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Turkey to Only Follow UN Sanctions on Iran

Turkey has stated it will abide by UN sanctions against Iran, but not the more sweeping restrictions imposed on Tehran by the United States and the European Union. "We will fully implement UN resolutions, but when it comes to individual countries' demands for extra sanctions, we do not have to [follow suit]," Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek declared in an interview published Sunday. "The facilitation of trade that is not prohibited under the UN resolution should and will continue," he was quoted as saying. "If a trade deal needs to be financed, we will have to find a way to pay for it."

The U.S. Congress passed legislation last month shutting any banks with ties to Iran - or any companies selling petroleum products to the country - out of the American market. These measures were followed Monday by unilateral EU sanctions, new measures that restrict trade related to Iran's nuclear program. The sanctions limit financial assistance and funding and allow EU members to inspect all cargo going to or from Iran.

Simsek's comments came as the International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed that a state-owned Turkish refiner, Tüpras, had stepped in to supply Iran after several international companies stopped selling the country refined petroleum. Turkey's foreign economic relations board has meanwhile said the country's ports, notably Mersin and Trabzon, would try to handle some of the trade with Iran that has been going through Dubai. The Gulf emirate is steadily restricting its economic ties with Tehran. Sources close to the Turkish government suggest that Ankara will watch the behavior of Russia and China to gauge the extent to which it can afford to ignore unilateral U.S. sanctions. Chinese companies have also been supplying Iran with petroleum. /Hurriyet/

Turkey and Britain Vow to Boost Relations

Turkey and Britain agreed to work together more closely to boost the economy, combat terrorism, address regional conflicts, and push Turkey's European Union bid under the updated strategic partnership document signed by their leaders Tuesday. The pact was signed by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his British counterpart David Cameron, paying his first trip to Turkey while in office early last week. The document tightens the strong bonds of alliance between the two countries and encourages them to cooperate on a wide range of global challenges.

According to the document, Turkey and Britain are committed to reviewing their bilateral relationship on an annual basis. Reciprocal visits to enhance bilateral relations in all fields

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will be intensified in the period ahead. Stating that the two countries commit to working together as G-20 members and major European trading nations to overcome the global financial crisis and increase bilateral trade and investment, the agreement says progress will be driven by the annual Turkish-British Joint Economic and Trade Committee. On Turkey's EU accession bid, the two countries commit to advancing the clear case for Turkish membership in the European Union. "Turkey will actively pursue its accession and reform program... The United Kingdom will champion Turkey's accession process, and support Turkey to meet the accession criteria."

The document also underlines the two countries' commitment to tackle all forms of terrorism and organized crime, declaring: "Efforts to bring an end to the international terrorist threat, including that of the PKK, as well as combating organized crime and the proliferation threat will be driven collectively by the annual ministerial counter-terrorism dialogue and the Bosphorus Group of operational leads." On regional peace and stability, it says, "We commit to regular, sustained and substantive engagement at all levels to support progress on resolving regional conflicts and promoting stability, especially in the Middle East, Afghanistan, the Western Balkans, Central Asia, the South Caucasus and the Indian subcontinent." In addition the two countries commit to working for a Cyprus settlement, based on a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation with political equality, in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and in line with the joint statements of the two leaders on Cyprus during the current round of negotiations.
/Turkish Press Review/

US Lawmakers Hear Testimony on Turkey's Foreign Policy

The United States has "no choice" but to work with Turkey, Ross Wilson, a former US ambassador to Turkey, was quoted as saying before the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs on Wednesday, adding that the Western aspirations Turkey has had for years remain in place. The remarks of the former envoy to Turkey were voiced as he tried to soothe concerns raised by some representatives during a hearing exploring "Turkey's New Foreign Policy Direction." He assured the lawmakers that there have always been ups and downs in US-Turkish relations.

Wilson's statements came after numerous representatives criticized a so-called recent "shift" in Washington's long-time NATO ally Turkey. "How do we get Turkey back?" asked Congressman Gary Ackerman. "Why is Turkish public opinion ... perhaps one of the most anti-American of any of the countries of the world?" asked the committee's chairman, Rep. Howard Berman. Wilson responded that anti-American feeling in Turkey tended to be "very broad and very shallow." The negative feelings tended to be based on Turkish opposition to specific US policies, such as the US-led invasion of Iraq, Turkey's neighbor, in 2003. Sometimes the "wild and crazy" Turkish press did not help, Wilson added.

With a panel of experts on Turkey listening, Berman and other lawmakers listed their worries about recent Turkish policy turns on Iran, Israel and the Palestinians. Wilson assuaged the lawmakers' fears, reminding them that the US is a country where Turks still like to vacation and send their children to school. "They are not sending their children to Iranian schools; they are not sending their children to Palestinian schools. The Western aspiration that Turkey has had for years... remains there," Wilson assured lawmakers.

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"Where we see problems, we should talk about them. Primarily we should talk about them in private," the diplomat concluded.

Soner Cagaptay of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Ian Lesser of the German Marshall Fund of the United States and Michael Rubin from the American Enterprise Institute also made statements and answered Representatives' questions at the hearing. /Today's Zaman/

Legal Experts Find Constitutional Reform Package in Line with EU Commitments

Reforms included in a major constitutional amendment package, set to face a referendum next month, are also necessary steps for Turkey to align itself with European Union standards in various areas, according to a new report by legal experts at Turkey's Secretariat General for European Affairs (ABGS). The package introduces "positive discrimination" in favor of the elderly, minors and the disabled, who are in need of social protection, as well as steps to ensure gender equality, and to provide constitutional protection for the rights of the children. These are also in line with provisions in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union to which Turkey is a party.

