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March 1-7, 2010

Turkey Recalls Ambassador to US Following 'Genocide' Recognition in a House Committee

Turkey's Ambassador to Washington, DC Namık Tan arrived in Istanbul on Saturday after being recalled to Turkey for consultations following the decision of a US congressional panel approving a resolution on Armenian allegations regarding the incidents of 1915. The resolution calling the events of 1915 a "genocide" passed the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs in a 23-22 vote on Thursday.

Tan made a short statement to reporters after his arrival, explaining that he will meet with officials, including the president, prime minister and foreign affairs ministers, for consultations. "After the consultations, I will return when it is deemed fit," he stated. Shortly after the measure passed the committee voting, the Turkish government said in a statement that Ambassador Namık Tan was being recalled to Ankara for consultations.

"We condemn this resolution which charges the Turkish nation with a crime that it did not commit," the statement said. The

Turkish government also expressed concern that the non-binding resolution could damage Turkish-US relations and efforts to normalize relations between Turkey and Armenia. Turkey and Armenia signed two protocols last October to normalize relations; however, parliaments of the two countries have not passed them yet.

In contrast, Armenia on Friday called the vote an important step forward for human rights. "We highly appreciate the decision," Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian said in a statement. "This is another proof of the devotion of the American people to universal human values and is an important step toward the prevention of crimes against humanity."

US Armenian groups likewise favored the decision. "The committee's message was simple, yet powerful: Turkey doesn't get a vote or a veto in the US Congress," Ken Hachikian, chairman of the Armenian National Committee of America, the largest U.S. Armenian group, said shortly after the vote.

Turkey strongly rejects genocide allegations and regards the events as civil strife in wartime that claimed the lives of many Turks and Armenians. While slamming the resolution as a "parody," Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said Thursday's approval of the resolution at the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee was the product of "erroneous policies." Turkey will "not be deterred by such a comedy, a parody, a fait accompli," he said in a speech to a businesspeople's group in Istanbul. "Let me say quite clearly that this resolution will not harm us. But it will damage bilateral relations between countries, their interests and their visions for the future. We will not be the losers," he said.

"We don't want to go through this crisis every spring," Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said in a press conference Friday. "That is why we introduced the normalization of

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the relationship with Armenia. We thought that this would begin to settle things, and we really did not expect this kind of backlash." "It is not for other parliaments to judge our history. Turkey is capable of dealing with these issues alone. It is a matter of national honor," he continued.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Thursday that her office believed that any action by the US Congress on a draft regarding Armenian allegations regarding 1915 incidents was not appropriate. Clinton said, "we have made that clear to all parties involved," while responding to a question on voting of the resolution on Armenian allegations in the US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs.

Clinton explained, "When President Obama took office and I became Secretary of State, we determined that the process undertaken by the Swiss in bringing the Turkey - Turkish and Armenian governments together was a very worthy one that we intended to support, and we have done so. I was personally in Zurich at the time that the protocols for the normalization of relationship between the two countries were signed. We think that is the appropriate way to manage the problems that have stood in the way of normalization between the two countries." /Hurriyet-Today's Zaman/

Erdogan Announces Plan for Reform Package

At a parliamentary group meeting of his Justice & Development Party (AKP), Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced, "We have been working on constitutional amendment and judicial reform for a long time. Now, we want to complete these works. We are going to submit a reform package to the parliament by the end of this month. We will mature the package by listening to views of both parliamentary and non-parliamentary circles. In the end, the package will add momentum to Turkey's adjustment process with the European Union."

In a move to urge all political parties to craft a compromise and pass the planned constitutional amendments, President Abdullah Gül on Thursday hosted Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and Selahattin Demirtas, leader of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). Gül urged the party leaders to resolve the disagreement in Parliament while the party leaders convey their concerns. The Turkish president's efforts are being interpreted as playing a kind of intermediary role to ease rising tension between the ruling party and the opposition.

