

TUSIAD Selected News on Turkey

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Survey Shows 69 Percent of Turks Support EU Membership

Overall, 69 percent of Turks say they want Turkey to become a European Union member, but this stance varies widely by region, according to the report published by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation, or TESEV, on Wednesday. Ninety-one percent of survey respondents in Southeast Anatolia said they want to see Turkey in the EU, followed by 87 percent in the country's East. The Aegean region had third-highest rate of support, with 74 percent. In Central Anatolia, 58 percent of respondents said they favored EU membership.

Regional differentiations were also observed on reconciliation with Armenia, with 60 percent in Turkey's Black Sea region objecting to establishing diplomatic ties with Armenia and opening the border between the neighboring countries. Overall disapproval of establishing diplomatic ties was measured at 44 percent.

The survey showed conflicting results when it comes to the United States, which ranked second after Israel (40 percent) on the list of countries with a hostile attitude toward Turkey. The United States, however, also ranked third on the list of countries with a friendly approach toward Turkey. Fifty-three percent of those surveyed said they see the future of Turkish-U.S. relations as positive.

Respondents in the Southeast also had different opinions on the relations between Turkey and the United States than did their counterparts in other countries. Fifty-two percent of all respondents thought the approach of the United States is not friendly toward Turkey, an opinion only 39 percent held in the Southeast. Forty-one percent of those surveyed in the Southeast, compared to 27 percent overall, said they found the U.S. approach toward Turkey to be friendly.

The high rate of support for Turkey's EU bid and the outlook on Turkish-U.S. relations were interpreted by analysts who worked on the report as refuting claims that Turkey's axis is shifting away from the West. "The results reveal that Turkish society is not emotionally distancing itself from the concept called the 'West,'" the report stated.

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Overall, Turkish foreign policy received a 65 percent approval rate. Twenty-five percent said they believe the prime minister is the most important person or institution in foreign-policy decision-making, while 25 percent said it is the Foreign Ministry. Only 1 percent believed the citizens are influential in decision-making.

A low rate of 8 percent of respondents said they believe Turkish Cyprus should become part of Turkey, while 22 percent want a peaceful solution based on consensus to the Cyprus issue. Fifty percent support Turkish-Armenian reconciliation, while 34 percent said the current situation between Turkey and Israel is hurting the interests of both countries. /Hurriyet/

Turkey Says Flotilla Organizers Should Wait and See New Gaza Conditions

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has advised organizers of a flotilla planning to depart for Gaza later this month to wait and see how Egypt's lifting its embargo of Gaza affects the Hamas-run coastal strip. This is the first time Davutoğlu suggested flotilla organizers to reconsider their plans. He had so far rejected U.S. and Israeli appeals to try to stop the flotilla, saying it is a civilian initiative that the government cannot intervene in and insisting that the international community should pressure Israel to lift the blockade of Gaza instead of trying to prevent the new flotilla.

The Humanitarian Aid Foundation (İHH), a Turkish charity that played the lead role in a similar mission to Gaza last year, says a new flotilla will depart for Gaza at the end of June. Last year's mission turned bloody when Israeli commandos stormed a ship owned by İHH, the Mavi Marmara, resulting in the deaths of eight Turks and one Turkish American.

In remarks published on Monday, the foreign minister reiterated the government cannot stop the activities of a civilian group, saying it is supported by a number of international organizations and that its work is legal. But he said the flotilla should this time wait to see how conditions in Gaza will change with Egypt lifting its embargo and the anticipated establishment of a Palestinian unity government. "No one should even imagine that the worst-case scenario could happen," he told reporters in an interview in the central Anatolian province of Konya, where he is on an election campaign visit.

To avoid the repetition of last year's tragedy, Israel should also do its share by lifting the blockade of Gaza, Davutoğlu argued, "Israel should wait for the establishment of the new Palestinian government and then lift the blockade of Gaza." Davutoğlu said he had talked with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who said the new Palestinian government is to be founded in the next two or three weeks. "What was Israel saying before? It said it would not lift the blockade of Gaza because it does not recognize Hamas. Since there will no longer be a Gaza administration there [once the unity government is established], [Israel should] see how the new government is working," he said.

