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Turkey Assumes UN Security Council Presidency

Turkey, a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, temporarily took over the council's presidency Wednesday and will head two high-level UN meetings during its one-month term. Turkish President Abdullah Gül will chair a UN meeting September 23 on the protection of peace. A presidency statement to be prepared by Turkey is expected to be adopted at the end of that meeting. The second meeting, on the global fight against terrorism, will be held September 27 and chaired by Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. Turkey has been the head of the council's Counter-Terrorism Committee since the beginning of 2010 and previously held the term presidency in June 2009.

Developments in the Middle East, the recent reports by the council's sanctions committees about Iran and Sudan, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Mission in Nepal, Mission in Liberia, Stabilization Mission in Haiti, Interim Force in Lebanon, cases of mass rape in Congo and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's recent report on Somalia are among the topics on the council's agenda. Israel's raid on the Mavi Marmara ship has been on the agenda of the council's meetings on the Middle East since the attack occurred May 31; the issue is expected to top the agenda again in the council's Middle East meeting September 17. The UN investigation delegation - formed to investigate the raid - is expected to present its first report to the secretary-general before September 15, allowing the report to be discussed at the September 17 meeting. Turkey's Security Council membership will expire January 1, 2011. /Hurriyet/

U.S. Military Chief Discusses Iran, Afghanistan on Turkey Visit

The United States' top military officer Admiral Michael Mullen Saturday stressed the need for Turkey to help enforce United Nations sanctions against Iran aimed at deterring the Islamic Republic from obtaining a nuclear bomb. Turkey voted against the U.S.-backed sanctions against Iran in June, insisting that its neighbor's nuclear program is peaceful despite fears that Tehran might be seeking to develop nuclear arms. Turkey has, however, stated that it will abide by the sanctions. Admiral Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters in the Turkish capital he did not plan to "question or rebut" Turkey over the vote and welcomed Turkey's stated intention to abide by those sanctions. Mullen said that both countries agree that Iran should not achieve "a nuclear weapons capability," and need "to do all that we can to ensure that."

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Mullen arrived in Ankara Friday to meet with his new Turkish counterpart, General Isik Kosaner, who took office on August 27. He also met with Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan and Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul. No statements were released after those meetings. Mullen praised Turkey - NATO's sole Muslim member state - for its role in Afghanistan and said the United States would welcome any additional help it can provide. Turkey currently holds the rotating command of the international peacekeeping force guarding the Afghan capital, and Turkish instructors are training the Afghan army and police force. "We would like Turkey to sustain all of those efforts," Mullen said. "Any additional capabilities that Turkey can provide against the training shortfall, that would certainly be of great help."

In addition, the U.S. military chief said Washington has no plans to withdraw its weapons from Iraq through Turkey, though the U.S. military has sought Turkish permission to transport some noncombat equipment from Iraq through its territory. Turkey has said it looks favorably on the passage of such equipment and technical material, but not arms, which would require parliament's approval. /Sabah/

U.S. Will Not Take Part in Turkey's October Military Drills

The United States will not be participating in the "Anatolian Eagle" exercise hosted by the Turkish Air Forces in October, a U.S. Embassy spokesperson said Wednesday. The U.S. routinely participates in two military exercises hosted by the Turkish Air Forces each year and this year it has already done so, stated the spokesperson. "We were part of the planning conferences for Anatolian Eagle 10/3. However, there were no other international participants and because our aircraft were assigned for other missions, we will not be able to participate in the exercise."

The multinational NATO "Anatolian Eagle" exercise is hosted by the Turkish Air Forces and is aimed at boosting aerial cooperation and training the air forces of other participatory countries. The exercises have been performed since the first Anatolian Eagle, or AE-01, in June 2001. Two of the three planned Anatolian Eagle exercises for 2010 took place in April and June. The remaining one, Anatolian Eagle 10/3, will run from October 11 to 22. The United States sent aircraft to Turkey for Anatolian Falcon 2010/02 exercise in central Anatolia and participated in the Anatolian Eagle 10/2 exercise. Both took place in June.

It was, however, not immediately clear if the Anatolian Eagle exercise in the fall will be multinational. Turkish officials told reporters that no invitation has been extended to Israel. "We have a clear stance regarding our relations with Israel. Our expectations continue," explained an official, referring to Turkey's earlier demands for an apology and compensation from Israel after its deadly raid on a Gaza-bound flotilla. The government decided to freeze all military exercises with Israel in response to the raid. Last year, Ankara excluded Tel Aviv from the same exercise, which prompted the U.S. and Italy to withdraw from the drills. Turkey had to conduct the exercise on a national instead of an international level. Turkey's opposition to Israeli participation in the 2009 exercise was linked to its Gaza offensive and came as a result of government pressure on the military to postpone the drills. /Hurriyet/

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Gül Says Turkey Committed to Western Balkans

President Abdullah Gül pledged his country's continued commitment to the Western Balkans in Sarajevo on Thursday, rejecting claims that Turkey exhibits a pro-Muslim bias in the ethnically split Balkan country. Gül, heading a large business delegation on a two-day visit to Bosnia, said Turkey will continue with intense diplomacy aimed at helping Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia to overcome differences that have remained since the 1990s wars in the region. He rejected criticism by Bosnian Serb leaders that Turkey favors Bosnia's Muslims over the country's Serb and Croat people. "Achievement of a lasting peace, security and stability in the region is at the heart of our policy," Gül declared after meeting with members of the tripartite Bosnian presidency.