In addition, the package includes amendments regarding private data protection, which is in Turkey's to-do list under a European Council resolution. The reform package also includes amendments to improve working conditions in Turkey in accordance with International Labor Organization (ILO) standards. These amendments will also enable Turkey to meet relevant provisions in the Revised European Charter and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. An ombudsman law, of great importance for EU harmonization efforts, is also part of the package. Among the other amendments is the right of individual application to the Constitutional Court, which is expected to ensure better functioning of domestic law, thus preventing legal cases from being taken to European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). This will help Turkey meet a decision of the Venice Commission, an advisory body of the Council of Europe made up of independent experts in the field of constitutional law. Constitutional amendments would also make party closures more difficult. The principles set forth by the Venice Commission would be taken as the basis for any future closures. /Turkish Press Review/

German FM Pledges to Support Turkey's EU Bid

Diverging from the stance of his country's top leader, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle pledged his full support Wednesday to Turkey's EU accession bid. Underscoring that Turkey's "direction is [toward] Europe," Westerwelle told a joint press conference with his Turkish counterpart, Ahmet Davutoğlu, that developing relations with Turkey and its joining the European Union are of key importance to Germany. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has repeatedly offered a "privileged partnership" to Turkey as an alternative to full EU membership.

The two foreign ministers held their press conference following a breakfast meeting at Istanbul's Çırağan Palace. Davutoğlu stated the German foreign minister had confirmed his country's support for Turkey's EU accession bid, adding that he had informed Westerwelle during the meeting about Turkey's initiatives regarding visa procedures. "I

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also told him that we appreciated the EU's efforts in the recent period on the liberalization of visas, but Turkey's being excluded from these efforts does not have any legitimate basis," the Turkish foreign minister reported. Davutoğlu also explained he told Westerwelle that the two parties in Cyprus should be treated equally in order to attain a lasting solution for the island. "I also said we attach great importance to Britain's and Germany's support on the matter for progress on the issue," he added.

Noting that Germany appreciates the success Turkey has had in recent years, Westerwelle argued the two countries have common interests as allies and that the strategic dialogue between them is very important. He added that 3.5 million Turks are living in Germany and more than 4 million Turks are visiting Germany each year, numbers he said showed the sound basis of the relations between the two countries. During his meeting with Davutoğlu, Westerwelle said the two top diplomats also discussed the establishment of a Turkish-German university in Istanbul, as well as international matters including the standoff over Iran. Germany welcomes the efforts of Turkey and Brazil to establish dialogue with Iran, he added, though he highlighted Iran acquiring nuclear weapons was not an acceptable solution and would pose a regional danger. /Hurriyet/

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Turkey Welcomes UN Flotilla Probe

Turkey on Monday welcomed a United Nations probe into Israel's deadly raid on Gaza-bound aid ships and said Tel Aviv's decision to cooperate with the inquiry panel was an important step. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said the probe marked the first time that Israel had agreed to an international inquiry and showed that "all countries are accountable to international law." Israel's decision to take part in the UN investigation "is a first ..., but it should not be seen as extraordinary," Davutoğlu stated. "As a UN member, Israel is a country that is answerable to the international community for its actions."

UN chief Ban Ki-moon announced earlier Monday that a four-member panel, including an Israeli and a Turk, would investigate the May 31 raid by Israeli forces on the aid flotilla aiming to break Israel's blockade of Hamas-run Gaza. Israel had until now rejected calls for an international independent investigation into the raid. The panel, chaired by former New Zealand Prime Minister Geoffrey Palmer and with outgoing Colombian President Alvaro Uribe as vice chairman, will begin work Aug. 10 and submit a first progress report by mid-September. Career diplomat Özdem Sanberk, a former undersecretary at the Turkish Foreign Ministry, will be the Turkish representative on the panel, while the Israeli member will be Joseph Ciechanover, a former senior official at Israel's Foreign Ministry, Ban announced on Saturday.

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A Turkish government source described the UN probe as an "important step" and said Ankara's pressure on the international community had led Israel to agree to cooperate. "As a result of Turkey's initiatives with the UN, the United States, and Europe, Israel has agreed to cooperate with the committee," the source explained, speaking on condition of anonymity. "This is a very important decision for Turkey," he added. "This committee is an important step in remedying the injustice Turkey has encountered in the raid."

The Turkish Foreign Ministry also hailed the U.N. probe as a "step taken in the right direction" and pledged Ankara's cooperation with the panel. "It is imperative that the investigation is carried out in a swift, objective and transparent manner in line with international standards... We believe all the panel members will act in an objective and responsible manner," a statement from the ministry declared. Turkey hopes that the result of the inquiry will serve to "install respect for international law and contribute to preventing a repeat of similar violations," it added. Turkey continues to insist Israel must apologize for the raid, pay compensation for the victims and lift the blockade of Gaza for the recovery of bilateral ties. /Hurriyet/

Turkish Government, Military Reach Deal on Top Posts

The Turkish government appointed General Erdal Ceylanoglu as commander of the land forces on Sunday, apparently defusing a row that was brewing between the government and military leadership. Ceylanoglu's appointment paves the way for the current head of the army, General Isik Kosaner, to become the top commander of NATO's second-largest military.