Last year's bloody flotilla raid brought Turkish-Israeli ties to a standstill. Turkey insists on a formal apology from Israel for relations to go back to normal, something Israel refuses to do.

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Israel has said it would resort to the use of force if necessary to stop the second flotilla, raising fears of a repetition of last year's tragedy. The United States has said it shared its concerns with Turkey regarding risks that would stem from a new flotilla trip to Gaza. A report published last week said the U.S. was to offer Turkey a proposal under which it would host future Israeli-Palestinian peace talks in return for preventing a second flotilla trip to Gaza. Responding to a question about the reported proposal in a televised interview on Friday night, Davutoğlu said there was no request from the U.S. to prevent the flotilla from sailing. /Today's Zaman/

Egyptian Revolutionary Youth Cite Turkey as a Model

Visiting Turkey to meet with top state officials yesterday, members of Egyptian revolutionary youth groups said that they see Turkey as a role model for their country's future. "Everybody in Egypt sees Turkey as a model for the future of Egypt, this is a widespread thought. The fact that Turkey has a secular regime and is run by an Islamic party is a very good example for us," group spokesman Abdallah Helmy, 34, stated in an interview. "[It's] not just [about] the economic and social systems, we even take the relations between the army and the Constitution in Turkey as an example," said Helmy, who is the program officer of the Reform and Development Party.

While in Turkey, the group is meeting with President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. According to Helmy, Islamic shariah law poses no obstacle for Egypt taking secular Turkey as a role model. "The Islamic shariah regime is only a framework for the legislation in Egypt, and it is the identity of the country according to the constitution," he explained. "We have a consensus in the country that Islamic shariah must be the framework for legislation. At the same time, however, we agree that our Christian friends must have their own framework [for] legislation." /Turkish Press Review/

Ankara, Tehran Ratify Anti-Terrorist Pact

With a statutory decree, the government late last week ratified a pact between Turkey and Iran for cooperation in the fight against terrorism. Under the deal, Tehran and Ankara agree to cooperate in fighting terrorist activities and any criminal act which threatens the national security and sovereignty of either country.

They will also work together to prevent and combat organized crime and narco-trafficking as well as the illegal production of weapons, explosives and munitions, and of nuclear, radioactive, biological and chemical materials, as well as weapons of mass destruction. The pact also covers the fight against forgery, cyber and telecom crimes, and human trafficking. Under the agreement, an act of terror is any activity carried out to put pressure on a government or government body by using or threatening to use violence in a bid to intimidate society or gain political/economic concessions. Under the pact, both sides are obliged to combat terrorist groups as well as affiliated organizations and sponsoring bodies. /Turkish Press Review/

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Turkey, Iraq Sign Natural Gas Pacts Worth \$1 Billion

The state-run Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) has signed an agreement with Iraq's petroleum ministry on the operating rights for the Mansuriya and Siba natural gas fields. Turkish Energy and Natural Resources Minister Taner Yıldız took part in the signing ceremony in Baghdad together with Iraqi Oil Minister Abd al-Karim Elaibi. TPAO will make investments worth more than \$1 billion in the two fields located in Diyala and Basra provinces, respectively.

TPAO General Manager Mehmet Uysal and Abdul-Mehdi al-Amidi, director of Iraq's Office of Licensing and Contracts at Iraq's Oil Ministry, signed the agreement on the operating rights for Mansuriya and Siba natural gas fields for 20 years. On Oct. 20 of last year, Iraq auctioned off three major natural gas fields to international companies, part of its strategy to shake off a legacy of war and isolation by opening up the lucrative sector. TPAO and its consortium partners won the tender for the operating rights to the Mansuriya and Siba gas fields. The fields have estimated combined reserves of 11.23 trillion cubic feet of gas, about 10 percent of Iraq's total 112 trillion cubic feet of proven natural gas reserves, the world's 10th largest.

In his remarks to the Anatolia news agency, Yıldız said Turkey is ready to support the development and stability of Iraq's energy sector. "Turkish companies will do anything to win more tenders in Iraq's energy sector," he declared. Elaibi underlined that they are very happy to sign an agreement with Turkey in order to develop natural gas fields in the country.