Gül urged Bosnian leaders to speed up their country's efforts to join NATO and the EU, saying that only a united Bosnia can secure peace and stability in the Balkans. "Without permanent peace and security in Bosnia we cannot talk about peace and security in the Balkans and Europe," Gül stated. "Turkey is a devoted defender of the peace in the Balkans, and we see it as our ethic debt to help," he said. "The Balkans represents the door to the West and is very important for us." He called on Bosnian leaders, regardless of their ethnic background, to make the elections on October 3 a turning point for the country's future, stressing that only a united Bosnia, based on compromise, can integrate into NATO and the EU.

Despite Turkey's improving relations with Serbia (including a free trade agreement that came into effect on Wednesday), Bosnian Serbs regard Turkey's growing influence in the Western Balkans with suspicion. Turkey has had traditionally close ties with Muslim Bosniaks, while its relations with Serbs in Bosnia and Serbia were strained during the 1992-95 Bosnian war. Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik accused Turkey on Thursday of having a "hidden agenda" for the Balkans, saying the Serbs should not be "naive" about Turkey's intentions. Gül said Turkey had no intention of interfering in the "internal affairs" of the former Yugoslav countries, but added, "Nobody can prevent us from cooperating amongst ourselves." Dodik said Gül's visit was aimed only at backing the political interests of Bosnian Muslims who want a more centralized state, which the Serbs oppose as they fear losing their autonomy. /Today's Zaman/

Cypriot Leaders Meet over Property Issue

Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders agreed on Friday to hold two full-day peace talks this week aimed at reuniting the long divided island, seeking to forge the framework for the most sensitive issue in the peace negotiations: property. Wide differences remain between the two sides on issues such as arrangements on property lost during the internal conflict. Greek Cypriots claim there were gross property rights violations after Turkey militarily intervened on the island and seeks compensation for lost properties.

Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus President Dervis Eroğlu and Republic of Cyprus leader Dimitris Christofias held a meeting on Friday to discuss the issue of property and to present a summary of their views on the topic for further scrutiny. Speaking to reporters following the talks, Eroğlu said they exchanged summaries of their views on the matter but did not go into detail at that time.

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Selected News on Turkey

They noted that that they will submit an expanded version of their proposals on September 6 and for this reason the leaders postponed the scheduled Sept. 7 meeting to the following day. Eroğlu said they will hold two full-day talks on Sept. 8 and 10 to discuss the details of what they agree upon and which issues they dispute. Eroğlu refused to comment on whether or not there was a shift in the position by Greek Cyprus on the issue of property, saying he did not want any comments on the newly resumed talks to derail negotiations. /Today's Zaman/

Turkish Commission Submits Flotilla Report to UN

A Turkish commission probing Israel's May 31 raid on the lead ship of a Gaza-bound aid flotilla, which left eight Turks and one Turkish-American dead, has completed its report, and is set to submit it to a UN commission probing the same incident. The report reportedly includes video footage shot during the raid, records of the ship's course, forensic reports on the raid victims, and testimony by the crew and other people aboard the ship, the Mavi Marmara. The report concludes that Israel unlawfully raided the aid ship in international waters and that Israeli naval commandos, intentionally and with the aim of killing, fired their guns at unarmed civilians at close range. /Turkish Press Review/

EU Foreign Policy Chief Welcomes Turkey's Dialogue with Iran

The European Union welcomes Turkey continuing dialogue with Iran as well as its efforts to reach an agreement on a swap deal to provide nuclear fuel for a research reactor in Tehran, EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton stated Monday, responding to a written question at the European Parliament. Under a nuclear fuel swap deal brokered by Turkey and Brazil in May, Iran agreed to ship most of its enriched uranium abroad in return for nuclear fuel for a medical research reactor in Tehran. But this didn't prevent the US and its allies from passing a new round of sanctions on Iran at the UN Security Council in June.

After their passage, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu engaged in hectic diplomatic activity to keep the swap deal alive. Davutoglu's efforts paid off, with Iran agreeing to resume negotiations with the EU and the Vienna Group, which is made up of the U.S., France, Russia, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Iran also asked Turkey and Brazil to be included in the renewed talks on controversial nuclear program. "It is evident that Turkey will maintain dialogue with its neighbors. The EU welcomes Turkey's efforts to come to an agreement on the swap deal to provide nuclear fuel for a medical research reactor in Tehran," Ashton said, adding that such an agreement on the supply of nuclear fuel would serve to build confidence, provided that certain matters are clarified. /Turkish Press Review/

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EU Welcomes Referendum Outcome as Obama Hails Turkish Democracy

As the United States praised the "vibrancy of Turkish democracy," the European Union welcomed the approval of constitutional changes by Turkish voters in a referendum Sunday. European Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Füle welcomed the referendum as a "step in the right direction" but said it needs to be followed by "other much-needed reforms" regarding freedom of expression and freedom of religion. Füle stated Monday the changes address "long-standing priorities" for Turkey's membership.

The Council of Europe also hailed the result of the referendum, calling it a significant step in the country's democratic development. "The constitutional reform approved on Sunday is an important step forward towards bringing the country closer to European standards and practices," Secretary-General Thorbjørn Jagland said in a statement. He also said allowing citizens to file complaints directly with the Constitutional Court would provide a "domestic remedy against human rights violations" and "reduce the caseload of the European Court of Human Rights with respect to Turkey."