Both posts were left unfilled at the end of the annual Supreme Military Council on August 4 after the government and the military clashed over who would lead ground forces. Financial markets weakened last week due to concerns about Turkey's political stability after the council, chaired by Prime Tayyip Erdogan but dominated by Turkey's generals, failed to name the two top armed forces jobs after the four-day meeting ended. The promotions process in the military was thrown into disarray by investigations into alleged plots by top-ranking officers to undermine the government. Earlier on Sunday Erdogan said agreement had been reached with the military on the positions.

Ceylanoglu, 65, had been appointed to the prestigious First Army Command at last week's council. Now, General Hayri Kivrikoglu will take that post. The government and military had broadly agreed on Kosaner's appointment, media reported last week, but it was delayed by uncertainty over who would replace him as head of ground forces. Hasan Igsiz, had been in line, but he was one of 19 officers summoned last week to testify in an inquiry into a campaign to discredit the ruling AK Party on the Internet. That case is one of several criminal investigations into alleged military-linked schemes to force the AKP out. Generals deny any involvement in such plots. /Sabah/

Intelligence Chief Remarks Spark Concern

Israel's Defense Minister Ehud Barak has voiced concern that Turkey could share Israeli intelligence secrets with Iran, revealing a deep distrust as Ankara's regional interests shift. In his speech to centre-left supporters in a kibbutz near Jerusalem, Barak expressed concern that following Hakan Fidan's appointment as chief of the Turkish

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National Intelligence Organization in late May secrets shared by Israel with Turkey "could become open to Iran over the next several months".

"It's appropriate simply because it's true, and it really troubles us," he told Israel Radio when asked about his remarks. Barak made the comments about Fidan on July 25 at the private forum but they were later broadcast, prompting Turkey to complain to Israel's ambassador on Tuesday. "At the end of the day, I simply pointed out something factual," he said. "We have no interest in aggravating anything, and I hope that Turkey has none either."

Fidan was previously a foreign policy adviser to Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan, whose AK party has roots in political Islam and has often censured Israel for its treatment of the Palestinians and its assumed atomic arsenal. Fidan also served as envoy to the U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency and was involved in talks that Turkey and Brazil held with Iran in hope of defusing tension over its nuclear program. /Sabah/

Ankara Intensifies Talks with Iraqi Officials

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu met with Ali al-Dabbagh, the Iraqi government spokesman, on Saturday, continuing extensive discussions on Iraqi political groups' efforts regarding the formation of a government in Iraq, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Saturday. Al-Dabbagh came to Ankara as special envoy of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Davutoğlu has had several talks with representatives from Iraqi political groups, most notably from the cross-sectarian al-Iraqiyya bloc of former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, since the Iraqi parliamentary election in March. Public contact with al-Maliki's Shiite-led State of Law coalition, on the other hand, has so far been rare.

Last month, Davutoğlu met with Allawi and Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in surprise talks in Damascus, a move interpreted as an attempt to prevent al-Maliki from forming a government. Allawi's al-Iraqiyya bloc, where the Sunnis are also represented, won the March election by a small margin but al-Maliki's State of Law has sought alliances with other groups to form a government despite the election results. Ankara has called for a broad-based government and sees Sunni representation in the Iraqi parliamentary politics as a key condition for stability in the troubled country as the United States prepares for a withdrawal.

In addition to al-Dabbagh, Ankara is hosting Iraqi politicians from another Shiite-led bloc, the Iraqi National Alliance, which was ranked the third biggest group in the election. A senior political figure within the Iraqi National Alliance, Humam Hamoudi, had talks in Ankara last week and former Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari, also a senior representative of the Iraqi National Alliance, will meet with Davutoğlu on Tuesday, according to the Foreign Ministry statement. /Today's Zaman/

Turkic Foreign Ministers Convene in Bodrum

With their permanent secretariat to be established in İstanbul at this year's summit, Turkic-speaking countries will reach unity in action in addition to their unity in religion, language and culture, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has argued. Davutoğlu gathered with the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the popular

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Mediterranean resort town of Bodrum for an informal meeting of Turkic-speaking countries on Thursday.

Accompanied by Azerbaijan's Elmar Mammadyarov, Kazakhstan's Kanat Saudabayev and Kyrgyzstan's Ruslan Kazakbaev, Davutoğlu was asked in a press conference whether Turkey's "extremely improved cooperation in all fields with countries in the Turkic world would get institutionalized." He recalled that the preparation for the institutionalization of the summit of Turkic-speaking countries was indeed finalized at its latest presidential summit, held in the autonomous Azerbaijani republic of Nakhchivan in October 2009. The summit outlined the establishment of the Turkic-speaking Countries Cooperation Council, with its permanent secretariat to be based in İstanbul. "At this year's summit, a secretariat for the Turkic-speaking Countries [Cooperation] Council will get permanently established in İstanbul," Davutoğlu explained as he underlined Turkey's president and prime minister as well as Mammadyarov, Saudabayev, and Kazakbaev all have "a strong will" on the issue.

The first summit of the group, including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, was held in 1992 at the initiative of then-Turkish President Turgut Özal. When asked whether there was a special reason for the gathering in Bodrum, Davutoğlu said they wanted to get out of a formal atmosphere and come together along with their families in an informal environment. "We are a big family expanding from the Altai Mountains in Central Asia to the Balkans. We hope to hold these meetings in different places from now on as well." /Today's Zaman/

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Obama Warns Turkey over Stance on Israel, Iran

United States President Barack Obama has warned Turkey's prime minister that Ankara's position on Israel and Iran could lessen its chances of obtaining U.S. weapons, a report stated Monday. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is interested in buying American drone aircraft in order to fight the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, after the U.S. military withdraws from Iraq at the end of 2011. The PKK, which is listed a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union, has bases in the mountains in northern Iraq, near the Turkish border.