Since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, Iraq has struggled to develop its oil and gas industry. The sector, which had been ravaged by years of sanctions-induced neglect and damage, saw development efforts move fitfully as looting and sabotage added to the damage it sustained during the effort to oust former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. Demand has also exploded as Iraqis can now buy appliances never available under Saddam's government.

Iraq has awarded 15 oil and gas deals since 2008 to international energy companies in the first major investment in the country's energy industry in more than three decades. The country, which sits atop the world's fourth-largest proven reserves of crude, also holds 126.7 trillion cubic feet of undeveloped gas reserves. For years, Iraq flared -- or burned off -- the gas largely because it lacked adequate facilities to process it. /Today's Zaman, Turkish Press Review/

Turkey, Georgia Lift Passport Requirements

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili met at the Sarp border gate Tuesday to mark a passport-free travel agreement between the two countries. Hours before facing protests against him during an electoral campaign in Hopa, Erdoğan attended the inauguration of the Sarp Customs Office in Batumi and announced that Turkish and Georgian citizens would be able to use their national identity cards while entering

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each other's countries via the Sarp Border Gate from now on. "This is a meaningful development for us and a unique implementation in the world," Erdoğan stated.

The prime minister noted that the trade volume between Turkey and Georgia, which had been around \$240 million in 2002, exceeded \$1 billion in 2010, adding that the border gates between the two countries had significantly contributed to such figures.

Erdoğan said Turkey and Georgia would soon start construction on the Çıldır-Aktas Border Gate which would be their third border crossing in addition to the Sarp-Sarpi and Turkgözü-Vale gates. "Turkey is not only a close neighbor for Georgia, but it is also a reliable friend. Today, Turkey and Georgia are the most important partners for each other in the Caucasus region," he said.

Speaking at the ceremony, Saakashvili said Erdoğan was a brave and honest Turkish politician. Describing Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the modern Republic of Turkey, as his idol in politics, Saakashvili remarked he was inspired by Atatürk while serving his country. The Georgian president also noted Turkey was a powerful country playing an important role in its region. /Hurriyet/

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Third AK Party victory wins more votes, but falls short of supermajority

In Sunday's parliamentary elections, the ruling Justice and Development (AK) Party boosted its votes 5 percent compared to the last general elections in 2007, but it won fewer deputies this time, 326, down from 341. The AK Party, planning a new constitution and a possible presidential system, was unable to capture the 330 supermajority needed for it to pass these changes without support from other parties in Parliament. The main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), which in 2007 formed an election alliance with the Democratic Left Party (DSP), won 5 percent more votes than in the last election, but this rise was lower than expected. The CHP won 135 seats, up from 112.

Election Results Overview:

AKP: 49.8% --326 Seats

CHP: 25.9% --135 Seats

MHP: 13.0% --53 Seats

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BDP: 5.9% --36 Seats
\Turkish Press Review and Hurriyet\

Gül visits Poland, asks for support for EU bid

Turkish President Abdullah Gül said that Turkey expected Poland's term presidency in the European Union to speed up Turkey's accession process and open more chapters to negotiations.

Speaking at a joint press conference with Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski, after a one on one meeting and a meeting between the delegations of the two countries in Warsaw, President Gül stated. "In 2014, we will celebrate the 600th anniversary of the foundation of relations between our two countries. Friendly historic relations continue to this day".

"Turkey and Poland are two allies and strategic partners. We are determined to boost relations in all fields. Political relations between our two countries are excellent. We have carried our relations in the defense sector to higher levels. We have displayed a will to further promote economic relations between our two countries," Gül said. \Hurriyet\

US hopes Azeri-Turkish gas deal to be signed soon

The United States hopes that Azerbaijan and Turkey will sign a transit agreement for new gas from the Shah Deniz field in coming weeks, the U.S. Special Envoy for Eurasian Energy, Richard Morningstar, stated. Azerbaijan is negotiating with Turkey to sell 6 billion cubic metres (bcm) of gas per year from the second phase of the giant Shah Deniz gas field in Azerbaijan, and to ship 10 bcm to European customers via Turkey. Talks include issues of transit fees, volumes of gas as well as transportation options, but do not specify which pipeline would carry the gas.

