaded in the past decade. Noting that despite sustained efforts in the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime, Rassoul said these problems are threatening Afghan society. The Afghan Foreign Minister also stated that Afghanistan views increasing economic cooperation and trust as key to establishing peace and stability in his country. /Today's Zaman/

Turkey's UN Envoy Calls on Israel to Meet Flotilla Raid Demands

Speaking about Turkey's demands from Israel concerning its raid on a Gaza-bound aid flotilla in international waters on May 31, leaving nine Turkish citizens dead, Turkey's UN Ambassador Ertugrul Apakan Thursday said, "Turkey calls on Israel to admit its mistakes and act accordingly. If Israel had met Turkey's demands for an official apology and

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compensation to the injured and the relatives of those who lost their lives during the incident, things wouldn't have reached this point."

Urging Israel to do what is necessary in light of a September UN Human Rights Council report, which concluded that Israel's flotilla raid broke international law and was brutal and disproportionate, Apakan noted, "If Israel doesn't act in line with the conclusions and recommendations specified in that report by next March, Turkey will press the flotilla raid before the UN Security Council." /Turkish Press Review/

Ankara Ready to Mediate Kosovo-Serbia Talks

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan told reporters in a joint press conference Wednesday with his Kosovar counterpart Hashim Thaci in the capital Pristina that Turkey is ready to immediately start mediating between Serbia and Kosovo in peace talks if his country is invited. Erdoğan met with Thaci during his two-day visit to Kosovo to discuss bilateral ties and the recent developments in the country.

Erdoğan argued the International Court of Justice's July 22 ruling, stating that Kosovo's Unilateral Declaration of Independence does not violate international law, will help further steps to be taken for the future of the three-year-old country. Following the ruling Serbia vowed that it will never recognize the independence of Kosovo, but observers say Serbia's EU membership aspirations will spur the country to soften its position. Erdoğan said he believes the ICJ's ruling will positively improve relations between Belgrade and Pristina. For his part, Thaci said Kosovo will be pleased if Turkey is involved in the process.

Erdoğan also met with Kosovar Parliament speaker Jakup Krasniqi during his visit. The prime minister told reporters that he will also visit Prizren City, where ethnic Turkish people predominantly reside. Erdoğan stressed the comprehensive historical, cultural, and social relations the two countries enjoy and said ethnic Turkish people living in Kosovo constitute a strong cultural link.

Noting that Turkey was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Kosovo, Erdoğan said Turkey has always continued to support the nascent country both before and after independence, noting that the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TİKA) continues to make serious investments in Kosovo, particularly in preserving historical and cultural heritage. Erdoğan stated Turkey wishes for a multicultural, democratic, prosperous, and stable Kosovo and that Turkey continues to support Kosovo as much as possible. He highlighted that there are 530 Turkish troops serving in the NATO peacekeeping mission in the disputed country. /Today's Zaman/

American Indian Delegation Visits Turkey

Representatives of 17 American Indian nations arrived in Turkey on Saturday as part of a weeklong business, educational and cultural exchange trip. Participants of the first Native American Business Cooperation Trip are scheduled to meet with Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, Foreign Trade Minister Zafer Caglayan, and also members of Parliament's Turkey-U.S. Friendship Group. The group will also meet with representatives of the

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Turkish Exporters' Assembly (TIM) and participate in business and networking conferences and meetings at three universities in Istanbul and Ankara.

"The Native American Business Cooperation Trip is the highlight of our recent efforts to foster increased economic and cultural ties between Turkey and [American Indians]," said Turkish Coalition of America (TCA) President Lincoln McCurdy, who organized the exchange. This trip marks the latest effort to promote stronger ties between the Turkish people and the United States' many ethnic and cultural groups, he added. /Turkish Press Review/

TUSIAD Highlights

TUSIAD will represent the Turkish business community in the B20 Summit being held on the sidelines of the G-20 Summit in South Korea's capital Seoul on November 11-12, 2010. The summit will be hosted by the Federation of Korean Industry (FKI), TUSIAD's Korean counterpart, along with the Korean Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Korean International Trade Union, and the Korean Federation of Banks. TUSIAD will attend the summit as the representative of Turkey's private sector. TUSIAD Chairwoman Umit Boyner will take part in several round-table meetings and a closing dinner with the participation of the heads of state of the G-20 member countries. Under the umbrella theme of "The Role of Business for Sustainable and Balanced Growth," four central agenda issues and 12 reports previously prepared by working groups will be discussed at these roundtables. As a participating member, Chairwoman Boyner contributed to the Foreign Direct Investment Working Group report. The B20 Summit participants are expected to make a joint declaration based on the reports of the working groups to be presented to the heads of state at the end of the summit. The B20 summit in Seoul is the second following TUSIAD's participation in the March 2009 summit in London.