U.S. President Barack Obama called Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on Sunday to congratulate him on the "vibrancy of Turkey's democracy" after results indicated a comfortable victory for the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP. "The president acknowledged the vibrancy of Turkey's democracy as reflected in the turnout for the referendum that took place across Turkey today," the White House stated in a press release after the leaders' conversation. Prime Ministry officials said Obama expressed his conviction that the result of the referendum would further strengthen Turkish democracy. The White House mentioned Obama also congratulated Erdoğan for Turkey's hosting of the FIBA 2010 World Basketball Championship.

Germany also lauded the results of the referendum. "I welcome the success of the referendum," Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle declared in a statement. "The reform of the constitution is another important step by Turkey on the road towards Europe... The contents of the reform package were discussed intensively in Turkey. This discussion within civil society - as well as the concrete distribution of the balance of power within the state - is very much to be welcomed." He added, "I am confident that the process of reform in Turkey towards a further opening up of society will continue."

Some 58 percent of Turkish voters approved the 26 constitutional changes, some of which controversially reshape the judiciary and curb the military's powers. Erdoğan's victory in the referendum came exactly 30 years after a military coup that lay the groundwork for the 1982 Constitution. He hailed the outcome as a "turning point" for

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Turkish democracy. Critics of the reforms say the amendments will give more sway over the judiciary to the government and allow the AKP to tighten its grip on power. /Hurriyet/

EU Ministers Discuss Relationship with Turkey

European Union foreign ministers sought to step beyond their vexed relationship with Turkey in talks on Saturday and instead look for ways to deepen ties with the nation. Underscoring the deep divisions that remain within the 27-nation EU, British Foreign Minister William Hague argued the process of admitting Turkey needs to speed up, while his German counterpart Guido Westerwelle advocated building the relationship outside the framework of Ankara's membership bid. "It's very important to show some momentum and the UK will be trying to make sure that happens over the next few months," Hague said of the accession talks. Standing just meters away from Hague in the cobbled courtyard of Brussels' Egmont Palace, Westerwelle told reporters the EU "would be well advised to build up relations" with Turkey instead of focusing on membership talks.

The EU is increasingly keen to work with Turkey on issues like the Mideast peace process, Iran's nuclear ambitions, and Bosnia, where Ankara wields significant influence. One proposed option is to give Turkey a seat at EU discussions on such issues, but there are fears that could be seen as a de facto EU membership for Ankara without it having to meet the tough guidelines to join. EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton played down such concerns after the meeting: "It is not a way of putting Turkey in the room as the 28th member without them going through the process," she explained. "It is about, in the areas where we work together, how do we more effectively ensure that we are in dialogue, and that is something we are looking at very carefully."

Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb underscored Turkey's growing influence by calling it "one of the top five countries in the world today" in terms of foreign policy. "Arguably, today Turkey is more influential in the world than any of our member states together or separately," Stubb said. "It has a great influence in the Middle East, in the African Horn, in the Persian Gulf, in Iran. It's a truly global player and we need to work together with Turkey right now on foreign and security policy."

Saturday's talks, preceded by a working breakfast with nations bidding to join the EU, were informal and did not produce any solid policy decisions. Ashton, who held talks with Turkey's foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu Friday night, called the discussions a chance to "chew over" the relationship between the EU and Turkey. /Sabah/

Turkish Cypriot President in Brussels for Direct Trade Talks

Turkish Cypriot President Dervis Eroğlu left for Brussels for a three-day visit on Sunday morning in order to hold talks focused on launching direct trade between the European Union and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) with EU officials. The Greek Cypriot administration meanwhile has reiterated that it will block Turkey's EU membership if direct trade is established between the EU and the TRNC. Northern Cyprus has been trying to establish stronger relations with the EU for years. It established the TRNC Coordination Center during Eroğlu's time as prime minister which has been attempting to harmonize TRNC policies with EU regulations, Eroğlu told reporters ahead

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of his departure in a bid to explain his administration's commitment to eventually becoming an EU member.

Direct trade regulations and the EU's unfulfilled promise of easing the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots will be at the center of talks with Belgian Foreign Minister Stevan Vanackere, whose country holds the rotating presidency of the bloc, and other EU officials, Eroğlu said, adding, "We will convey our wishes for fulfillment of whatever was promised, and once more remind [the EU officials] of these promises." The EU unveiled a plan to ease the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots by establishing direct trade with the TRNC after they voted for the UN plan - led by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan - to reunite the island.

In related news, Greece's new foreign minister has called on Turkey to provide stronger support for peace talks in Cyprus after the landmark September 12 Turkish referendum on constitutional reforms. Dimitris Droutsas said Wednesday he hopes Turkey will show the "necessary political will" to back talks on the island that have produced only limited progress after two years of negotiations between rival leaders. /Today's Zaman, Hurriyet/

Syria Says Coordination with Turkey Central to Peace Talks

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad stated on Monday that coordination with Turkey was the key to help relaunch peace talks with Israel, the official SANA news agency reported. Assad made the comments in talks with French presidential envoy Jean-Claude Cousseran, a former ambassador to Damascus, who delivered a message from President Nicolas Sarkozy to the Syrian leader. Assad underscored "the importance of coordination with Turkey to build up on what has been achieved in (previous rounds of) indirect negotiations" between Syria and Israel that were brokered by Ankara.