The Shah Deniz field is being developed by BP, Statoil, state energy company SOCAR and some others. It is estimated to contain 1.2 trillion cubic metres of gas. Production began in 2006, and the second phase is expected to start by 2017.

Azerbaijan has been in talks with more than 20 firms and consortiums looking to buy gas from Shah Deniz II and said last year it will conclude negotiations by mid 2011. Azerbaijan is being courted by the West and Russia for its energy reserves in the Caspian Sea, and is a key potential gas supplier for the EU-backed Nabucco pipeline project, aimed at reducing the continent's energy dependence on Russia.

Nabucco

The 7.9 billion euro Nabucco pipeline aims to bring up to 31 bcm of gas annually from the Caspian and Middle East to an Austrian hub via Turkey and the Balkans, cutting out Russia. But it faces competition for Azeri gas from Russia's South Stream project to take the fuel

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under the Black Sea to Europe. Russian state energy giant Gazprom signed a deal with SOCAR in September 2010 to buy 2 bcm of gas in 2011 and even more from 2012.

Azerbaijan sells gas to the domestic market, neighbouring Georgia and Turkey via the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline, as well as to Russia.

Morningstar said the United States considered Nabucco as "the most preferable" option from a political and strategic standpoint. "The question is whether the Nabucco pipeline is commercially viable," he said.

\Sabah\

Turkey establishes \$100 mln fund to support Libya opposition

Turkey has established a \$100 million fund to support Libya's rebel Transitional National Council, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu announced on Thursday. "There is a real need for humanitarian access as well as for the natural needs of Libya like schools, hospitals and all those facilities," Davutoğlu stated, according to a report by Reuters.

Davutoğlu was speaking to reporters at a summit of Western and Arab countries backing Libya's rebels and planned to prepare for a political structure after the departure of leader Moammar Gadhafi from power.

The statements came at the third meeting of the International Contact Group on Libya in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates. Davutoğlu was among participants at the meeting along with his counterparts from 21 countries. The participants also included U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

The Contact Group, including the United States, European powers, allies from the Middle East and international bodies, was established during an international conference in London in March to lead international efforts to map out Libya's future. The group held its first meeting in Qatar, the second in Italy. The fourth meeting of the Libya Contact Group will be held in Turkey. \Hurriyet\

NATO decides to turn İzmir air base into land command NATO, in the midst of extended air strikes in

Libya, will trim the number of its major bases from 11 to seven to cut costs and duplication, including transforming the air base in Turkey's port city of İzmir into a land command, the alliance said on Thursday.

NATO is currently using its command base in İzmir, which was established as a command base in 1952, to oversee its aerial mission as part of the operation against Libyan forces loyal to Libyan leader Col. Muammar Gaddafi.

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October of last year at a meeting in Brussels, during which Turkey was represented by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and Defense Minister Vecdi Gönül, leaders drafted plans to reform NATO's command structure and cut the numbers of fixed headquarters to seven from 11, while trimming staff numbers to 8,500 from around 13,000. Defense ministers were expected to discuss the politically sensitive decision of which bases to close on Wednesday's NATO defense ministers meeting. The binding decision was made at NATO's Lisbon summit last November but leaders did not mention which bases would be shut down.

NATO earlier deactivated a command center in Eskisehir, a city in Central Anatolia, while restructuring its command bases in 2009. NATO had 65 bases during the chaotic collapse of the Soviet Union but it has since reduced the number to 11.

Observers said Turkey was expected to undertake diplomatic overtures to avert any possible consensus in the NATO defense ministers meeting on Wednesday, which discussed the closure of NATO command bases. But Turkish Defense Minister Vecdi Gönül did not even attend the meeting in Brussels as he was campaigning for a parliamentary seat in Antalya. Decisions in NATO are made based on consensus and it is impossible to make a move that a single NATO member rejects.