Two reports prepared within the scope of a joint project initiated by TUSIAD and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have been released on November 5th, 2010. The first report is titled: "Demography and Management towards 2050: Implications for Education, Labor, Health and Social Security Systems", while the second is titled: "Reflections on the Education System". The summaries of these reports (in Turkish) can be accessed at TUSIAD HQ's website www.tusiad.org.

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Erdoğan Discusses Missile Defense Plans with Obama

The G-20 summit in Seoul offered Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan the opportunity to once more express Ankara's reservations about NATO's planned anti-missile system during a bilateral meeting with U.S. President Barack Obama. Erdoğan responded affirmatively when asked on Friday whether NATO's U.S.-backed plans were on the agenda of his talks with Obama. "We conveyed our sensitivities to him," Erdoğan was quoted as saying while speaking to reporters at the Grand Intercontinental Hotel in southern Seoul after the summit closed. The two-day G-20 meeting was attended by a total of 33 global leaders.

The meeting between Erdoğan and Obama came only days ahead of the NATO Lisbon summit on November 19-20, at which time a decision regarding the controversial missile defense system will be made. Turkey is demanding that there should be no references to any specific country as a threat within NATO's strategic concept document and that the legitimization of the missile system should be made in general terms. Another principle that Turkey is insisting on is that the system should supply protection to every member state and that the burden and risk should be shared on just and equal terms.

Erdoğan explained he also raised technical issues, including who would have command and who would "push the button," during the meeting with Obama. "We made requests for some technical explanations and, as a matter of fact, I have observed that [Obama] has a positive look in regarding these requests," he added. Erdoğan further noted that Turkey would make its final decision on the issue following the Lisbon summit during which the country will be represented by the president, the foreign minister, and the defense minister.

While in Seoul, in addition to Obama, Erdoğan had talks with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, a meeting that was later joined by Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. The prime minister also had bilateral meetings with Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, British Prime Minister David Cameron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and South Korean President Lee Myung-bak. /Today's Zaman/

As Progress Report Released, EU Calls for Closer Cooperation with Turkey

The European Union's executive arm called for support for further EU enlargement Tuesday, saying the accession process with Turkey and countries in the Western Balkans gives it greater influence in a vast region spanning the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and the Danube basin. In a strategy paper released on Tuesday along with annual progress reports on candidate countries including Turkey, the EU Commission noted Turkey's growing foreign policy activism and said it could be a significant asset for the EU. The EU Commission's calls come amid growing European skepticism towards the accession of new members, as several members of the 27-nation bloc are still battling the global financial crisis.

The strategy paper and the accompanying annual progress report make clear that Turkey, a candidate since 1999, still has a long way to go for membership. The EU

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Commission noted that Turkey has continued its political reform process, praising a set of constitutional amendments passed in a September 12 referendum. The lengthy document also says an investigation into the Ergenekon plot and other coup plans "remain an opportunity for Turkey to strengthen confidence in the proper functioning of its democratic institutions and the rule of law." It stated that President Abdullah Gul continues "to play an active conciliatory role promoting dialogue between the main political parties and endeavoring to ensure the sound operation of state bodies." The report also said the positive trend on preventing torture and ill-treatment continues and freedom of worship continues to be generally respected.

However, the progress report was critical of the state of media freedom in Turkey, citing concerns over a number of ongoing court cases involving journalists. On the government's efforts to address the Kurdish issue, the report said the government's Kurdish initiative "was only partly followed through," despite public statements of commitment. On Cyprus, whose division hampers progress in Turkey's accession process, the Commission noted Ankara's continued refusal to open its ports and airports to traffic from Greek Cyprus. "Despite repeated calls by the Council and the Commission, Turkey still has not complied with its obligations," the progress report said. /Turkish Press Review/

Ankara Vows to Speed up Reform at Helm of Council of Europe

Upon taking over the chairmanship of the Strasbourg-based Council of Europe for six months, Turkey declared it has set five priorities to make the 61-year-old European body more visible and more active. "Turkey's chairmanship will make every effort to put the Council of Europe back on the international scene as an innovative, more flexible and feasible organization so that it can adapt itself to the changing political landscape," Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said during Wednesday's handover ceremony. Turkey last chaired the council in 1992.

At the ceremony the outgoing Macedonian chair transferred the six-month tenure to Davutoğlu at the Palais de Conceil de l'Europe. The passing of the torch to Turkey occurs as another Turk, Mevlüt Çavusoğlu, serves as head of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, placing two prominent Turkish politicians at the top of one of the oldest international organizations working for European integration. "The expectations from Turkey are quite high. Turkey is seen as an important actor and that's why its chairmanship of the council is noteworthy," Daryal Batibay, Turkey's permanent representative to the Council of Europe, told a group of visiting Turkish journalists Wednesday. "We are ready to do our best."