These talks, launched in May 2008, broke off in December that year amid Syrian protest over Israel's devastating offensive on the Gaza Strip. "Syria is permanently striving for a just and comprehensive peace" based on UN resolutions, al-Assad told Cousseran. In August, Sarkozy chose Cousseran to act as his special envoy to help kick-start peace talks between Israel and Syria. Assad, whose country wants the restitution of the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights as part of any peace deal with Israel, told Cousseran he was "grateful" for French support aimed at reviving the peace process. He also expressed the "hope of seeing real progress in the peace process, even if Israel's policies do not inspire that," SANA reported. /Hurriyet/

Potential 4bln Euro Loan Boosts Nabucco Pipeline

Three leading international financial institutions are preparing to loan a potential €4 billion to the Nabucco pipeline project - a project that aims to reduce Europe's dependence on Russian energy supplies and could make Turkey an indispensable energy route for its neighbors. In order for the much-awaited project to begin, officials from the European Union, European Investment Bank (EIB), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and International Finance Corporation (IFC) - a World Bank Group affiliate - met in Brussels last Monday where they signed a letter of authorization for the large loans. Under the agreement, the three financial institutions, the EIB, the

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EBRD and the IFC - may provide loans to the project of up to €2 billion, €1.2 billion and €800 million, respectively.

Speaking at a press conference following a ceremony formalizing the deal, Reinhard Mitschek, managing director of Nabucco Gas Pipeline International, said an important step had been taken. He added that he expects the loans to be approved next year and that he hopes the pipeline will be able to carry 18 billion cubic meters of Azeri and Iraqi natural gas to Europe by late 2014 or early 2015. Additional supplies from producer countries in the region, including Turkmenistan and Egypt, could also be transported in later years, Mitschek added.

Also speaking to reporters, BOTAS General Director Fazil Senel elaborated on the significance of Monday's agreement and on the project's possible benefits to Turkey. He said Turkey is one of the masterminds of the Nabucco pipeline, also known as the "Turkey-Austria gas pipeline." "We're supporting every step necessary for the project's completion," he stated. "Today's signatures provide proof of the contributions these three important financial institutions will make. It is an important step for realization of the project. Seventy-five percent of the Nabucco pipeline will be on Turkish soil - and it will make substantial contributions to the places it passes through. Our producers, industrialists, and our people will benefit from the project." The 3,300-kilometer project will have an annual capacity of 31 billion cubic meters of gas and is expected to cost €7.9 billion. If it becomes fully operational, the project will meet 5 percent of Europe's annual energy demand, which is expected to reach 600 billion cubic meters by 2020. /Turkish Press Review/

U.S. and Turkey Play in World Basketball Championship Final in Istanbul

Turkey on Sunday was unable to stop an outstanding performance by Kevin Durant, who led the United States to an 81-64 victory in the 2010 FIBA World Basketball Championship final. The Oklahoma City Thunder forward poured in 28 points to lead all scorers at the Sinan Erdem Dome in Istanbul, giving Team USA its first world title since 1994. Coming off a historic win over Serbia in the semifinal on Saturday night, Turkey nevertheless fell short against the US side, which took the lead early in the game and never gave it up. "Hedo," the Phoenix Suns' Hidayet Turkoglu and Turkey's highest profile player, finished the game with 16 points, a game high for Turkey. Durant was later named Most Valuable Player in the tournament. "I'm very proud and happy to be the captain of this team and hope that my teammates go on and become great players," he said. Apart from Durant and Hedo, Argentine Luis Scola, Serbian guard Milos Teodosic and Lithuanian Linas Kleiza also made the tournament's all-star team. Lithuania took the bronze medal with a 99-88 win over Serbia, while Argentina finished fifth after an 86-81 victory against Spain.

In a ceremony, the members of the U.S. team got their gold medals from President Abdullah Gul, while Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali Sahin presented the members of the Turkish team with silvers. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan was also present to watch the game. Turkish team coach Bogdan Tanjevic thanked the national and local governments for giving \$100 million to help organize the tournament. Thanking Turkish fans for their unwavering support, he added, "They supported us very well and gave us energy all through the tournament." The silver medal finish gave Turkey's "12 Giant Men"

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its highest-ever showing in the World Championship, which they finished sixth in 2006. Turkey was also a silver medalist in the European Basketball Championship in 2001, also hosted by Turkey. The runner-up spot is arguably the biggest success of any Turkish team sport on the international level. "Today we are the champions of the rest of the world," Tanjevic said, laughing, "because the U.S. is a different team." /Turkish Press Review/

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Gül, Turkish Ministers in New York for UN Meetings

President Abdullah Gül, accompanied by several government ministers, departed on Friday for New York to attend the 65th annual session of the UN General Assembly, which will include various activities headed by Turkey. Matters such as ensuring the Millennium Development Goals will be achieved, returning the UN and the General Assembly to the center of global governance, and promoting sustainable development will be at the center of debates, roundtable meetings, and addresses during the General Assembly to be held between September 23 and 30. In New York, Gül will be accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister and Economy Minister Ali Babacan, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, and Environment and Forestry Minister Veysel Eroğlu.