President Gül also on Wednesday met with Deniz Baykal, leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP). Baykal conveyed his party's concern over the arrangements related to the judicial system in the planned constitutional amendments. The CHP chief also said it was not right for the ruling party to come up with such amendments with just one year left before the general elections. /Turkish Press-Hurriyet/

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Belgium Deals Heavy Blow to PKK in Europe

In a move that won praise from Turkey, the Belgian police launched orchestrated raids on premises suspected of belonging to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and detained dozens of senior members of the outlawed group, including two of its leading figures, Zübeyir Aydar and Remzi Kartal.

About 300 Belgian police officers, as well as tax inspectors from the finance ministry, participated in the raids, one of the most extensive operations carried out against the PKK in Europe so far. The operation was launched in coordination with Turkish intelligence, which provided Belgian authorities with information and evidence on the links between the PKK and its European operatives. Aydar, leader of the outlawed Kurdish National Congress (Kongra-Gel), and Kartal, who is known to be the PKK's chief operative in Europe, were among at least 15 people detained in the raids.

Kongra-Gel claims to be the political wing of the PKK, but it is widely recognized as just another name for the PKK and is classified as a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union. Both Aydar and Kartal are former members of the now defunct Democracy Party (DEP), shut down by Turkey's Constitutional Court for links with the PKK.

The raids, which began early on Thursday morning and took place in 25 locations across six major cities in Belgium, followed anti-PKK operations in France and Italy last month. Reports said Italian and French police were also involved in the operation, assisting the Belgian police. Private NTV quoted Belgian authorities as saying the operation was an international one.

Turkey, which has long criticized European countries for turning a blind eye to the PKK's fundraising and propaganda activities on their soil, commended Belgium after Thursday's raids. "Solidarity against terrorism is the responsibility of all countries, particularly for those who are allies in international organizations. We are pleased that Belgium honored this responsibility," Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu told reporters at a joint press conference with Murray McCully, the foreign minister of New Zealand, in Ankara. /Today's Zaman/

Davutoglu Meets with Egyptian President Mubarak

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu was in Egypt to hold official talks and Wednesday and met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Sharm el Sheik. The meeting was held in line with a 2007 Turkey-Egypt Strategic Dialogue Framework Memoir. During the meeting, issues such as Iraq, Palestine, and the Middle East peace process were discussed. /Turkish Press Review/

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Turkey Appoints Consul to Erbil

The Foreign Ministry has appointed young diplomat Aydın Selcen as consul to Erbil, the capital of Iraq's regional Kurdish administration, in line with a decision to improve and advance relations with the administration in northern Iraq taken by the National Security Council (NSC). Turkey opening a consulate was decided at last year's high-level strategic cooperation committee meeting chaired by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Iraqi counterpart Nouri al-Maliki. Selcen will arrive in Erbil on March 15 in the wake of the Iraqi general elections this past Sunday. /Turkish Press Review/

TUSIAD Highlights

TUSIAD Chairperson Umit Boyner sent a letter to the members of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs last week urging them to vote against House Resolution 252, which characterizes the events of 1915 as genocide. Ms. Boyner expressed concern that the resolution ignores historical facts as well as the positive progress made by Turkey and Armenia in resolving their differences. She urged the members to focus instead upon common objectives, including stability in the Caucasus, Turkish-Armenian rapprochement and strengthening US-Turkish relations.

March 8-14, 2010:

Swedish Prime Minister Reinfeldt Apologizes to Erdoğan after Swedish Parliament Vote on Armenian Resolution

Swedish Prime Minister Frederick Reinfeldt called his Turkish counterpart late Saturday to apologize for a vote in the Swedish parliament saying the Ottoman Empire committed "genocide" against Armenians and other minorities in 1915.

"The government is absolutely against the resolution, which was ratified as a result of domestic policy, and it will have no sanction or exercise power," Reinfeldt said, according to a statement issued by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's office. The controversial 131-130 vote came as a blow to the "excellent diplomatic relations" between the two countries, Turkish diplomats said.

"We will not allow this [resolution] to affect bilateral relations in a negative way," Reinfeldt said. "Sweden will continue supporting Turkey, especially in its EU accession process, as always. We are ready to do our best to protect the existing relations from such a baseless decision made by only one extra vote."