According to diplomats, Turkey's six-month tenure will be important because it could guide ongoing efforts to diminish anti-discriminatory policies across the continent. Among Turkey's priorities are: continuing reforms at the council, actively contributing to reforming the European Court of Human Rights to reduce its burden, assisting in a report to the Committee of Ministers next May in Istanbul that will recommend ways to fight growing discrimination, racism and Islamophobia, empowering independent inspection institutions, and facilitating an adequate environment for the completion of ongoing negotiations between the EU and the Council on the former's decision to join the European Convention on Human Rights, one of the most fundamental documents of the

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Strasbourg-based council. "We are aware this is an ambitious program for the chairmanship," Davutoğlu said. "At a time when the Council of Europe is at a crossroads, we did not have another option." /Hurriyet/

Israel, Turkey must Overcome Tensions, U.S. Senator Says

Senior U.S. Senator John Kerry Tuesday called on Turkey and Israel to overcome recent tensions and renew close ties to help with peace efforts in the Middle East. Kerry, who is the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told a group of journalists in Ankara that doing so could help Israel's relations with Syria and Lebanon. "It is important that Turkey and Israel renew relations and go back to the way they were," Kerry said.

Relations between the two hit an all-time low in May, when Israeli naval commandos killed eight Turks and one American of Turkish descent on board a Gaza-bound ship that tried to breach Israel's naval blockade. Turkey has made an Israeli apology and compensation for the victims' families a condition for improved ties. Israeli commandos said they opened fire in self-defense after meeting what they called unexpected resistance when they boarded the ferry carrying aid supplies to Gaza.

Kerry said he understood Turkey's strong reaction to the incident but said Israel "had acknowledged that some mistakes had been made." He stated he was confident tensions can be "put in a proper perspective" if the people of Israel and Turkey try and understand each other. "I think it is entirely possible that we can move beyond the tensions," he stressed before a meeting with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Kerry was in Ankara as part of wider Middle East tour that also took him to Israel, Sudan, Lebanon, and Syria. /Hurriyet/

Turkish Officials Defend Iran Trade

Turkish firms trading with Iran aren't contributing to the Islamic republic's alleged nuclear ambitions, according to a group of prominent Turkish trade representatives hoping to boost trade with the U.S. "We realize that it's important that our members understand the details of the US-orchestrated sanctions on Iran and we try to keep them informed," Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodities Exchanges (TOBB) head Rifat Hisarciklioglu explained at a conference Monday. "Turkish companies trading with Iran weigh the advantages and disadvantages of trade and then decide whether to proceed. But it should be known these companies aren't contributing to the production of nuclear weapons in Iran."

Speaking at the 26th Trans-Atlantic Conference, jointly organized by the TOBB and U.S. think tank the Franklin Center for Global Policy Exchange, Hisarciklioglu and Deputy Prime Minister for the Economy Ali Babacan both spoke on the sensitive Iran issue and how it has shaken Turkish-U.S. relations. Hisarciklioglu stated Turkey wants to improve trade ties with the U.S., reversing their current decline. "In 2002, the US share of total exports from Turkey was 7.3 percent, but by 2008 this fell to only 4.8 percent," he noted.

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Hisarciklioglu said Iran could represent a serious problem for Turkish-U.S. relations, as the U.S. decision to impose additional sanctions on Iran could harm Turkish firms operating in the region. "We shouldn't forget that Iran is Turkey's neighbor, with bilateral trade last year reaching \$8 billion," he said. "One of the ways to integrate Iran into the global system is through trade." The improvement of trade ties with Turkey's neighbors is an opportunity, rather than an obstacle, to its relations with the U.S., he argued. "It's very important for Turkey to approach and develop relations with the countries it has historical and cultural ties with, as well as geographical proximity," Hisarciklioglu added. "That doesn't mean Turkey will turn its back on the transatlantic alliance system... Turkey may develop relations within other areas, while keeping strong relations with its allies. We can all benefit from this."

For his part, Franklin Center Vice President William Hughes said Turkey and the US should stand together, work together, and cope with difficulties together. Good relations with Turkey, a key US ally, are very important for US officials and leaders, he added. The conference concluded Tuesday in both Ankara and Istanbul, with participants discussing such issues as Turkey's future, foreign investment, trade and energy security, the health and pharmaceuticals sectors, Turkey's EU membership accession bid, and the recent US midterm elections. /Turkish Press Review/

Gül Eyes Higher Levels of Collaboration and Trade in Turkmenistan Visit

President Abdullah Gül on Friday called on Turkish businessmen, who have primarily invested in the construction sector in Turkmenistan, to diversify their investment in the Central Asian republic, saying they should also invest in the production and industrial sectors to solidify cooperation. Gül was on an official visit to the gas-rich Central Asian country to improve bilateral and trade relations between the two Turkic countries. Following a bilateral meeting between Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov and Gül, the two presidents presided over a meeting between their delegations in which Gül urged Turkish businessmen to invest in the country's manufacturing and industry.