The UN Security Council, under Turkey's presidency, will hold a session on Sept. 23 on improving its role in the maintenance of peace and security around the world. Gül will preside at the meeting which will be attended by heads of state and government representatives. A presidential statement is expected to be released after this meeting. Ankara hopes that both the meeting and the presidential statement will bring in a conceptual approach to questions such as how peacekeeping can be rendered more effective in the light of UN experience, how related units of the UN can get involved in interactive exercises, and how these exercises can be arranged by taking financial, humanitarian, and social dimensions into consideration. Turkey considers the Sept. 23 Security Council meeting on maintaining peace the most important goal of its two-year Security Council membership. It joined the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member in January 2009 and will have the seat until the end of 2010.

During the assembly, Gül will hold bilateral meetings with participants and will deliver speeches at several universities. He will also attend a meeting of the least developed countries and address participants on Sept. 22. Foreign Minister Davutoğlu will head a ministerial meeting of the council on Sept. 27 that will appraise the global fight against terrorism since the 9/11 attacks. Davutoğlu will deliver a speech at a conference at the Harvard University on Sept. 28, while also attending several meetings at think tanks. He

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is expected to deliver around 14 speeches and hold approximately 40 bilateral meetings, while Gül is expected to deliver nine speeches and hold roughly 20 bilateral meetings.

/Today's Zaman/

Istanbul Turkic Summit Focuses on Cooperation, Energy Policy

A landmark summit of Turkic-speaking countries closed on Thursday in İstanbul with participants declaring their firm will for building regional peace, stability, and welfare through a newly-established Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States. Along with Azerbaijani President İlham Aliyev, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kyrgyz Interim President Roza Otunbayeva, and Turkmen President Gurbanguli Berdimukhamedov, Turkish President Abdullah Gül held a press conference closing the summit.

Stressing that the sole goal of cooperation among Turkic countries is not protecting and increasing the interests of their own people, Gül stated that they also aim at contributing to the development of peace, stability and welfare for all peoples of the region through this cooperation. "Besides promising great potential, the geography where our countries are located also faces various problems and risks. We will not let these problems and risks harm opportunities for cooperation in our region. We have full confidence that the Turkic Cooperation Council will prove itself in a short time as a regional organization that completes the current cooperation mechanisms in the Eurasia geography," Gül declared. Next year the summit will be hosted in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan will host the summit in 2012.

However, the sixth member of the summit of Turkic-speaking countries, Uzbekistan, which has not been represented at the presidential level at any summit since 1998, was not even represented at a low level during this İstanbul summit. The establishment of the cooperation council was outlined during the ninth summit of the forum, which was held in Nakhchivan last October. Additionally Turkmenistan has not put its signature on the agreement that was signed by participants of the Nakhchivan summit to establish the council. Turkmen officials cited their foreign policy based on "positive neutrality" as the reason for not signing the agreement.

The 10th summit of the Turkic-speaking countries also served as an opportunity for talks between parties on energy cooperation. Referring to a trilateral meeting among energy ministers of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Turkey that was held on Wednesday, Gül said the meeting focused on opportunities of cooperation regarding energy sources in the Caspian Sea basin. "I would like to state that, when all of these contacts and meetings are taken as a whole, this important meeting is an activity that befits the Turkic world in regards to contributing to maintaining regional peace, stability and welfare," Gül said. At the trilateral meeting to which Gül referred, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Turkey pledged to strengthen energy cooperation. /Today's Zaman/

CHP Leader Holds Talks in Brussels

Main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu arrived in Brussels Wednesday for talks with senior European Union officials and leaders of various political groups at the European Parliament, as well as business circles and think tanks,

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to promote Turkey's EU bid. As part of his three-day stay in the EU capital, Kilicdaroglu had a busy schedule to make his party's support for Turkey's EU accession bid better known among EU leaders.

Kilicdaroglu first met with Martin Schultz, the head of the EP's Socialists and Democrats group, as well as Belgian Parliament Speaker Andre Flahaut, who is also the leader of Belgium's Socialist Party. Kilicdaroglu also held talks with businesspeople at the offices of the Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (TUSIAD) and Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodities Exchanges (TOBB), and attended a dinner hosted by Turkish Ambassador Murat Ersavci in his honor.

The CHP leader met with the European Union's chief commissioner for enlargement, Stefan Fule, on Thursday. Fule stated he had had "a very fruitful" meeting with Kilicdaroglu, adding that the recent referendum in Turkey regarding a package of government-backed constitutional amendments topped the agenda of their talks. "I explained to Kilicdaroglu why we had insistently described the constitutional package as a 'step in the right direction.' I think that the constitutional amendments will affect Turkey's EU accession drive in a very positive way," Fule told reporters.

Fule also stressed that the Turkish government should welcome positive contributions when drafting a new constitution, adding that commitments made by the Turkish president and prime minister to include all segments of the society in the new constitution had been well received by the EU. The minister said the commission would closely monitor the implementation of the amendments approved in Sunday's referendum in line with standards set by the EU.

Kilicdaroglu also met with European Socialists' Party President Poul Nyrup Rasmussen. He told reporters following the meeting, "we set a road map to develop our cooperation. We will put into practice that road map by holding a series of seminars." He expressed hope that Rasmussen and his associates would make valuable contributions to Turkey in its European Union membership process. "I also informed Rasmussen on the constitutional amendment package in Turkey. He also highlighted importance of independent judiciary and free media," Kilicdaroglu added. /Turkish Press Review, Anatolia.com, Inc., Hurriyet/

First Gaza Flotilla Report Sent to UN Chief

An inquiry panel handed over a preliminary report on Wednesday to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Israel's raid on a Turkish activist ship taking aid supplies to Gaza, which left nine dead and many wounded, a UN spokesman said. The UN panel is chaired by former New Zealand Prime Minister Geoffrey Palmer, co-chaired by former Colombian President Alvaro Uribe and includes Israeli representative Joseph Ciechanover and Turkish representative Özdem Sanberk.