"The president has said to Erdoğan that some of the actions that Turkey has taken have caused questions to be raised on the Hill [Congress]," a senior administration official was quoted as saying. These questions centered on "whether we can have confidence in Turkey as an ally," stated the official. "That means that some of the requests Turkey has

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made of us, for example in providing some of the weaponry that it would like to fight the PKK, will be harder for us to move through Congress."

Meanwhile, Turkey's number-two diplomat, Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu, is set to visit Washington on Monday for routine political consultations. Turkish and American diplomats are expected to discuss a variety of topics, including Turkey-Israeli ties, the Middle East peace process, Iran's nuclear program, developments in the Caucasus, and the American withdrawal process from Iraq. /Hurriyet/

Turkey Establishes Own Inquiry into Flotilla Raid

Soon after a UN probe of Israel's deadly May 31 raid on a Gaza-bound flotilla began on Tuesday, Ankara announced that it has established its own national commission to investigate the raid in order to submit a report to the UN panel. The Foreign Ministry, in a statement on Wednesday, said that a committee led by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and Interior Minister Besir Atalay had already been established to investigate the attack by Israeli security forces on the Gaza humanitarian aid convoy, which took place in international waters and resulted in the deaths of eight Turks and one Turkish-American.

In New York on Tuesday, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon met with the four-member panel probing the flotilla incident as they sat down to map out the investigation. Ban stressed during the meeting that the panelists "should seek the fullest cooperation of the national authorities" as they carry out their work. The first progress report from the panel is scheduled to be delivered by September 15.

In related news, state inspectors have found around 250 bullet marks on the Mavi Marmara, the lead ship raided by Israeli commandos in the incident. Media reports said investigators found the marks had been painted over while the ship was held in Israel after the raid. A report is expected to be sent to the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office in two to three weeks. Investigators collected around 180 pieces of evidence from the ships, including bloody clothes. The 12-member investigative team includes four engineers and two divers who examined the underside of the ship. /Turkish Press Review/

Turkey, U.S. Continue Talks on Troop Pullout from Iraq

Turkey and the United States have increased the frequency of talks on the use of Turkish soil for the transfer of American troops, arms, and logistics equipment out of Iraq, sources have said. "There is no new request from Washington over the withdrawal process and the implementation is going on as it was before," Turkish Foreign Ministry sources stated on Monday. Some U.S. military equipment has already been transferred through Turkey since 2009 under an agreement that allows Turkey's İncirlik Air Base to be used by American forces as a "logistics hub."

There are reported plans to establish an aerial bridge between southeast Turkey and the base for the transfer of troops and equipment coming from Iraq. Since there are no plans to transfer heavy equipment through İncirlik, no new agreement is needed to carry out

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those plans, sources stated. Turkey insisted on a legal document in 2003 to outline the details of the transportation of military equipment to Iraq. It is not yet clear whether the Americans will only use Turkish airspace and the İncirlik base or if they will also seek to transport heavy equipment overland during the withdrawal process.

In its "Facts and Figures on Drawdown in Iraq" fact sheet released August 2, the White House stated, "By the end of August 2010, U.S. forces in Iraq will reduce the total [amount] of equipment in Iraq from 3.4 million pieces in January 2009 to a total of 1.2 million pieces... Most of the troops and equipment are being transported out of Iraq through Kuwait, although Jordan and Turkey are also permitting transit." According to the U.S. State Department's Office of the Inspector General, the U.S. Consulate in Adana "anticipates an increased role in the event of a U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq through Turkish territory." The İncirlik Air Base is located about 12 kilometers east of the center of Adana. /Hurriyet/

Report Highlights Challenges of U.S. Mission in Turkey

A U.S. report prepared after inspection visits to U.S. diplomatic missions in Turkey underlines the increasing challenges facing diplomats as both Turkey's complexity and importance for Washington grow. "Turkey has grown in complexity and importance for the United States at a faster rate than the mission's public diplomacy resources, especially people," the report, prepared after inspections from January to March in Washington, Ankara, Adana, İstanbul, and İzmir, stated. "A continuous balancing act between competing priorities is required." According to the document, released on Friday, US diplomatic missions in Turkey manage "the complex and very important relationship between Turkey and the United States at a time when the Turkish government is demonstrating a new level of activism, both regionally and on domestic issues." It advises, "Understanding Turkey's motives and goals for this activism is critical to the success of the mission's work as it guides the Washington interagency process towards effective ways of dealing with Turkey."

According to the report: "The basic question is whether, or to what extent, Turkey is moving away from the Western orientation established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and setting its sights more firmly eastward where its Islamic credentials smooth the way and potentially provide added value. The mission is grappling with the answers to this question as Turkey itself grapples with the challenges of its new activism." It notes that the Turkish government's commitment to working toward regional stability manifests itself "sometimes in ways that please the United States and other times not" and emphasizes, in particular, that Turkey's future links to Israel and Armenia remain important to the United States.