Saying that trade relations are improving strongly, President Gül thanked the Turkmen authorities for their trust and assistance displayed toward Turkish businessmen and contractors. The president noted the trade volume between the two countries was \$1 billion when he visited Turkmenistan in 2007 but this number has now doubled. Gül also praised the country's railroad projects and highlighted that these giant transportation developments will increase trade in the region. He said Turkey is also undertaking railway projects to revive the famous Silk Road, which will connect China to Paris and London, adding that Turkmenistan is also on the Silk Road and that this will not only increase trade ties with Turkey but with other countries too.

In addition, Gül underscored that Turkey attaches great importance to energy relations between the two countries, pointing to the huge natural gas reserves of the country. He talked about the newly built pipelines that will transfer Turkmen gas to international markets and said these are evidence that natural resources are being used in the best way for the future of Turkmenistan. Gül said he believes cooperation on gas between Turkmenistan and Turkey will enhance relations in this sphere in the future.

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Speaking at the meeting, the Turkmen president said support and cooperation between Turkey and Turkmenistan are beneficial for the world and contribute to the development of regional cooperation, adding that he is sure that all of Turkey's initiatives and efforts will result in success. He noted that trade volume between the two countries was \$2.275 billion in 2009 but this number reached \$ 2.390 billion between January and September of 2010 alone. Recalling that there are over 2,000 Turkmen students studying in Turkey and there are Turkish schools operating in Turkmenistan, Berdymukhammedov also suggested direct cooperation between higher education institutions in the two countries. /Today's Zaman/

Turkey, Bangladesh Forge Links, Seek Increased Trade Cooperation

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called for a higher level of trade with Bangladesh on Sunday, vowing to support the South Asian country in international platforms. "We will never leave Bangladesh alone," Erdoğan told reporters in a joint press conference with his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina in the capital Dhaka during his two-day visit. This visit, the first Turkish prime ministerial visit to the country in 21 years, aimed to bolster growing trade relations and bilateral ties between the two countries. The two prime ministers held bilateral talks and meetings with delegations which Erdoğan defined as "very useful." Erdoğan was accompanied by several State Ministers on his visit, including Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan and Mehmet Aydın, the co-Chairman of the Turkey-Bangladesh Joint Economic Commission.

Noting that he is pleased to be in a "friendly and brotherly" country, Erdoğan said he assessed the current level of bilateral ties between the two countries today with his counterpart. "Turkey is one of the first countries that recognized Bangladesh's independence. Our relations have increasingly strengthened. We appreciate and follow Bangladesh's steps in its path to development. We are monitoring its successful record in human rights, rule of law, and gender equality. There have never been problems between Turkey and Bangladesh. In addition, the two countries also display solidarity in international organizations. We want to continue to enhance our economic, cultural, and political cooperation," Erdoğan told the news conference.

Pointing to the fact that trade volume between the two countries was only \$47 million in 2002 but reached \$658 million by 2009, Erdoğan stated these numbers don't reflect the potential between Turkey and Bangladesh. The prime minister said they have increased the previously set \$1 billion goal for 2015 to \$3 billion. "There should be more, not less," Erdoğan underlined. He also noted that Turkish Airlines will launch direct flights to Dhaka on December 23 this year, which he believes will increase trade and tourism and solidarity between the two nations.

Hasina stated the talks held with Erdoğan and with the Turkish delegation took place in a warm and friendly atmosphere. Noting that they hold similar views on many topics in international affairs, Hasina said they have an agreement in the struggle against any type of terrorism. Hasina stated they agreed to continue cooperation in health, education, and the defense industry. "I want to express my admiration to Prime Minister Erdoğan for his success in international relations and his leadership," Hasina concluded. Erdoğan later was expected to hold talks with Bangladesh's President Muhammad Zillur Rahman. /Today's Zaman/

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Gul Says NATO Summit, Conversation with Obama Fruitful

Speaking to reporters over the weekend after returning home from the Lisbon NATO summit, which ended with the signing of a deal to build a missile defense system and the acceptance of NATO's new strategic concept, President Abdullah Gul stated that Turkey's concerns about the system were addressed during the summit and Ankara's views were included in the new strategic concept. "Now we look towards signing a security agreement with the European Union," he added. Among other things, Turkey urged that no country be singled out as a target of the missile shield and that all NATO members be offered equal protection under it.