The United Nations did not give details of the report but a spokesman for Ban said the inquiry was proceeding in "in a positive and collegial manner... The panel agreed that in the light of the information so gathered, it would examine and identify the facts, circumstances and context of the incident and make findings and recommendations for the prevention of similar incidents in the future," stated the spokesman.

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Israel has established two commissions to investigate the flotilla incident, including a military committee that already released its report and a civilian committee, which also includes two international observers. The latter continued listening to testimony from Israeli government and military officials on Wednesday. Turkey also established a commission, which convened twice in June and included officials from the Justice and Foreign ministries, as well as the Maritime Undersecretariat. Turkish officials told reporters the commission was working both at high and technical levels. /Hurriyet/

Turkish Military Officers Participate in NATO Drill in Armenia

Eight military officers from Turkey have participated in a "humanitarian aid and disaster relief" drill held by NATO in the Lori Mar region of Armenia. The drill began on Saturday, September 11 and ended on Friday. Turkish officials were also at the NATO headquarters in the region of Lori Mar from September 11 to 17. Supply and evacuation operations in the Lori region in the north were envisaged via Georgia. The Turkish officers also passed to Armenia via Georgia, as the Turkey-Armenia border has been closed since 1994 due to the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The military exercise was planned by the Euro-Atlantic Disasters Response Coordination Center, or EADRCC, under the NATO umbrella, where all decisions are based on the unanimity of votes. EADRCC organizes humanitarian assistance practices in member countries of the European Atlantic Partnership Council, or EAPC, aiming at cooperation between neighboring non-member countries. The Council prepared a devastating earthquake scenario in Armenia for the drill, entitled "Armenia-2010."

According to the scenario, the infrastructure of the country is completely ruined in the aftermath of a large earthquake and 20,000 people die. Hazardous industrial waste spills were also included in the scenario. The drill includes rescue, evacuation, and the cleanup of hazardous waste. The goal is to see how well NATO and council members coordinate with each other. 600 officials and 40 observers from 15 countries including Turkey participated in the drill. /Turkish Press Review/

Erdogan Calls for Increased Trade with Iran

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Reza Rahimi oversaw a meeting Thursday which brought together over a hundred businessmen, including Turkish investors eager to buy into Iran's mostly government-owned textile, machinery and automotive industries. "Our bilateral trade ties have reached \$10 billion... When we take away the barriers to trade between ourselves, when we complete our preferential trade agreement we can reach a bilateral trade volume of \$30 billion in five years," Erdogan told the businessmen from Turkey and Iran.

Numerous rounds of sanctions on Iran by the United Nations, the United States, and the European Union have hit the Islamic Republic, discouraging investment in its huge natural gas reserves as well as its banking sector. Meanwhile Turkey, which took over the presidency of the Security Council this month, has fostered diplomatic and business ties with Tehran. A trade agreement between the two countries is set to expand business ties

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even further. Analysts say Turkey is seeking to capitalize on the diplomatic risks it has taken in backing Iran while the West piled on sanctions.

Some Turkish businessmen were hoping Erdogan could help them forge stronger ties with Iran when other countries were backing away. "This is a big opportunity for Turkey," said Mehmet Koca, member of the executive board of the Turkey-Iran business group. "Finance and trade that was carried out by Dubai and the United Arab Emirates before the sanctions can be taken over by Turkey," explained Koca, who is also the general manager of Turkish fertilizer company Gubretas. He added Iran remained significantly closed to foreigners and needed to be convinced to open up to foreign investment.

Turkish companies were expected to buy stakes when Iran begins a privatization program, expected early next year, or form joint ventures with Iranian businesses. "Turkey's private sector is more forward looking and more experienced than ours," said Iran's Rahimi. Turkey and Iran shared a bilateral trade volume of nearly \$10 billion in 2008, 80 percent of which were Iranian exports to Turkey, mostly in the form of natural gas. Iran supplies Turkey with one third of its gas needs. /Sabah/

Turkey, Iraq Renew Crude Oil Pipeline Deal

Energy Minister Taner Yildiz and Iraqi Oil Minister Husain al-Shahristani Sunday attended the signing ceremony in Baghdad of an agreement extending the Kirkuk-Ceyhan Crude Oil Pipeline deal by 15 years. Iraq is one of the key partners in Turkey's energy policies, Yildiz argued, stressing that the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline is a crucial element of bilateral energy ties. Yildiz also reiterated Turkey's hope for negotiations with Baghdad on certain oil and natural gas projects.

For his part, Shahristani stressed provisions in the new deal against confiscation. "From now on, there will be no confiscation of Iraqi oil passing through Turkey, as the Turkish government has provided guarantees on this issue," he stated. Some 500,000 barrels of oil currently flow through the Kirkuk-Yumurtalik pipeline, and the construction of a second pipeline may be needed if Iraqi oil production rises. /Turkish Press Review/

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Gül Highlights Turkey's Role in International Peace at UN Summit

Turkey has a great role to play in fostering peace both in its region and throughout the world, Turkish President Abdullah Gül said Thursday during ongoing UN meetings in New York. Chairing a UN Security Council summit on the establishment and preservation of

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peace, Gül argued concrete steps should be taken to make the Security Council more active, adding that Turkey would always be a reliable partner of the council and international community in such a process.