In reply, Erdoğan said politicians cannot re-shape history. "Turkey presented its archives to historians, scientists and researchers from all sides," he explained. "The political attempts, results of ignorance and prejudice, disrupt both scientific research and Turkey's peace efforts in the region."

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Expressing his disappointment with the resolution, Erdoğan urged the Swedish government "to take steps to remedy this mistake." The resolution says that Armenians and other Christian minorities were subjected to genocide during World War I while the Ottoman Empire fell apart. Turkey denies any systematic massacre or genocide and asserts that people from both Turkish and Armenian communities were killed in civil strife during wartime. In protest of the Swedish parliament's move, Erdoğan has canceled a planned visit to Stockholm, and Turkish Ambassador Zergün Korutürk has been recalled to Ankara. /Hurriyet/

Turkish Ministers Told to Put US Contacts on Hold until April 24

The Turkish government has put bilateral contacts at ministerial level with the US on hold for several weeks amid tensions with Washington over Armenian claims of genocide by the Ottoman Empire a century ago.

The US House Committee on Foreign Affairs passed a resolution on March 4 recognizing the claims of genocide. Turkey angrily criticized the move and recalled its ambassador in Washington, Namık Tan, for consultations. The government, considering possible steps for retaliation during a recent Cabinet meeting, has agreed to suspend inter-governmental contact with the US until April 24, when US President Barack Obama will release an annual message commemorating what Armenians say marked the beginning of a genocide campaign during World War I.

Accordingly, the scheduled trips of state ministers Zafer Çağlayan and Egemen Bağış to the US have been postponed. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is currently considering whether he will attend a nuclear summit in the US on April 12-13 upon Obama's invitation. Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan's visit to the US to attend the International Monetary Fund (IMF) summit is also under question.

In his April 24 message last year, Obama refrained from using the word genocide in order to avoid harming a process of reconciliation between estranged neighbors Turkey and Armenia, although he had promised during his election campaign that he would formally recognize the claims if elected president. It is not clear how carefully he will tread this year. The Obama administration remained silent in the run up to the vote at the House committee and told the committee chairman that it was opposed to the measure only at the last minute.

On Saturday U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates stated that the United States felt very strongly that passing of the resolution in a congressional committee was a mistake. "We certainly hope that Congress and the House of Representatives take this measure no further," Gates told the al-Arabia TV channel.

"Turkey and Armenia are making progress toward a reconciliation," Gates continued, adding that the protocols between the two countries had been drafted with that goal in mind and that the United States supports that process.

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The European Union's new enlargement commissioner, Stefan Füle noted, "I know that sometimes politicizing history makes reconciliations difficult. I've made a point of support for the current stage of the relationship between Turkey and Armenia." /Today's Zaman - Hurriyet/

Erdogan Calls for More South Korean Investments in Turkey

Speaking at a meeting of the Turkey-South Korea Business Forum in Istanbul, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan asked South Korean businesspeople to boost their investments in Turkey, calling the current bilateral trade volume insufficient. Stating that South Korean direct investments around the world stand at \$100 billion, Erdogan said Turkey's share of this is only \$500 million. "We expect our South Korean friends to significantly ramp up their investments in Turkey," he said. "The current trade volume between our countries is out of line with our strong friendship ties."

On Turkey's economy, Erdogan said it is set to grow 3.5 percent this year, adding that some international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) put the figure even higher. Pointing to the remarkable structural reforms of recent years, Erdogan said, "Turkey is among the countries least affected by the global economic crisis thanks to the sound economic reforms and policies implemented by the government. Despite a serious contraction of global trade, last year Turkey's exports reached \$102 billion." International forecasters predict that Turkey will be one of the fastest-growing economies of the world not only in 2010 but also in the following year, Erdogan explained.