Public diplomacy is also a challenge, the document says, because public opinion toward the US is largely unfavorable. Other challenges regard dealing with media, where "sensational treatment of issues having to do with the United States is a constant risk," and with a Turkish society that has been undergoing a transformation. "While its diverse society retains many traditional features, it is undergoing rapid change. The hegemony of the long-dominant secular elite has been successfully challenged by Islamic-oriented organizations. This challenge has had a democratizing effect, but Turkey has not fully defined the nature of its democratic governance. These changes have implications for the

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embassy's outreach. Mission Turkey has to go more broadly, more deeply, and farther afield to inform and influence Turks," it said. /Today's Zaman/

Mexican FM Stresses Stronger Ties with Turkey

Despite the distance between them, the emerging economies of Turkey and Mexico are seeking to strengthen cooperative ties in such areas as economic opportunities, migration, and the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking, said Mexican Foreign Minister Patricia Espinoza, on a visit to Turkey last week. "Turkey has an increasing pressure in the international arena. It's really assuming the role it is (being) called (on) to play as one major country, one important economy," Espinoza stated in an interview Friday.

Following a visit to Mexico last year by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, both countries have started to work on a framework to boost bilateral relations. In Ankara on Friday, Espinoza signed an agreement for cooperation on education, science, culture, the arts, the media, youth, and sports. She stressed the similarities between Mexico and Turkey as large, developing countries that are very open to contact with the outside world. Saying that Mexico is following Turkey's European Union accession talks, she added, "We believe very much in integration and strengthening the institutions of the country." Espinoza said Mexico hopes to provide further opportunities for the two sides to seek joint ventures and projects together. Turkish companies "can make some joint efforts to have a bigger presence in Mexico," she said, adding that Turkish firms can develop with other companies in Latin America in general, as well as the Caribbean.

This November, Cancun, Mexico will host the 16th session Conference of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). "I was very happy to hear that Turkey is ready to support Mexico in its task as a host and chair of the conference on climate change," said Espinoza. "Turkey is an important actor in these negotiations. We hope that Turkey will remain being a very active participant in order to give an impulse to having ... the most concrete negotiations as soon as possible." /Turkish Press Review/

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U.S. Officials Discuss Iran Sanctions with Turkey

The meeting last week, which included talks between U.S. State and Treasury Department officials and the Turkish government, came as Turkey said it would support Turkish companies making sales to Tehran despite unilateral U.S. sanctions that restrict

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trade. "They were here to discuss and explain UN sanctions and also the new U.S. sanctions package signed into legislation by President Obama on July 1," a U.S. embassy official in Ankara told reporters. The official said Turkey was one of many countries the delegation was planning to visit. On the Turkish side, a Foreign Ministry source stated, "There was an exchange of views about U.S. sanctions on Iran. We told them Turkey does not feel itself bound to adhere to any sanctions other than those enacted by the UN."

Since June, the UN Security Council, the United States, and the European Union have tightened sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program, which Washington fears is a cover to build an atomic bomb. Tehran says its aims are purely peaceful. Both the U.S. and EU sanctions cover a broader range of activities than those enacted by the UN and are aimed at squeezing Iran's energy and banking sectors, which could also hurt companies from other countries doing business with Tehran. The U.S. legislation will sanction companies for supplying Iran with refined petroleum products with a fair market value exceeding \$1 million or that during a 12-month period have an aggregate fair market value of \$5 million or more.

Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz told reporters this month Ankara would back private firms making sales to Iran. Turkey stepped in to sell Iran the equivalent of 1.2 million barrels of gasoline in June when most other sellers refused to continue sales due to the looming sanctions. But Turkey charged Iran a 25 percent premium above the market rate then sharply curtailed gasoline shipments by some 73 percent in July as the U.S. sanctions came into force. The U.S. embassy official would not comment on the report that Washington had warned Turkey about sanctions, but said, "They are making these visits because it is very important for us to pass the word about this sanctions package."

The United States has so far largely looked the other way as its NATO ally has strengthened political and economic ties with Iran as part of Ankara's long-term energy strategy. Washington's tolerant attitude may end if Turkey continues to take the bite out of U.S. sanctions or boost ties with the Islamic Republic beyond a symbolic partnership. Any international firms that sell gasoline to Iran could face retribution under the U.S. sanctions including a possible ban from the U.S. financial system or denial of U.S. contracts. /Sabah/

Turkey to Remove Iran, Greece from 'Enemies Watchlist'

The National Security Policy Document, also called the 'red book', is being drafted to include Turkey's new initiative of maintaining problem-free relations with the nation's neighbors. Instead of being penned as possible threats, Iran, Greece, Iraq, and Russia will now be qualified as possible collaborators. The redrafting of the security policy book began in February of 2010 and is expected to be passed on to the National Security Council in October for evaluation and will then be voted on in the December meeting. All related ministers as well as Prime Minister Erdoğan are closely reading over the text as the policy is being drafted and are even rewriting certain parts themselves.

Redrafted every five years, the last time being in 2005, the document had marked Greece's increase of their territorial waters to 12 miles from shore as a cause for war. The new draft will no longer count Greece's 12 miles clause as a priority threat and

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instead will emphasize collaboration between the countries. The High Level Strategic Collaboration Council initiated by Greece is listed as being a vehicle to allow increasing collaboration between the nations in a number of fields.

Perhaps the most important details regarding the new security policy draft are regarding Iran. According to the draft, the new document will no longer contain the threat of Turkey's incurring a similar regime as Iran. Iran's nuclear power and nuclear weapons capacity will however be added as an item of concern. The draft also emphasizes Turkey's aversion towards having any form of nuclear weapons in the region and includes intentions to establish the foundation for collaboration on the issue.

