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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.

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Selected News on Turkey

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 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 Demirtaş, leader of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). Gül urged the party leaders to resolve the

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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/

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/

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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/

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 Erdogan 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.

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