Stressing that his government has introduced groundbreaking changes to create a suitable economic environment for foreign investments, Erdogan said, "The volume of foreign direct investments (FDI) attracted by Turkey climbed from just \$1 billion in 2003 to \$22 billion in 2007. Turkey was ranked ninth among developing countries in 2008 with an inflow of \$18.2 billion in FDI." Erdogan said last year FDI in Turkey dropped to \$7.6 billion due to the crisis. "We aspire to bring Turkey into the world's top 10 economies by 2023, the centenary of the Republic of Turkey," Erdogan said, adding that Turkey would become a more stable, reliable and economically strong country once it completes its current transformation. "I believe the rapid transformation process Turkey has been undergoing should be evaluated well by investors," he said. /Turkish Press Review/

Greek Prime Minister Papandreou: "I Want to Show the World that Old Enemies Can Be Firm Friends"

Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou has revealed that he would meet with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan within a few months. He explained, "I hope that Turkish-Greek relations will be a model for stability. I want to show the world that old enemies can be the best of partners through cooperating."

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At a joint press conference in Washington alongside US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Papandreou also spoke on the Cyprus issue. "The sooner a solution is reached, the better," he said, "We can't leave the island in this situation. I fully support [Greek Cypriot leader Demetris] Christofias to further negotiations to find one united solution."

For her part, Clinton said that she and Papandreou spoke about Athens developing relations with Ankara, adding, "Greece and Turkey are NATO allies, two close friends of the United States, and a constructive relationship is in the interest of both nations." /Turkish Press Review/

Davutoğlu Has Talks with Assad in Damascus

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu had talks with senior Syrian officials that focused on the Middle East peace process as well as tensions escalating from time to time between Lebanon and Syria.

Davutoğlu had separate closed-door meetings with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Assistant Vice President Hassan Turkmani. Israel and Syria held four indirect rounds of peace talks with Turkish mediation in 2008, but they were suspended following the deadly Israeli offensive in Gaza at the end of 2008. Ankara says it is willing to resume mediating indirect talks between Syria and Israel only if both parties clearly voice their will for such mediation. Last week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he was prepared to meet with Assad immediately and without preconditions. In response, Moallem reiterated that Israel must first declare its intention to withdraw to its 1967 borders before any talks can take place. /Today's Zaman/

March 15-21, 2010

Fuele Reaffirms Support to Turkey's EU Membership Bid; Sweden Supports Turkey's EU Reforms

EU Commissioner for enlargement Stefan Fuele on Monday reaffirmed his support to Turkey's accession talks and bid to join the European Union (EU). Fuele also underlined his support to efforts to normalize relations between Turkey and Armenia while speaking at a joint news conference with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu in Ankara.

Fuele said he welcomed Turkey's policy of zero problems with its neighbors, which was discussed at the meeting. He also welcomed historical steps made between Turkey and Armenia to normalize relations. Fuele revealed that they also discussed the Cyprus question, adding that implementation of the Additional Protocol was important for the EU and urging Turkey to normalize relations with the Greek Cypriot party. The Additional Protocol to the Ankara Agreement foresees extension of Turkey's customs union deal to ten countries that

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joined the European Union (EU) in 2004, including the Greek Cypriot Administration.

Fuele noted that visa liberalization was important both for Turkey and the EU. He stated that studies to liberalize visas could start in the event that progress was made to deal with illegal migration to Europe via Turkey.

In related news, the Swedish government has announced that it will provide not only political, but also financial assistance to reforms that have been fulfilled in Turkey on its path toward European Union membership. The move is part of the Swedish government's newly adopted strategy for developing cooperation with Turkey for the period 2010-2013.

"Turkey's future membership in the EU remains the strongest incentive for further democratic reforms in the country. Through this new strategy, Sweden is strengthening its support for the development of closer relations between Turkey and the EU," said Minister for International Development Cooperation Gunilla Carlsson.

Relations between Turkey and Sweden soured after the Swedish parliament narrowly approved a resolution March 11 recognizing the 1915 killing of Armenians during the last days of the Ottoman Empire as "genocide." Turkey recalled its ambassador and cancelled a high-level Turkish-Swedish meeting in protest.

Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt has expressed regret over the parliament's decision, urging the Turkish government to prevent any deterioration in relations.