Pointing to Turkey's geographical position, Gül said his country was located in a strategic area that covered a wide region between the Balkans, Middle East, Black Sea, Mediterranean, Caucasus, and Central Asia, at the intersection of many risks and threats. "Therefore, Turkey has to struggle with multilateral issues which affect both its security and the safety of regions around it, and it displays efforts to establish peace and stability in such a wide area," Gül stated, adding that Turkey's remarkable performance in the diplomatic sphere thanks to its recent mediation efforts was no coincidence.

Turkey's president also said the United Nations Security Council should improve its efficiency in order to establish international peace and security during the 21st century. "I call upon the member states to explore the possibility of establishing a 'global rapid reaction capability' to effectively tackle natural and ecological disasters, food shortages and epidemics," Gül stated. "This would also help maintain international peace and security by mitigating the threats stemming from weak governance, the collapse of public order, and domestic or inter-state conflicts over diminishing natural resources," the president explained.

Touching on Afghanistan, Gül argued it was necessary to continue the international mission there. "Our failure in Afghanistan will certainly have unpredictable consequences for the international community. Therefore, Afghanistan deserves our close attention and sincere commitment," he said. "Turkey's commitment to Afghanistan is open-ended. We will continue our assistance as long as the Afghans require it. We firmly believe that an essential pillar of ensuring the irreversibility of the processes under way in Afghanistan is directly linked to ensuring better, result-oriented cooperation at the regional level, particularly between Afghanistan and its neighbors."

The president also stated Turkey attached top priority to the prosperity of the Balkans. "As a Balkan country, Turkey attaches cardinal priority to the peace, stability, and economic development of the Balkans. In recent years, we have actively engaged in result-oriented initiatives in the Balkans by intensifying our high level bilateral visits to Belgrade and Sarajevo," he said. "Moreover, the launching of trilateral cooperation mechanisms with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia on one hand, and with Bosnia and Croatia, on the other, was of historic significance. Through these mechanisms, we have tried to create a new atmosphere of mutual understanding and cooperation among those nations." /Hurriyet/

UNHCR Probe Condemns Gaza Flotilla Raid

According to a report by a three-person panel of experts appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council, Israel's May 31 efforts to stop a flotilla of aid ships from reaching the Gaza Strip broke international human rights and humanitarian law, and more such incidents may occur. "Lethal force was employed by the Israeli soldiers in a widespread and arbitrary manner which caused an unnecessarily large number of persons to be killed or seriously injured," the report stated. "Less extreme means could have been employed in nearly all instances of the Israeli operation, since there was no imminent threat to

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soldiers." It also concluded, "There was no legal basis for the Israeli forces to conduct an assault and interception in international waters."

The Israeli raid on vessels attempting to breach a naval blockade of the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip left nine Turkish citizens dead, generated international criticism, and led Turkey to suspend diplomatic and security cooperation. The UNHCR report comes amidst reports of a scrapped meeting between Turkish President Abdullah Gul and Israeli President Shimon Peres on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, as well as new figures showing increased trade volume between Turkey and Israel in August.

Israel's Foreign Ministry called the report "as biased and as one sided as the body that has produced it," and argued its own inquiries had sufficiently investigated the raid. Israel has said that in the confrontation, which followed numerous warnings for the ships to change course, its soldiers were attacked with knives and clubs after boarding the Mavi Marmara, one of the six vessels in the flotilla, and seven were wounded, including by gunfire after volunteers aboard the ship managed to grab Israeli firearms. Activists have said they threw the firearms into the sea. There was no violence on the other five ships.

Israel refused to cooperate with the UN inquiry, and video and photographic evidence obtained from Israel, mostly through the Internet or published proceedings from Israeli inquiries, could not be relied on, the report said. While it was clear that the Israeli soldiers who tried to take control of the ship were attacked, the panel found no evidence that passengers used firearms to shoot at the soldiers. The UN panel's report was prepared by Karl Hudson-Phillips, a former attorney general of Trinidad and Tobago; Desmond de Silva, former chief prosecutor of the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone; and Mary Shanthi Dairiam, a Malaysian women's rights activist. /Anatolia.com, Inc./

Turkey Says Banks Complying with UN Sanctions

"As it stands, none of our banks, none of our companies, have done anything to break the embargo (sanctions) on Iran," said Turkish Trade Minister Zafer Caglayan, reacting to reports that Turkey and other U.S. allies have been allowing Iranian banks with suspected links to Tehran's atomic program to do business within their borders, frustrating Western countries trying to financially squeeze the Islamic Republic. Turkey is obligated to implement the UN measures, but not to restrict activities of Iranian banks hit by sanctions imposed separately by the United States and the European Union. While Turkey is not compelled to abide by non-UN sanctions, those banks or firms that do business with Iranian companies blacklisted by Washington could face U.S. penalties.