The updated document includes the vision of economic collaboration with Greece, Iran, and Iraq replacing the previously noted threat derived from these nations. Referring to the increasing dialogue process and the collaboration council established with Iraq, the document does go on to list the PKK threat derived from bases in the north of the country. The document also emphasizes the increasing collaboration and developing economic trade experienced with Russia and notes that establishing new areas of collaboration with Asian nations is amongst objectives. Turkey also plans to increase the role as an energy transit point for the West and the East. The document will reiterate that Turkey's EU objectives are state policy and that the condition of achieving a solution for the Cyprus issue has not changed. The new draft also includes such current hot topics as environmental issues, human rights and human trafficking. /Sabah/

UN Gaza Flotilla Inquiry Commission Visits Turkey

Members of an international fact-finding mission held talks in Ankara Monday as part of a trip to examine evidence from Israel's attack on a Gaza-bound aid flotilla in May. The UN delegation visited Atatürk Hospital to meet with activists injured during the flotilla incident and collect data, and then held a meeting at the Justice Ministry, Foreign Ministry sources told reporters. The delegation was also scheduled to meet with Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu later in the afternoon.

After their meetings in Ankara, members of the mission were scheduled to fly to Istanbul late Monday. The delegation will confer with the domestic Turkish investigation commission, hear testimony from witnesses of the attack, including those who were injured, and meet leaders from Turkish state ministries and institutions. Members of the international mission will also examine the Mavi Marmara, Defne Y, and Gazze aid ships, which are anchored in the southern town of İskenderun after being towed from Israel. Turkey is giving its full support to the U.N. panel and says the report the international mission will prepare is of vital importance in revealing the facts of what happened during the raid. The UN panel is set to release its initial progress report in mid-September.

In related news, Israel's trade with Turkey rose by almost one-third during the first seven months of 2010 - despite the heightened political tensions - the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics reported Thursday. Exports to Turkey between January and July totaled \$811.8 million, up 32 percent on the same period of 2009. Israeli imports from Turkey rose 30 percent to \$1.04 billion during the same period. /Hurriyet/

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Turkey, Azerbaijan Deepen Strategic Cooperation

Turkey and Azerbaijan concluded a Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance deal on Monday during Turkish President Abdullah Gül's two-day visit to Baku at the invitation of his Azerbaijani counterpart, Ilham Aliyev. This came just days before agreements on a strategic partnership between Russia and Armenia, Azerbaijan's long-time foe, during Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Armenia on August 19.

It is believed the deal mostly includes cooperation in the security and military spheres. The Azerbaijani Defense Ministry reported on Monday that Undersecretary Murat Bayar of the Undersecretariat for the Defense Industry (SSM) and Azerbaijani Defense Minister Sefer Abiyev held talks to discuss in some detail the strategic partnership agreement and possible military cooperation opportunities between the two countries.

Gül and Aliyev held talks along with their accompanying delegations, where they largely discussed Azerbaijan's protracted territorial conflict with Armenia. Gül stated at a press conference on Monday that the occupation of internationally recognized territories of the former Soviet republic could not continue, promising that Turkey will continue every effort to solve the problem. "It is necessary to transform the Caucasus into a region of stability and cooperation. For this [the Nagorno-Karabakh] dispute needs to be resolved and this solution undoubtedly will be within the framework of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity," Gül said. Both Aliyev and Gül stressed the plight of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) as a result of the conflict and said they should immediately be allowed to return to their homes.

Both Gül and Aliyev told reporters that domestic processes need to be completed in Azerbaijan to abolish visa requirements for Turkish citizens. Turkey abolished flexible visa requirements for Azerbaijani citizens in 2007 and reduced the residence permit to 30 days, making it harder for immigrants to stay in the country for long periods. Underlining that bilateral relations in political, security, economic, and cultural spheres between the two countries are improving, Gül said they would reciprocally promote organizations to strike more deals on trade and investment. /Today's Zaman/

Ankara, Washington Dismiss Ultimatum Allegations

Turkish leaders Tuesday continued to deny a news report that President Barack Obama had warned Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan that Turkey stands little chance of getting weapons it wants to buy from the US unless it changes its stance on Iran and Israel. "No country can issue warnings against Turkey. No one, particularly, can talk to the prime minister in such a tone," said Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu of the report, which appeared in the Financial Times on Sunday. Citing an anonymous US official, the daily reported that Obama told Erdogan that some of Turkey's actions have "caused questions to be raised" in Congress and thus Turkey's weapon requests could be harder to move through the US Congress. The government says ties with the US are strong, particularly at a time when the two countries are intensifying dialogue over stabilizing Afghanistan and ensuring a smooth US withdrawal from Iraq.

The US also denied the report, with White House Deputy Press Secretary Bill Burton saying, "We obviously have an ongoing dialogue with them (Turkey). But no such

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ultimatum was issued." Speaking late on Monday, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey's ties with the US ties are at a "historic peak," although he admitted that some in Congress are unhappy with Turkey's policies and that this could affect US actions regarding Turkey. "There might be difficulties in arms trade; such issues are internal issues for any country," Erdogan said, emphasizing that his government might also change its course of action due to views in Parliament. "This is natural," he said, and added that Turkey is now capable of producing many of the weapons it needs. /Turkish Press Review/

Green Light for U.S. Investors to Trade on Turkish Derivatives Exchange

Investors from the United States will be able to trade on the Turkish Derivatives Exchange, or Turkdex, according to a statement released on Thursday. The Commodity Futures Trading Commission, or CFTC, the authority that regulates commodity futures and option markets in the U.S., has given a "No-Action Letter" to Turkdex which will enable American individual investors and investment funds to trade on the Turkdex-ISE-30 contract.