Sweden's broad commitment to Turkey also includes academic cooperation administered by the Swedish Institute. Grant programs provide Turkish students with the opportunity to study human rights and European studies in Sweden, while Swedish students are given the opportunity to conduct "minor field studies" in Turkey. /Anadolu Ajansi - Hurriyet/

Armenian Deportation Remarks Draw Ire Locally and Abroad

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's remarks about the possible deportation of undocumented Armenian workers from Turkey after US and Swedish lawmakers passed resolutions branding the World War I-era killings of Anatolian Armenians as genocide have sparked reactions both in Yerevan and in Ankara.

"Look, there are 170,000 Armenians in my country -- 70,000 of them are my citizens, but we are [tolerating] 100,000 of them [illegally] in our country. So, what will we do tomorrow? If it is necessary, I will tell them, 'Come on, back to your country.' I will do it. Why? They are not my citizens. I am not obliged to keep them in my country. I mean these are [defenders of the Armenian claims of genocide]. Their attitude is negatively affecting our sincere attitude, and they are not aware of it," Erdoğan told the BBC Turkish service in an interview on Tuesday.

Erdoğan's comments met with a stern reaction from Armenia. "This kind of political

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statement does not help improve relations between the two states," said Armenian Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan. "I agree with the assessment that when the Turkish prime minister allows himself to make such statements, the events of 1915 immediately return to our memory," he added.

Thousands of illegal Armenian immigrants, mostly women from the impoverished countryside, work as cleaning ladies and in other low-skilled jobs in İstanbul, where many settled after an earthquake in their homeland in 1988. The exact number of Armenian immigrants in Turkey is unknown. But Turkish-Armenian groups say Turkish politicians inflate the numbers of illegal workers and threaten expulsions whenever tensions escalate between Ankara and Yerevan.

In Ankara, Deniz Baykal, the leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), called Erdoğan's remarks "grave" and "against human rights." "Wanting to use people who came to Turkey for work as a trump card in the resolution of a dispute is definitely unacceptable and is against human rights. Various people may have some ideas, an opposition party deputy may also say something, but these are not statements that have results -- perhaps you can call them inappropriate statements. But when a prime minister, a person who has the authority to deport them, says such things, then it is very grave," Baykal told his party's parliamentary group meeting on Wednesday. /Today's Zaman/

Erdogan Touts Turkish Economy to British Investors

Speaking at a meeting of the Turkey-Britain Business Forum in London, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that Turkey had managed to weather the global financial crisis with minimal damage, with its financial system having felt almost no impact from the crisis. "While many banks and companies in the US and Europe faced tough times during the crisis, Turkish banks didn't see any difficulties," he said.

Stating that Turkey's ties with Britain have picked up in recent years, Erdogan said, "Turkey and Britain engaged in model cooperation at both the regional and global levels, in an example for all of Europe." Stressing that economic and trade cooperation constitutes an important part of Turkey's ties with Britain, Erdogan called on British entrepreneurs to take advantage of Turkey's rapidly developing investment environment and dynamic young population. He further said Turkey is on the way to becoming the shining star of its region.

Also speaking at the meeting, British Justice Minister Jack Straw said the Turkish economy proved its resilience during the global economic crisis. "This showed how sound and strong Turkey's financial system and industry are," he added. Stating that Turkish products are in demand in the British market, Straw praised the quality of these products, especially Turkey's white goods (small appliances).

State Minister for Foreign Trade Zafer Caglayan told the gathering that half of all refrigerators sold in British market are Turkish-made. Underlining what he called deep

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economic and trade ties between Turkey and Britain, Caglayan said the good attendance of Turkish and British businesspeople at the meeting showed this. Caglayan also expressed hope that trade between the two countries, which dipped due to the crisis, would resume its upward trend this year in line with global recovery from the crisis. /Turkish Press Review/

President Gul Visits Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon

Turkish President Abdullah Gül said on Monday that Turkey is "Africa's voice" in international platforms, during a joint news conference with Democratic Republic of the Congo President Joseph Kabila in Kinshasa.

Gül and Kabila held a bilateral meeting and then jointly chaired a committee gathering between the two countries after an official ceremony hosted by Kabila. During the meeting, the two countries signed an agreement to establish a political counseling mechanism. The agreement was signed by Foreign Ministry Deputy Undersecretary Ünal Çeviköz and DR Congo Foreign Minister Alexis Thambwe Mwamba.