In announcing the agreement, reached at a meeting of NATO defense ministers on Wednesday night, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said it would make the 28-nation alliance "leaner, more flexible" as well as "more affordable." The reforms come at a time when defense budgets throughout the Western world are under pressure due to the global economic crunch. \Today's Zaman\

Number of Syrians taking refuge in Turkey now exceeds 5,000

As Syrian tanks stormed a border town overnight in the latest assault to crush a three-month uprising against President Bashar al-Assad, more than 5,000 Syrians have taken refuge in neighboring Turkey, semi-official Anatolia news agency reported on Sunday.

In a pattern witnessed in other cities, and towns besieged by troops and armor following street protests demanding political freedoms and an end to al-Assad's autocratic rule, residents said loyalist forces commanded by al-Assad's brother Maher pushed into Jisr al-Shughour.

The strategic town, among hills on the road between Syria's second city Aleppo and the country's main port of Latakia, had seen large demonstrations, with residents describing a mutiny by security forces whom they said had been fighting other troops to try and prevent the killing of civilians.

"Tanks came from the South after shelling randomly and sending volleys of machine gun fire all over the town. People are still fleeing from the North," one resident said.

Bassam, a tile layer, fled to Turkey as troops were closing in on his hometown, spoke about how troops burned wheat crops in three villages near Jisr al-Shughour in a scorched earth

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policy to try to crush the will of people in the strategic hill region who have been participating in large protests against Assad's rule.

Syrians have been fleeing to Turkey since April 29 but the movement has sped up after the killing of 120 security personnel by who the Syrian authorities say are "armed gangs" in Jisr al-Shughour last week. Refugees and rights campaigners said the deaths resulted from soldiers mutinying because of the killings of civilians. Damascus has banned most foreign correspondents from the country, making it difficult to verify accounts of events. Turkey has also restricted access to refugees in camps and hospitals, saying it is to protect their privacy.

The number of Syrians who have crossed the border and taken refuge in Turkey since then stands at 5,051 as of Sunday morning, The Anatolia wrote. News reports said up to 10,000 people are waiting on the other side of the border. They stay in their vehicles and make-shift tents and sometimes children "sneak into" Turkish villages to get food for their families, according to the Anatolia.

Refugees could be seen walking around the grounds of a camp at Boynuyöğün where tents have been pitched inside an old hangar, and another camp at Yayladağı has been established in the grounds of a disused tobacco company. "The Red Crescent is now preparing a fourth camp, which will be close to the first. At the moment they are levelling the ground. It will have a capacity of around 2,500," said The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesman Metin Çorabatır. \Today's Zaman\

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- Syria's operations close to border may spark clash with Turkey
- Armenia returns to busy Turkish agenda
- Gaza flotilla to sail without Mavi Marmara
- Ankara, TRNC set to consult ahead of tripartite Geneva meeting next month
- IMF predicts Turkey's growth will surpass its neighbors'

Syria's operations close to border may spark clash with Turkey

The times of good relations between Turkey and Syria, during which the once-hostile neighbors were brought together politically, economically and socially and which saw unprecedented agreements, such as the elimination of visa requirements and shared border crossing projects, may have taken a hit. This is due to the Syrian army's brutal crackdown on opposition protestors and the civilian killings which are reported to have happened close to Turkey's border.

Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM) expert Professor Veysel Ayhan

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warned that Turkey will not be a bystander if and when the Syrian army, which is located close to the Syrian-Turkish border, starts killing civilians in front of the eyes of Turkey.

Top Turkish political and military officials have been paying visits to the border region lately to check on the status of Syrian refugees and get a perspective on the situation first hand. The high-level appearances sent a strong message to Syrian leadership that Turkey will not remain indifferent to what has been happening along the border areas with Syria, experts argued.

On Friday, the Turkish commander of the land forces, Gen. Erdal Ceylanoğlu, flew to Hatay, a border province where all the tent cities for the Syrian refugees are set up, to investigate the Turkish army facilities and sites, gathering information about the army stations along the border from officials. There are some reports that Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan could be next on the list to visit the area. According to Ayhan, all of these top-level visits of Turkish officials to the region send a clear and serious message to Syria that Turkey will not close its eyes to the killings of civilians at its elbow.

