



Washington

# Selected News on Turkey

March 8-14, 2010

## CONTENTS:

- Swedish Prime Minister Reinfeldt Apologizes to Erdoğan after Swedish Parliament Vote on Armenian Resolution
- Turkish Ministers Told to Put US Contacts on Hold until April 24
- Erdogan Calls for More South Korean Investments in Turkey
- Greek Prime Minister Papandreou: "I Want to Show the World that Old Enemies Can Be Firm Friends"
- Davutoğlu Has Talks with Assad in Damascus

## 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."

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/

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## 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.

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/

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## **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."

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."

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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/

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