Noting that this visit marks the first time that a Turkish president has visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gül said he believes his visit will open a new page in bilateral relations. Underlining that Turkey attaches great importance to relations with DR Congo, Gül said Turkey's African initiative continues.

"We have a 34-year-old embassy here, and this shows how we value our relations with DR Congo," Gül said. Saying that he believes the Turkish businessmen accompanying him will have successful meetings with their local counterparts, Gül said DR Congo has enough political will to develop economic relations with Turkey.

Stressing that DR Congo is awash with natural resources and needs to efficiently use them, Gül said DR Congo has displayed an important transformation in the last few years. President Gül stressed they expressed the decisiveness to develop bilateral relations in every sphere and exchanged views on ways to achieve that. In his speech President Kabila said they have already decided to open an embassy in Ankara to advance their relations with Turkey. He also added that the agreement they signed with Turkey would contribute greatly to the development of relations with Turkey.

Gul also held talks in Yaounde, Cameroon during his African tour. His Cameroonian counterpart Paul Biya decorated Gul with a medal of merit, followed by a one-and-a-half-hour meeting and the signing of agreements on mutual visa exemptions as well as technical, scientific, agricultural and economic cooperation.

Biya also hosted a dinner in Gul's honor at the country's presidential palace. Speaking at the dinner, Gul noted that Turkey and Cameroon are determined to boost their friendly ties. Stating that stronger cooperation in such areas as agriculture, health and education would

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benefit both sides, Gul said Turkey wants to improve bilateral ties with African countries in a number of areas.

Gul also pledged that Turkey will continue to be the voice of African nations on international platforms. "We're well aware that Turkey couldn't have secured a non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council without support from African countries, and no doubt Turkey, at both the UN Security Council and other international platforms, will pull its weight to help solve problems facing Africa," Gul said.

He added that Turkey plans to open embassies in 10 more African countries in addition its current 18 representative offices across the continent. Gul also called on Turkish investors to invest in Cameroon's mining, health and education sectors. Before leaving for. /Today's Zaman - Turkish Press Review/

March 22-28, 2010

Proposed Changes to Turkey's Constitution Revealed

The ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, has proposed amendments to the Turkish Constitution. The constitutional amendments package proposes changes to 23 articles and three interim articles, namely, Articles 10, 20, 23, 41, 53, 69, 74, 84, 94, 125, 128, 129, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 156 and 159 of the Constitution. If a popular referendum is held, the package would be approved or rejected as a whole. The amendments include several changes.

First, it includes changes to the judiciary. Until now, the government has been dogged by problems with the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) the Council of State and the Ergenekon case; the amendments seek to tackle all these problems at once. The changes envisage the complete restructuring of the HSYK and open the possibility that its members can now be freely investigated for any wrongdoing. Meanwhile, the current 11-member Constitutional Court would now have 19 members, 16 of whom would be appointed by the president and three members by Parliament.

Second, the AKP proposes a party closure commission. A parliamentary commission would be set up to examine party closure cases, with a commission of 20 members, five members from each party. A two-thirds majority would be sufficient to approve a decision to close a party through a secret vote. To open a case, 14 votes from the commission would be required.

Ministerial decisions on religious high schools or the headscarf ban would no longer be a reason for party closures. If the Constitutional Court rules that a party is the center of activities threatening the unity of the state and nation, human rights, the rule of law or the democratic and secular nature of the Republic, it would be dissolved. The votes of 13 of 19

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members would be needed for the ruling. Discussions and debates in Parliament would not be considered a reason for a party closure.

Deputies subject to prohibitions from politics will be banned from membership in a different party for three years. However, they would retain the right to remain in Parliament until the end of the legislative session in question.

According to the proposal, it will be permissible for a new party to resurrect the name of a closed party. Meanwhile, the auditing of political parties will be conducted under the jurisdiction of the Court of Accounts. If there is a pending lawsuit against a party, new rules will be applied.