Gul also spoke about his brief conversation with U.S. President Barack Obama during the summit, saying that they had discussed the U.S. Congress' failure to act on legislation important to Turkey, referring to sales of unmanned aerial vehicles and cobra helicopters. Following Turkey's strong reaction to Israel's aid flotilla raid in May, which left nine Turkish nationals dead, and Ankara voting against a new round of UN sanctions against Iran in June some Members of Congress have urged Washington to cool its ties with Ankara. Gul said he also brought up the issue of the U.S. ambassadorial post in Ankara remaining vacant, as Republicans have blocked Obama's nomination of Francis Ricciardone since August. Obama pledged to do whatever he can to get Ricciardone confirmed, Gul reported. "He thanked Turkey for its efforts on Iraq," Gul also said. "He tries to listen to and understand our concerns on Iran. We believe that Obama will do his best on Turkish-related matters. We value and support Obama, and want him to be strong and successful."

Calling the summit fruitful in every aspect, Gul said that during the meetings he stressed the importance of winning hearts in Afghanistan. On the difficulties facing NATO's mission there, Gul said Turkey has so far trained 12,000 Afghan soldiers and that Afghan police officers are set to get training in Turkey as well. "Turkey knows Afghanistan and the Afghan people. This is our difference," he explained. /Turkish Press Review/

Cypriot Leaders Agree to Continue Talks through January

The Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders, who have been engaged in UN-mediated reunification talks since September 2008, held a tripartite meeting with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Thursday and agreed to continue talks until the end of January. Dervis Eroğlu and Demetris Christofias also agreed to intensify their contacts in the coming weeks in order to establish a practical plan for overcoming the major remaining

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points of disagreement, and they will meet again at the end of January next year in Geneva at a tripartite meeting, the UN Secretary-General told reporters after their meeting. "In the meantime, the leaders will identify further convergences and the core issues which still need to be resolved, across all chapters," Ban said.

Ban recalled that he visited the island earlier this year, and felt the hope and expectation among people on both sides for a settlement that would finally reunify Cyprus. "That sense of anticipation has faded, however, as talks continued throughout the remainder of the year without clear progress or a clear end in sight. That is why I invited the leaders to meet with me today. The peace talks on Cyprus were losing momentum and needed a boost if the two sides are to reach a settlement while there is still the time and the political opportunity to do so," he explained. "Both leaders have told me they recognize the need to move more quickly and decisively in order to reach a settlement. Serious differences remain, but both leaders expressed their commitment to work together, as partners, toward that goal," Ban added. /Today's Zaman/

Ankara Rejects EU's Cyprus Offer to Open Talks on New Chapters

Despite mounting pressure from the European Union to open its ports and airports to the Greek half of Cyprus, Turkey will not be doing so until a settlement on the divided island is reached, a senior state official has said. Turkey strongly believes that the EU has not been constructive in its efforts for a permanent solution on the island and has rejected out of hand a proposal to open two more chapters of negotiation if Turkey complies with the EU's demand. Turkey refuses to open its ports and airports to traffic from Greek Cyprus, urging the EU to first end the isolation of Turkish Cyprus as it promised in 2004, following a referendum on a UN reunification plan in both parts of the island.

The EU insists that Turkey is obliged to open its ports and airports to traffic from Greek Cyprus under an agreement known as the Ankara Protocol. There have been intensified efforts in the past two months to overcome this obstacle. In a recent attempt, Belgium, which is currently chairing the EU presidency, promised Turkey that two more chapters of negotiation would be opened in return for complying with the Ankara Protocol.

A senior government official who has asked to remain unnamed stated that opening ports and airports to Greek Cyprus would be out of the question until a permanent settlement is found. The EU offered opening the energy chapter and the justice and fundamental freedoms chapter in return for opening the ports. The government says the proposal is not adequate and emphasized that the EU should act on the principle of equality and try to produce solutions on the Cyprus issue. The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) has been considering the proposal for a month, but its ultimate decision, to not open its ports, has finally been made.

In addition to its stance that the two chapters suggested are completely irrelevant to finding a lasting solution in Cyprus, the government understands that there is no guarantee that the Greek Cypriots will not veto any of the remaining chapters. Turkey has firmly stated that it needs to see some concrete steps from the EU and Greek Cyprus toward a solution before it can open its ports. /Today's Zaman/

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Turkey Continues International Aid despite Global Economic Crisis

Turkey has continued to aid international development organizations despite the economic crisis, with over \$3 billion officially donated in the past five years. Last year alone \$707 million was donated to the Caucasus and Balkan regions, Eastern Europe, and Africa. These donations came despite the global crisis and economic distress that rocked Turkey and the world, the Anatolia news agency reported Friday.

According to last year's numbers, the country receiving the largest donations from Turkey was Afghanistan, with \$96.4 million, followed by Kyrgyzstan with \$67.7 million and Kazakhstan with \$62.5 million in donations. Despite the ongoing economic crisis, Turkey even increased the amount of donations to some countries. The \$15.9 million donated to Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2008 was doubled in 2009, with \$32.7 million donated.