According to the reports from the region there are about 15,000 Syrians who have fled from the Syrian army's latest attacks on the villages in a bid to catch the protesters. Those Syrians have set up camps on the Syrian side along the Turkish border and are waiting to cross the border in the event the Syrian army attacks intensify in the coming days.

Syrian troops near Turkish border as the number of refugees exceeds 10,000

Syrian troops are tightening their grip on villages near the Turkish border, setting up checkpoints and arresting dozens in an attempt to stanch the flow of residents fleeing into Turkey, activists said Sunday. Human rights activist Mustafa Osso said there were concerns that thousands of displaced people crowded near the border would come under attack in the coming days.

On Saturday, Syrian troops backed by tanks and firing heavy machine guns swept into a village near the Turkish border, forcing more people displaced by the crackdown on anti-government protesters to flee across the frontier. The Local Coordination Committees of Syria, a group that documents protests, said troops backed by six tanks and several armored personnel carriers entered Bdama Saturday morning.

The Syrians who fled to the border areas and are still in Syria told Today's Zaman that some Syrian soldiers are deployed at a school in Bdama and that around 15,000 soldiers have been posted in several villages along the Turkish-Syrian border. The same people who live at the border due to the fear of the Syrian army also said that the Syrian army has cordoned off the border area between Az Zawf and Bdama in order to prevent the Syrians who are fleeing from their hometowns from crossing into Turkey. (Today's Zaman)

Armenia returns to busy Turkish agenda

Turkey will come under pressure to normalize its relationship with neighboring Armenia, another component of the zero-problems policy of the re-elected government as hopes are

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running high over a progress at the June 25 meeting of the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders mediated by Russia. The leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan will meet next Saturday in Kazan in Russia at a meeting brokered by Russian President Dimitri Medvedev, one of the mediators of the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh, an Azeri territory occupied by Yerevan. The speculation reveals the two sides are close to a framework agreement, which will ultimately lead to a breakthrough over the long-running dispute.

Initial signals of optimism came from Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Memmedyarov who said last week Armenia began to act more flexibly. Turkey, a party sided with Azerbaijan and closed its border with Yerevan in 1993 in solidarity with Baku, is not involved in the Minsk process leading negotiations between the two foes but says it is not very optimistic.

However, genocide resolutions brought to the US Congress every year are hanging like a sword of Damocles over Turkey. Last week, pro-Armenian lawmakers introduced a fresh congressional resolution calling on the United States to recognize World War I-era deaths of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as "genocide." "Undoubtedly, there will be pressure from the United States to normalize relations with Armenia in the post-election era," opposition deputy Faruk Loğoğlu told the Daily News. His Republican People's Party, or CHP, opposed the protocols and reconciliation with Armenia unless a settlement was reached to the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute.

"It is necessary to reconsider the protocols. If a further step is going to be taken in relations with Armenia, the calibrations of the process should be set well," said Loğoğlu, Turkey's former ambassador to Azerbaijan and the US. "The CHP is in favor of Turkish-Armenian reconciliation but any normalization should observe Turkey's interests." Turkey wants to create a belt of security and stability in the Caucasus and believes Armenia is no exception to this policy. In the post-election era, the Turkish government is expected to introduce a set of confidence-building measures as a sign of its commitment to the normalization process.

Armenian Prime Minister Tigran Sarkisian, in a recent interview with the BBC, said his country was ready to establish diplomatic relationship with Turkey without any preconditions and slammed the closure of border in the 21st century as "absurdity." \Hurriyet Daily News\

Gaza flotilla to sail without Mavi Marmara

Turkish pro-Palestinian activists said Friday an aid flotilla will sail for Gaza this month to defy an Israeli blockade, but without the Mavi Marmara ship that was stormed by Israeli commandos a year ago.

"The Mavi Marmara unfortunately suffered so much damage we couldn't get it ready in time," Bulent Yildirim the head of the IHH, a Turkish Islamic charity, told a news conference. Yildirim announced that ten ships would sail for Gaza from ports around Europe on June 25.