Turkdex has been trying to obtain the authorization certificate for one-and-a-half years, according to Isinsu Kestelli, board chairwoman of Turkdex, explaining that this authorization is an important milestone for Turkdex on its path to becoming a global exchange. "The CFTC sets up a condition," Kestelli said. "Other countries' exchanges must get an authorization, entitled a 'No-Action Letter,' from the CFTC to allow American investors' transaction on those exchanges. Thanks to the authorization, we expect more Americans will trade in the Turkdex-ISE-30, increasing the trading volume." The final approval from the CFTC was made Thursday and was officially announced on U.S. markets.

Turkdex applied for the authorization certificate on Nov. 12, 2008, said Çetin Ali Dönmez, director of Turkdex, adding that they worked together during the process with Sidley Austin, a leading law firm in the U.S. "As a result, we are well pleased to get the authorization from the CFTC as [it] provides important prestige for Turkey. This will draw European and Asian investors' interest in Turkey's derivative exchange," Dönmez told reporters. "I cannot say how much this authorization will affect the trading volume, but it [will] be positive. The effect might be experienced in a one-month period but at most in one year we might see the impact." The daily trading volume of ISE-30 contracts in the Turkdex is nearly \$1 billion, according to Dönmez. /Hurriyet/

Turkish, Greek Premiers Stress Fraternity following Historic Mass

The Turkish and Greek prime ministers have expressed expectations for improved ties after Sunday's historic Mass at Sümela Monastery in the Black Sea province of Trabzon. The Mass was the first such rite since 1923 and passed without incident amid widespread concerns that it would be targeted by Turkish ultranationalists. The event drew 3,000 Orthodox Christians from Greece, Russia, Georgia, and other countries. It was officiated by the İstanbul-based Fener Greek Patriarch Bartholomew.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan lashed out at critics of the Mass at Sümela, saying their arguments were counteracted by the peaceful atmosphere at the historic church.

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"We are determined to maintain our good ties with all nations. We have to do it. Christians visited Sümela Monastery and performed a religious service there. So what happened? What did we lose? On the contrary, we are winning," he argued on Sunday at a fast-breaking dinner in the Turkish capital. Erdoğan also expressed his government's intention to be a pioneer in cementing friendly relations with other countries. "We will also take a step forward. We pursued the same policy in Cyprus, too. We said we would take the first step with the Greek Cypriots. What did we lose?" he asked.

Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou also spoke on Sunday and welcomed the "historic and important event" in Turkey. He said the mass at Sümela Monastery was a sign of rapprochement between Greece and Turkey and reflected "a spirit of cooperation and peace" between the two neighbors.

The monastery was abandoned after the foundation of the Turkish Republic and the subsequent population exchange between Turks and Greeks. It has since become a major tourist destination along Turkey's Black Sea coast. The government recently approved Bartholomew's request to hold this year's celebration of the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos on August 15 at the monastery, in line with its stated policy of addressing the issues of religious minorities. /Today's Zaman/

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Turkey to Increase Contacts in Congress Following Talks

Turkish policymakers are planning to intensify contacts with the U.S. Congress, where many are raising questions on the future of ties with Ankara after Turkey voted against further UN sanctions on Iran and amid a deterioration in Turkish-Israeli ties. The decision to reach out to Congress came after a series of talks between a Turkish delegation and senior U.S. administration officials in Washington last week. Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu and Deputy Undersecretaries Tacan İldem and Selim Yenel met with U.S. officials, including Undersecretary for Political Affairs William Burns, National Security Council Chief of Staff Denis McDonough, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Michele Flournoy, and Special Envoy of the Secretary of State for Eurasian Energy Richard Morningstar.

The meetings covered a multitude of issues on the agenda of Turkish-U.S. relations, ranging from energy to Afghanistan and Turkish-Israeli relations, and were an opportunity to convey a first-hand account of Ankara's position on each of these subjects, Foreign Ministry officials stated on Friday. There are differences of opinion and method regarding Iran's nuclear program and Turkish-Israeli ties, the officials said, while

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the two countries' opinions converge on Iraq and Afghanistan. Indeed, the Turkish delegation granted tentative permission to a request by the U.S. to transport materials from Iraq through Turkey, under the condition that the vehicles passing through are unarmed.

The two countries also agreed during last week's talks that there should be more contacts between the Turkish and U.S. administrations to eliminate some of the misunderstandings, particularly regarding Iran. The U.S. administration, which is eager to maintain cooperation with Turkey especially in Iraq and Afghanistan, has asked for Turkish assistance in informing the Congress on issues related to relations with Turkey, the officials reported. Thus, Turkey will increase efforts to inform Congress and will start a campaign to that effect after the Congress returns from its recess next month.