The public corporation with the most donations in 2009 was the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency, or TİKA, with 26 program coordination offices in 23 countries. Nearly 80 percent of TİKA's resources last year were used for social infrastructure projects in less-developed and developing countries. Fully 16.1 percent of Turkey's overall donations were by TİKA in 2008, a number that increased to 20.2 in 2009. TİKA was followed by the Education Ministry, with 18.7 of the overall donations. Non-governmental organizations also increased their donations each passing year.

Following the increase of Turkey's international activities, the United Nations Population Fund, or UNFPA, decided to move its Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office from New York to Istanbul. Looking at last year's numbers, 44.4 percent of Turkey's donations in 2009 went to the Caucasus and Central Asia regions, with 26.8 percent in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, 24.6 percent to the Middle East and Africa and 3.8 percent to East Asia. /Hurriyet/

Istanbul Mayor Topbas Elected Head of UN United Cities Organization

Istanbul Greater Municipality Mayor Kadir Topbas on Saturday was elected president of the United Nations' United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) organization through 2013, the Anatolia news agency reported. The UCLG has thousands of members, including local administrators from 136 of 192 UN countries. Speaking at the third UCLG world congress in Mexico City, Topbas stated that a new era had begun for the body. "There will be a stronger and more recognizable UCLG which will be able to meet all demands," he said, adding that all of its leaders will be responsible for meeting the millennium development goals.

Lisbon Mayor Antonio Costa, who left Topbas the only candidate when he withdrew from the race, advocated dialogue between cultures and religions, saying, "I would like to work with Topbas, who is a very prestigious president and mayor of Istanbul, one of the most beautiful cities in Europe." Mayors and local authority representatives from all around the world created the UCLG in 2004, and its next world congress is slated for Morocco in 2013. /Turkish Press Review/

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Turkish Cars Finalists for NYC's "Taxi of Tomorrow"

Turkey sits with two to one odds that the next generation of the iconic NYC taxi will be made in Turkey. A futuristic Turkish taxi cab with a see-through roof for gazing at the skyline and the Turkish-produced Ford Transit Connect van are among three finalists in New York City's search for the "Taxi of Tomorrow." The model V1 by Turkish automaker Karsan Otomotiv and the Izmit-built Transit Connect van made the short list along with a model by Nissan Motor Company. New York City expects to announce the winner in early 2011 with the new vehicles on the road no later than 2014. The new taxis would be phased in as older models retire. /American-Turkish Council/

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WikiLeaks Documents Point to U.S.-Turkey Tensions

Leaked documents revealing harsh U.S. criticism of Turkey's approach toward Israel and Iran - and diplomats' suspicions about the ruling party's "Islamist" agenda - have sparked concerns that the revelations could damage relations between Washington and Ankara. Analysts say, however, that the statements contained in the diplomatic cables released late Sunday by the whistleblower website WikiLeaks should come as "no surprise" to Ankara and should not seriously threaten the two countries' ties. Prominent figures with Turkey's ruling party come in for much discussion in the leaked documents, as American officials debate whether the government under Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is pursuing a "neo-Ottomanist foreign policy" or seeking to "Islamize" the country.

Though early cables questioned Erdoğan's leadership, singling out his "overbearing pride" and "unbridled ambition," U.S. officials later became more convinced of his party's hold on power. The Turkish government's foreign policy remained a topic of concern in Washington, however, with documents revealing that U.S. diplomats urged Ankara not to compromise with Iran and concurred with an Israeli diplomat's assessment that Israeli-Turkish relations had deteriorated because "Erdoğan simply hates Israel."

Turkey's foreign policy has "Rolls Royce ambitions, but Rover resources" and Turks "can't compete on equal terms" with either global or regional powers, former Ambassador to Ankara James Jeffrey said in a separate confidential document.

Despite the seeming severity of some of the comments revealed in the cables, analysts say that Washington's unease with Erdoğan's ruling Justice and Development Party, or

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AKP, was already well-known and that the leaks would not create serious tensions between the two allies. /Hurriyet/

Turkish PM Vows to Stand by Lebanon, Prevent War

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, at the start of a two-day visit to Lebanon Wednesday, said Turkey his would support Lebanon to ensure its stability and unity. "Lebanon is one of the most diverse countries in the region. We will stand by Lebanon's side and I know that my Turkish brothers will help achieve peace in Lebanon through dialogue," Erdogan told a rally in northern Lebanon. "The Israeli government should realize that when security and peace prevail in the region, then it would gain from this peace. Should a war erupt, then the people of the region and the residents of Israel would be the losers," he added.

The Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri thanked Erdogan for his support. "Your visit reflects your continuous care for this region's issues and your special perspective regarding its people's concerns," Hariri said. Erdogan's visit comes as Turkey endeavors to play a bigger role as regional mediator in the Middle East. "We are working towards peace and justice and the implementation of international law," Erdogan said in reference to the United Nations tribunal probing the 2005 assassination of Hariri's father, former premier Rafik Hariri.

Accompanied by Hariri, Erdogan toured areas in the northern Akkar region and inaugurated Turkish-built schools and a rehabilitation centre. The Turkish premier also met with President Michel Suleiman, Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, and officials from the Shiite movement Hezbollah. In remarks published Wednesday in the Lebanese daily As Safir, Erdogan said his country would not allow Lebanon to deteriorate into a civil war. Turkey would "...do the necessary to fight signs of a civil war in Lebanon," he stated. "Now is the time for unity in Lebanon."

Erdogan's visit comes ahead of the release of the findings of the Hariri Tribunal - which is widely expected to indict members of Hezbollah- the cause of mounting domestic political tension. The militant group has said it will not accept any accusation against any of its members, and warned of the repercussions of such an outcome. During his stay in the country, Erodgan also visited Turkish troops deployed with the United Nations forces stationed in Lebanon and signed a partnership agreement to establish a free-trade zone. /Sabah/

In Bern, Gül Stresses Commitment to Normalizing Ties with Armenia

Turkey is firmly committed to pushing ahead to normalize ties with Armenia despite a stalemate in diplomatic efforts to that effect, President Abdullah Gül stated in remarks delivered during a two-day state visit to Switzerland. "It is evident that these subjects are not easily resolved," Gül said on Thursday, the first day of his visit, as he was addressing the Swiss parliament, the lower house of which is among a number of European parliaments that have recognized the killings of Anatolian Armenians in the early 20th century as genocide. "However, we maintain our firm vigorous commitment to the protocols, which aim to normalize Turkish-Armenian relationship," he said, referring

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to pacts signed between the two parties last October in Zurich. "We will continue our efforts so that a sustainable and comprehensive peace dominates the Caucasus."

Gül also expressed hope that his Armenian counterpart, Serzh Sargsyan "continues with the same courage so that the process can be crowned with success." Switzerland last year mediated talks between Armenia and Turkey, which have had no formal ties since 1993, leading to the signing of two protocols to restore diplomatic ties and open their border. In a speech welcoming Gül, Swiss President Doris Leuthard also urged Turkey and Armenia to push ahead with normalizing ties. "Switzerland is persuaded that there must not be a retreat before any efforts to continue the track of dialogue and cooperation, as Turkey and Armenia have undertaken with great courage these last years," Leuthard said. "May the process of normalization continue between the two countries."

Speaking at a joint press conference later in the day, both Gül and Leuthard addressed questions concerning the almost one-year-old nationwide vote in favor of banning the construction of minarets in Switzerland. "Everybody is free to perform their religious practices. While this is the case, I would also like to see more freedom for places of religious worship," Gül stated when reminded that he called the ban a "shame" for Switzerland at the time. "Either a church, mosque or a synagogue; architectural styles may be formed in a way to be integrated with the city if there are members of that religion. A minaret is nothing to be afraid of." Along with Leuthard, Gül on Friday participated in a round-table business meeting and a forum on renewable energies before departing for Turkey. /Today's Zaman/

Turkey, Egypt Set to Launch Strategic Cooperation Council

Turkey and Egypt will set up a "high-level strategic cooperation council" aimed at boosting bilateral political consultations and economic ties, Turkey's foreign minister said Monday. "We hope to sign the accord and hold the first meeting of the council when our prime minister [Recep Tayyip Erdogan] visits Egypt in the coming months," Ahmet Davutoglu said after talks with his Egyptian counterpart Ahmed Abul Gheit. The council will include the two countries' prime ministers and a number of senior ministers from both sides. Keen to boost its regional profile, Turkey has signed similar agreements with Greece, Syria, and Iraq and describes the council gatherings as "joint cabinet meetings."

Gheit hailed the agreement as "a very constructive step" and voiced hope it would "take bilateral relations to a higher level." The two ministers said they also discussed international efforts to revive peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians and Iran's nuclear program as well as developments in Lebanon and Iraq. Gheit wrapped up his two-day visit later Monday after meetings with Erdogan and President Abdullah Gul. /Sabah/

Greece Calls for Turkey-EU Summit on Accession

The European Union should hold a summit with candidate Turkey to set out a new strategy for Ankara 's membership bid, said Greek Foreign Minister Dimitris Droutsas on Monday. "I think this is really the time to have a frank discussion with all the member

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states and also with Turkey," he stated at a seminar at the European Policy Center in Brussels. "We have to make our minds up again within the European Union, what our expectations are concerning Turkey." Only through sincerity and an open exchange of views can things get back on track, as the current situation is headed towards a deadlock which will benefit neither side, he added. "The time has come again for open and sincere words, and my personal view is that the best way is to renew commitments that we have already expressed in the past," he said. But Droutsas also said the Cyprus problem could continue to block Turkey's EU path. "Turkey cannot become a member of the EU as long as there are occupation forces on the island," he said, referring to Turkish troops deployed in 1974 to protect the island's Turks from ethnic violence.