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Already strained relations between Turkey and Israel worsened after Israeli soldiers shot dead nine Turks aboard the Mavi Marmara, the lead ship in a convoy of six vessels bound for the Palestinian enclave last year.

The activists said in May that 1,500 people from around 100 countries would participate in the flotilla, carrying, humanitarian aid and construction materials to Gaza.

Israel has not met Turkish demands for an apology and compensation for the families of victims in last year's assault on the Mavi Marmara.

Gaza is controlled by Hamas, which calls for the destruction of Israel and is regarded as a terrorist group by Western powers, including the United States and the European Union. Israel says it blockades Gaza to stop the importation of arms.

U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon has asked governments to discourage activists from sending a new convoy. Earlier this month Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said the impact of Egypt opening the opening of the Rafah border gate with Gaza needed to be assessed, apparently discouraging a new flotilla.

Ankara, TRNC set to consult ahead of tripartite Geneva meeting next month

Ankara and the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus (TRNC) are set to consult ahead of a tripartite meeting next month in Geneva bringing together TRNC President Dervis Eroglu and Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias, led by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Following tradition, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu is set to pay his first visit abroad to the TRNC soon after Ankara's new government is formed following last weekend's general elections. If no government is formed before the July 7 meeting, Davutoglu is still likely to fly to Northern Cyprus to hold a round-table meeting with top TRNC leaders in order to coordinate policies ahead of the Geneva meeting, said diplomatic sources. Meanwhile, UN Special Envoy to Cyprus Alexander Downer recently told Ankara of his willingness to meet with Davutoglu ahead of the July 7 meeting. \Turkish Press Review\

IMF predicts Turkey's growth will surpass its neighbors'

Turkey's economy will grow 45.3 percent between 2011 and 2016, 12 points higher than the expected average growth rate in its immediate neighbors, according to new International Monetary Fund projections. The country's gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to reach \$1,159 billion in current prices, while the total GDP of its adjacent neighbors is estimated to amount to \$1,407 billion.

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Among Turkey's neighbors, Greece is expected to grow the slowest over the next five years, by 12 percent through 2016 to reach \$348 billion. Iran's economy is expected to grow 34.1 percent to reach \$564 billion. Turkey is set to rank second only behind Greece by 2016 in terms of per capita income, with \$15,000, half of Greece's projected per capita income of \$31,000. \Turkish Press Review\

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EU puts ball in Turkey's court for progress in talks

The European Union said on Tuesday that it was up to Turkey to speed up its stalled accession talks with the 27-nation bloc by making more of an effort to meet the EU's requirements, responding to Turkish criticism over the stalemate.

“Turkey will be able to accelerate the pace of negotiations by advancing in the fulfillment of benchmarks, meeting the requirements of the Negotiating Framework and by respecting its contractual obligations towards the EU,” an official at the press office of Stefan Füle, the EU's commissioner for enlargement, told Today's Zaman. The official was responding to a question asking for comments over critical remarks by Turkey's ambassador to the EU, Selim Kunalalp, who said the EU has lost its leverage over Turkey's post-election reform efforts because of the stalemate in accession talks.

The official said Turkey's membership process is now “reaching a point at which the criteria or benchmarks to be met are quite demanding and difficult.” “They require important choices and adjustments in Turkey, such as changes of legislation,” added the official.

The EU suspended talks on eight chapters in 2006 due to Turkey's refusal to open its ports and airports to traffic from EU member Greek Cyprus. France, which opposes Turkish membership on cultural grounds, blocks the opening of five other chapters that it says are directly related to accession. The remaining chapters are more difficult ones, requiring candidate countries to agree to sweeping concessions. Turkish officials have revealed that the government is unwilling to agree to such concessions in the absence of a clear perspective for accession.

The EU official, on the other hand, suggested that Turkey has not fulfilled all the criteria that needed to have been fulfilled for the opening of the talks on the competition chapter. “It has been clear from the start what is required to open the chapter on competition. Good progress

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was made in Turkey and there are few outstanding requirements to meet. Once this is done, the chapter can be opened," said the official.