President Abdullah Gül and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, who will both be in the United States next month to attend UN General Assembly meetings, will also have talks with U.S. officials. In related news, some Republican Representatives blocked the appointment in August of Francis Ricciardone, Obama's nominee for ambassador to Turkey, because they see Ricciardone as too soft to deal with the Turkish government. He is largely expected to be confirmed when Congress reconvenes. /Today's Zaman/

Turkey Seeks Explanation from Iran over Genocide Remarks

Alarmed by reports that Iranian Vice President Hamid Baghaei said the events of 1915 constituted genocide, Turkey is seeking high-level explanation from Tehran. The Iranian vice president made the alleged remarks during a conference entitled "Iran, a bridge of success" on Wednesday. According to Baghaei, the mass killings and deportation of Armenians during the waning days of the Ottoman Empire amounted to genocide: "A hundred years ago the Ottoman Empire committed genocide against a certain number of Armenians," the Iranian news agency IRNA quoted.

Soon after the allegations arose, the Iranian Embassy in Ankara released a statement saying that the vice president's statements were not accurately reflected by some media outlets. The embassy stated that Baghaei commented on the subject only as a problem between Turkey and Armenia and that he did not express his opinions about the issue. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu spoke late Friday with his Iranian counterpart, Manouchehr Mottaki, who told him that Iran's position was in line with Turkey's stance on the issue.

Iranian Vice President Hamid Baghaei denied the allegations at a press conference Sunday: "We are rejecting the news reports attributed to me in some media outlets," he said, arguing the conference that took place last Wednesday on the 70th anniversary of Iran's occupation during World War II focused on Iranian attempts in international platforms to follow up on the damage it sustained during the war. "The conference was about this issue," he stated. "Some press outlets reported that I made comments, took a stance, and made an exclusive analysis on disputes between some countries like Turkey and Armenia. But I am denying this." He repeated that he did not evaluate a legal case between Turkey and Armenia. "It was not a topic of the conference." Baghaei said, citing the growing ties between Turkey and Iran. "Today we have a very strategic, very solid

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and strong relationship with Turkey. We respect Turkey, which is one of the most important countries in the region." /Hurriyet/

Two Supply Lines Approved in Nabucco Pipeline Project

During their latest meeting in the Turkish capital of Ankara, shareholders of the Nabucco Natural Gas Pipeline project approved the construction of two supply lines extending to Georgia and Iraq, officials said in a written statement on Monday. The route planned for the new supply lines will provide alternative supply resources for the pipeline which will receive gas from Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Iraq. Shareholders approved the start of the engineering work for the two supply lines, officials reported, adding that construction of a third supply line at the Turkish-Iranian border was not considered at the moment due to the current dispute in the region.

The Nabucco pipeline is a joint project undertaken by Austria, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary which will carry natural gas from the Caspian Sea to Austria through the territories of participating countries. The project aims to reduce Europe's energy dependence on Russia. Shareholders of the Nabucco Project include Botas (Turkey), Bulgarian Energy Holding (Bulgaria), MOL (Hungary), OMV (Austria), RWE (Germany), and Transgaz (Romania). /Anatolia.com, Inc./

Armenian Border Will Remain Closed during NATO Exercise

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said Thursday that Turkey will not temporarily open its border gate with Armenia during an upcoming exercise of NATO, signaling a reversal of earlier statements that it was under consideration. "This exercise is for entirely humanitarian purposes and it is about extraordinary circumstances. As a NATO member Turkey will, of course, participate in it," Davutoglu told reporters when asked to comment about Azerbaijani opposition to a temporary opening of the border. "As I have told the Azeri media earlier, opening of the border, even temporarily, is out of the question. Unnecessary rumors should be avoided," Davutoglu said.

Earlier in the day, Davutoglu told an Azerbaijani television station that there was no plan to open the border during the exercise. "Our approach with regard to the exercise is humanistic. But there is nothing on the agenda with respect to opening of borders, this is not an issue of debate," Davutoglu told Azerbaijan's ANS television. Ankara has decided to participate in the NATO Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center exercise, set to be held in the central Kotayk region of Armenia. Exercises are scheduled to run between September 11 and 17. /Turkish Press Review/

Gul Assures Zardari of Post-Disaster Support

President Abdullah Gul spoke with his Pakistani counterpart Asif Ali Zardari on the phone Wednesday to discuss Turkey's efforts to help Pakistan in the aftermath of the country's devastating floods. During the conversation, Gul asked Zardari what more could be done for Pakistan, Gul's office reported in a statement. Zardari said he appreciates the assistance of the Turkish people and state and that Pakistan would be pleased to see this support continue. The Pakistani president also said Turkey has always supported and helped his country in its hours of need, according to the Pakistani media. Since late July

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flooding has killed more than 1,600 Pakistanis and left 20 million homeless.

To date Turkey has sent \$10 million in financial aid and 244 tons of relief support, including vaccines and other medical supplies. Turkey has also sent a 42-member medical team, two fully equipped mobile hospitals, and an ambulance and truck for medical rescue efforts. Turkey's Red Crescent Society (Kızılay) is also poised to build 500 prefab houses and larger tents that will provide long-term protection for people affected by the floods. /Turkish Press Review/

Turkey to Take Command in Gulf of Aden

Turkey will take over command of the international Combined Task Force (CTF-151) to fight piracy and carry out surveillance tasks in the Gulf of Aden for three months. The Turkish Naval Forces Command Secretariat General released a statement and said a Turkish Rear Admiral will take over the task to fight against sea piracy in the Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea, and off the shores of Somalia between September 1 and December 1. The takeover ceremony will take place on Mina Salman Pier in Bahrain's capital Manama, and TCG Gokceada will serve as the command ship for the three months. The Turkish Naval Forces have sent ships to the region since February 2009. /Anatolia.com, Inc./

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