Droutsas was noncommittal when asked about bilateral relations, saying that Athens and Ankara are trying to deepen cooperation in areas where there are shared interests in the hope doing so will help foster an atmosphere that can resolve deeper disputes. "This is the way we are going and this is the way we are trying," he said. "We have things that are more than worrying. ... We have a country, Turkey, that is aspiring to become an EU member state. This candidate is threatening an EU member state with the casus belli, in the case that this member state will make use of a right it has according to international law ... We have to see this very clearly. This is not compatible with European Union values." /Turkish Press Review/

Turkey, Bosnia-Herzegovina Cement Partnership during Izetbegovic's Visit

In his first visit to Turkey after being elected to the trilateral presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bakir Izetbegovic met with President Abdullah Gül, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (PACE) President Mevlüt Çavusoğlu in Ankara on Tuesday to cement an already strong partnership enjoyed by the two countries. Izetbegovic and other delegates discussed matters such as bilateral relations, the key elections held in Bosnia and Herzegovina on October 3 and Turkey's support of the Balkan country in international institutions.

In the delegation-level meeting, Gül reportedly congratulated Izetbegovic for his recent election win. Gül said that the fact that the election was transparent and in line with international norms was a big gain. The Turkish president also told his Bosnian counterpart that Turkey's support for Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue as always. Izetbegovic's trip coincided with the 15th anniversary of Dayton Peace Accords which ended the war in Bosnia and established today's federal Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Izetbegovic also met with the PACE president in Ankara on Tuesday where they discussed the political situation in the country and its integration into Europe. In a statement released by the Ankara office of the PACE president, Çavusoğlu congratulated Izetbegovic for his election success and said that in assuming this post, as someone who presided over the Bosnia and Herzegovina delegation at PACE, Izetbegovic will be an important gain for the stability of the Balkan country. Çavusoğlu emphasized that Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to take important steps to live up to its commitments after the country was accepted as the member of the Council of Europe, and that comprehensive constitutional reforms need to be immediately undertaken.

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The European Union's high representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Valentin Inzko, also visited Turkey this week. Speaking to journalists Inzko said the election of Izetbegovic will pave the way for a more conducive climate of reconciliation in the former Yugoslav state, where parties are still largely divided along ethnic lines. The elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina last month, made up of a Muslim-Croat federation and Republika Srpska, underscored difficulties in forming a government capable of launching political and economic reforms. Serbian populated Republika Srpska is trying to wean away from the central authority with claims for more loose federation, or even secession. The autonomous region is also very critical of Turkey's involvement in the Balkan country's affairs, arguing that Turkey is favoring Bosnian Muslims. /Today's Zaman/

Turkey, EU Work to Finalize Readmission Agreement

Hopes are running high that Turkey and the European Union may soon finalize a readmission agreement to tackle the flow of illegal immigrants to Europe, which in return would reward Turkish citizens with certain visa flexibilities. A technical delegation from the European Commission held talks with Turkish officials in Ankara on Friday to conclude the agreement, diplomatic sources said. "This is a technical mission, not a political one. We are hoping to resolve all matters during this technical visit," said an EU diplomat who wished to remain anonymous. "There might be a follow-up at a higher level, but in principle we see that the road is clear. We think that the technical team can wrap up the negotiations. That's all we hope."

The readmission agreement, which aims to share the burden of illegal immigration between EU member states and candidate countries through cooperation, is not concerned with visa liberation as such, yet some EU member states have particularly set Turkey's signing of the deal as a precondition of facilitated visa-travel to Europe. EU member states apply a common asylum policy in line with the Dublin-2 Convention and expect cooperation from candidate countries. Thus, the EU is expected to give the green light for a lot of new visa opportunities for Turkish nationals once Ankara signs the agreement.

The readmission agreement to be signed with Ankara will be binding for the entire union and the financial burden is expected to be shared. Ankara is weary of visa problems with EU member states, with Turkey's chief EU negotiator Egemen Bağış saying in recent remarks that "the moment when our citizens feel the least European is the moment when they wait for hours in visa queues to Europe." Bağış said Europeans were actually harming themselves by delaying the visa process and implied that visa facilities would promote business interactions with the EU. "Sixty percent of Turkey's foreign trade is with Europe." /Hurriyet/

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