The judicial power of the Constitutional Court and the Council of State would be limited to administrative practices and functions, meaning that no ruling process in the "public interest" will be permitted. In this, there will be no check for "correctness" in cases that are opened.

Other than appointments and promotions by the Supreme Military Council (YAS) all dismissal decisions will be subject to judicial supervision, including disciplinary punishment for civil servants. Members of the military involved in criminal gangs or accused of coup attempts will be sent to civilian courts while military courts would only be permitted to hear military-related cases.

Positive measures for the protection of women, children, elderly and disabled would not be considered a violation of equal rights. Civil servants would have the right to collective bargaining with a body for conciliation to be established in the event of disagreement. On the other hand, workers would neither have the right to strike nor could the state lock out any employees. Everyone would be entitled to the protection of privacy. Data access for personal information would be included in protection measures.

The 15th interim article in the Constitution would be abolished meaning that those involved in the Sept. 12, 1980, coup, including Kenan Evren, Nejat Tümer and Tahsin Şahinkaya, could be subject to trial.

EU Commissioner for enlargement Stefan Fuele on Monday reaffirmed his support to Turkey's accession talks and bid to join the European Union (EU). Fuele also underlined his support to efforts to normalize relations between Turkey and Armenia while speaking at a joint news conference with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu in Ankara. /Hurriyet/

Irish President McAleese Arrives in Ankara for Landmark Visit

Irish President Mary McAleese arrived in Ankara Tuesday for a landmark official visit, the first of its kind, at the invitation of her Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gul, who welcomed McAleese with full military honors at the Cankaya Presidential Palace. The two presidents' spouses, Martin McAleese and Hayrunnisa Gul, were also present at the official welcoming

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ceremony. In a face-to-face meeting, Gul and McAleese chaired an interdelegational meeting as well. Speaking at a joint press conference afterwards, McAleese said Ireland has always supported Turkey's EU accession bid. Expressing pleasure at being the first Irish president to visit Turkey, McAleese thanked Gul for giving her a warm welcome.

Stating that Turkey and Ireland have strong historic ties despite the geographical distance between them, McAleese said, "We remember very well how the Ottoman Empire lent a helping hand to our people during the Great Hunger. The Ottoman sultan sent three ships, full of foodstuff, to Irish ports in Drogheda. The Irish people never forgot this unique generosity. The symbols in the Turkish flag, the crescent and the star, have become symbols of the region. Moreover, we see the Turkish symbols on the uniforms of the Drogheda United soccer team. If you visited Drogheda next Saturday, you might think that the Turkish National Soccer Team was about to play. All these are small signs that show how the Irish people see Turkey, as well as highlight the importance we place on our relations with the Turkish people."

Stating that gaining European Union membership requires a difficult integration process, McAleese added that it is worth it. Turkey and Ireland enjoy good political relations, she said, calling for better trade ties between the two countries. Nearly 120,000 Irish tourists visit Turkey every year and some of them buy property in the country, strengthening their ties with Turkey, she said. "The closer our countries grow in education, the more people will understand each other. Turkey has a good education system," she said, adding that they would welcome Turkish students studying in Ireland.

Asked about the Armenian allegations, McAleese said Ireland knows to steer clear of the debate. "Ireland supports all measures that will encourage friendship," she said. For his part, Gul underlined Turkey's strong desire to improve ties with Ireland.

Stressing the importance of improving bilateral economic and commercial ties, Gul added, "I believe President McAleese's visit will make a valuable contribution to efforts to boost our economic relations. The Turkish-Irish trade volume currently stands at around €1 billion. But we have a great potential to increase it. We invite Irish businessmen to make more investments in Turkey."

The visiting Irish president also met with Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali Sahin and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. During their meeting, Erdogan presented a replica of a map of Ireland drawn by Ottoman sea captain Ali Macar Reis on animal skin. /Turkish Press Review/

German Chancellor Merkel's Agenda Set for Turkey Visit

German Chancellor Angela Merkel will travel to Turkey on March 29 on a two-day state visit. During her second visit to Turkey as the chancellor of Germany since 2006, Merkel will meet with representatives of some opposition parties after visiting the mausoleum of Mustafa

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Kemal Atatürk. She is set to meet with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Merkel will be received by President Abdullah Gül and partake in a banquet to be hosted in his honor by Prime Minister Erdoğan. She will proceed to İstanbul later in the same day.