Turkey has recently enjoyed growing economic and financial relations with neighboring Iran. Western diplomats are concerned that if Turkey becomes a virtual safe haven for Iranian banking activities it will be easier for Tehran to dodge sanctions. An intelligence report on Turkey and Iran provided to Reuters by a diplomat said: "Turkey's blossoming financial-economic relationship with Iran provides Iran with a gateway to the entire European financial system... The fact that Turkey is allowing itself to be used as a conduit for Iranian activity via Turkish banks and the Turkish lira is making it possible for Iranian funds in Turkish guise to make their way into Europe."

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A Turkish diplomat denied suggestions that Iran's nuclear program is being financed via Turkey's banking system. "The Turkish banking system, which was not affected by the crisis, is extremely transparent and is tightly monitored by the BDDK, an independent body," the diplomat explained, referring to Turkey's banking watchdog. "It is indeed impossible that the banking system finances the Iranian nuclear program. At the same time, Turkey has no such intention and no such practice." Among other financial institutions, the United States and the EU have blacklisted Bank Mellat, Iran's second largest bank. The bank operates branches in the Turkish cities of Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. /Sabah/

Barzani Pledges Support for Turkey's Efforts to End Terrorism

The northern Iraqi regional administration is ready to support Turkey's efforts to end terrorism as part of its democratic expansion initiative, and to ensure that the terrorist PKK lays down its arms, Massoud Barzani, the administration leader, said Sunday. Barzani made the remarks during a visit from Turkish Interior Minister Besir Atalay in his official residence in Salahaddin, northern Iraq, preceded by Atalay's visit to Erbil, the regional administration's capital. During the meeting, the two officials reportedly discussed developments following the approval in a referendum earlier this month of a major constitutional reform package in Turkey. Stressing the importance of the approval, Barzani declared Ankara's initiative is in line with democratic principles. Stating that no problems can be solved through violence, Barzani said the regional administration stands ready to contribute to Turkey's efforts in this context.

Barzani also welcomed a message of friendship from President Abdullah Gul and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan conveyed via Atalay. Barzani also told Atalay of Kurdish views on stalled efforts to form a new Iraqi government in the wake of the March general elections. Iraq has been locked in a political impasse since the elections, with various political groups from different sectarian and ethnic backgrounds failing to reach agreement on a government. As it enjoys good relations with all groups in Iraq, Turkey is continuing its efforts to help Iraqi political groups forge a broad-based national unity government to ensure stability in the fragile country.

In related news, National Intelligence Organization (MIT) head Hakan Fidan is expected to visit northern Iraq next week to hold talks with Barzani, Iraqi security officials, and US military officers on disarming the terrorist PKK, as well as closing its bases and offices in northern Iraq. Fidan is also scheduled to hold talks on the command of a trilateral mechanism among Turkey, Iraq, and the U.S. meant to closely follow terrorist PKK activities in the region and help gather intelligence about PKK cross-border infiltrations from northern Iraq into Turkey. To the same end, Fidan also held talks with U.S. Central Intelligence Agency head Leon Panetta last week. Interior Minister Atalay is also scheduled to hold talks with his Syrian and Iranian counterparts on the same matter, and meet with representatives of non-governmental organizations in southeastern Anatolia. /Turkish Press Review/

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Turkish Cypriot President Meets with UN Chief

Turkish Cypriot President Dervis Eroğlu met with United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in New York on Saturday. Following the meeting, President Eroğlu told reporters that Ban seemed determined, like the Turkish Cypriot side, to reach a conclusion of the Cyprus talks by the end of this year. "The UN chief is already aware of our intention to intensify talks and get a result by the end of 2010. We will repeat this to Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias at the negotiation table," Eroğlu stated.

The Turkish Cypriot leader said he informed Ban about the Turkish Cypriot side's new proposals on the property issue. He said, "The return, compensation and exchange of properties are included in our proposal package. Our urban transformation project has been welcomed even by Greek Cypriot businessmen. What I can say is that we think it would be appropriate to come together as parties and guarantor powers at the end of talks to launch a give-and-take process."

Asked about Christofias' remarks that Turkey was the key country and that he wanted to meet Turkish officials to discuss the Cyprus issue, Eroğlu said, "The problem is in Cyprus. The people to solve the problem are in Cyprus as well. The people to solve the question are sitting around the negotiation table." At a press conference, Eroğlu also said that he repeated his request for a three-party meeting of the Cypriot parties and Ban during his meeting with the UN chief. Eroğlu said, "Ban said he would assess the matter."

Eroğlu also warned about the upcoming Greek Cypriot election scheduled for 2011 and said Christofias would focus on the election next year, which he said could have effect on the Cyprus talks. "So, there is a risk of losing another year. In my opinion, the talks may come to an end by the end of this year." Eroğlu added that Turkish Cypriot people were fed up with the course of talks and that their interest in the talks was going down day by day. "We must put a time limit on the talks now. The Greek Cypriots are against it. If we continue in the way the Greek Cypriot side wants, we will be around the negotiation table for another five or 10 years." /Hurriyet/

Orhan Pamuk to Receive 2010 Norman Mailer Lifetime Achievement Prize

Orhan Pamuk will be honored at the Annual Norman Mailer Center and Writers Colony Benefit Gala, to be held on Tuesday, October 19, 2010 in New York City. Pamuk, winner of the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature and an author whose work Mailer greatly admired, will be in attendance to accept his prize. The Norman Mailer Center and Writers Colony, a non-profit organization for educational purposes, honors renowned American writer Norman Mailer and his lifelong interest and commitment to writers and writing. /American Turkish Society/

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