On the second day of her visit, Merkel will visit the Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque. After taking part in a panel discussion with students at the German High School, Merkel will meet with religious representatives of German community in İstanbul. Besides Chancellery Commissioner for Migration, Refugees, and Integration Maria Boehmer, a number of Turkish and German businessmen will accompany Merkel during her visit.

Turkey-Germany bilateral relations as well as Turkey-European Union relations, the Cyprus issue, the Middle East peace process and the nuclear crisis with Iran are expected to top the agenda of the meeting between Prime Minister Erdoğan and Chancellor Merkel. /Today's Zaman/

Turkey Reaches out to Armenians after 'Deportation' Row

In a show of goodwill towards the Armenian people, the Turkish government has decided to take two significant steps to improve relations: allowing a religious service to be held at the Akhtamar Church in the eastern province of Van and launching studies on providing educational opportunities to the children of illegal Armenian workers.

The government's move came amid growing criticism in Turkey over Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's latest remarks on the possibility of deporting illegal Armenian workers in the country if necessary. On March 16, while on a visit to the UK, Erdoğan said Turkey could send 100,000 Armenian workers who are working in the country without the necessary permission back to Armenia.

Facing fierce criticism, Erdoğan later complained that he had been misquoted in the media, which he said misrepresented his remarks to mean that they were targeting Turkey's Armenian community.

In Van, the governor's office announced on Thursday that Culture and Tourism Minister Ertuğrul Günay had approved an application submitted by the Van Governor's Office in December 2009 to permit a religious sermon to be held once a year at the Akhtamar Church, which was re-opened as museum in March 2007 following restoration that was undertaken at the behest of the government. At the time, the Armenian community pressed for the 1,100-year-old church on Lake Van's Akhtamar Island to be made available for religious services.

According to the decision signed by Günay, the church will be opened for religious services only one day every year and this service will take place in the second half of September, to be

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attended by a limited number of visitors and at a time which will not complicate the movement of visitors to the museum.

On Thursday in Ankara, Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç told the NTV news channel that the government has been attempting to create a formula which will allow the children of illegal Armenian workers to attend non-Muslim minority schools.

"The Education Ministry is continuing its studies on the requirements for enrollment in minority schools," Arınç said. "Up until this date, Turkey has always opened its arms to those who come to this country," he added.

According to a recent study, the "State of Armenian Irregular Migrants in Turkey," the children of these workers, especially if they are born in Turkey, face many problems, including being stateless since there is no diplomatic representation for Armenia in Turkey and the children are not registered as citizens of any country. The children are not able to attend school because their parents are irregular workers and they need to keep this fact hidden. There are schools in Turkey for the Armenian minority but under Turkish law only Turkish citizens can attend.

Education Minister Nimet Çubukçu, speaking to reporters in Ankara, however, was cautious regarding the chances of providing opportunities for the children of illegal workers to receive an education, saying the government was considering whether to ease laws that specify only those children who are Turkish nationals and belong to a non-Muslim minority can attend minority schools.

Çubukçu said Arınç thus referred to possibilities for children of foreigners who reside in Turkey legally to attend minority schools. "It's an issue which is still under consideration. The final decision has not yet been made," she added. /Today's Zaman/

Ambassador Koruturk to Return to Sweden

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said Wednesday that Turkey's Ambassador in Stockholm, Zergun Koruturk, will return back to Sweden at the beginning of next week. "The cases in Sweden and the US are not the same The Swedish government clearly opposed the adoption of a bill on the incidents of 1915 at the Swedish Parliament. The Swedish government clearly demonstrated its stand on the bill regarding the incidents of 1915," Davutoglu stressed. Within this frame, statements from Sweden were satisfactory, Davutoglu also explained. /Anadolu Ajansi/

TUSIAD Highlights

TUSIAD has issued a press release about the proposed constitutional amendments package. To view this press release, visit www.tusiad.us.

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