"In the absence of any clear perspective of accession, there's no reason why Turkey should align its legislation toward narrow EU standards. To put it simply, the EU has lost its leverage on Turkey," Kunalp said. \ Today's Zaman \

U.S. concerned at Syria border moves

The United States is concerned by reports that Syria is massing troops near the border with Turkey, which could escalate the crisis in the region, and is discussing the issue with Turkish officials, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said.

Syrian troops gathered near the Turkish border, witnesses said on Thursday, raising tensions with Ankara as President Bashar al-Assad increases the use of military force against a three-month-old popular revolt.

Turkey said the two countries' foreign ministers had consulted by telephone, and Syria's ambassador to Ankara was later summoned to the foreign ministry, demonstrating further how disturbed Turkey is over events in its southeast neighbor.

Clinton stated the reported move by Syria to surround and target the town of Khirbat al-Joz just 500 meters (yards) from the Turkish border marked a worrying new phase of Syria's attempt to quash anti-government protests.

"If true, that aggressive action will only exacerbate the already unstable refugee situation in Syria," Clinton said.

"Unless the Syrian forces immediately end their attacks and their provocations that are not only now affecting their own citizens but (raising) the potential of border clashes, then we're going to see an escalation of conflict in the area."

Mainly Turkey has become increasingly critical of Assad, after previously backing him in his drive to seek peace with Israel and improve relations with the United States. Assad also opened the Syrian market to Turkish goods.

Clinton said she had discussed the situation with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and that President Barack Obama had also talked to Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan. The United States has steadily sharpened the tone of its rhetoric toward Assad, saying he is losing credibility and must either implement promised reforms or get out of the way.

Rights groups say more than 1,300 civilians have been killed across Syria since mid-March, but the anti-Assad protests have still grown, especially on Fridays after Muslim prayers.

It is hard to verify accounts of the violence as Syria has expelled many journalists, including Reuters correspondents.

\Sabah\

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Hamas leader has talks on Palestinian unity in İstanbul

Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal has had talks with Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu on stalled efforts to create a Palestinian unity government, Turkish officials said on Wednesday.

Mashaal met with Davutoğlu in İstanbul on Tuesday during an unannounced visit. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas also arrived in Turkey on Tuesday but officials said no meeting between Abbas and Mashaal in Turkey was planned.

Abbas arrived in Ankara and is expected to have talks with President Abdullah Gül, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Davutoğlu on Thursday and Friday. Mashaal, on the other hand, was expected to leave İstanbul later on Wednesday. In Tuesday talks, Davutoğlu urged Mashaal to maintain Palestinian unity, said the officials. Abbas' Fatah and Hamas agreed last month to end a four-year rift by forming a joint caretaker government to prepare for new elections. But efforts to form the unity government have stalled as the two sides have been unable to agree on a prime minister. Hamas opposes to re-appointment of Western-backed Salam Fayyad as prime minister, saying Fayyad is allied too closely with the West while Abbas says he wants Fayyad, a US-educated economist, to stay.

Abbas and Mashaal were previously expected to meet in Cairo, Egypt, on Tuesday to discuss composition of a new unity government but that meeting was postponed reportedly due to Hamas' opposition to Fayyad. Palestinian news agency Ma'an, however, reported on Tuesday that the Cairo meeting was postponed simply because of scheduling problems and that the talks would take place within the next few days.

While in Turkey, Abbas is also expected to discuss the stalled efforts to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Peace talks broke down last September with the expiration of an Israeli moratorium on settlement building in the West Bank. The Palestinians have refused to negotiate without a new one, while Israel is demanding talks without preconditions.

Erdoğan and US President Barack Obama discussed, among other issues, the Middle East peace process over the phone late on Monday, the White House and Turkish Prime Ministry said. (Today Zaman)

Gül praises internet's role in the Arab Spring, but Google exec criticizes filtering plan

Facing criticism over government plans to filter Internet access, President Abdullah Gül yesterday praised the role the Internet has played in facilitating the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa. "The Internet played an important role in the Arab Spring," Gül reportedly told Eric Schmidt, the executive chairman of search engine giant Google. "It would not have as easily happened in the Internet's absence." Gül's meeting with Schmidt came amid debate over the government's new requirement that Internet users in Turkey choose one of four content-filtering packages, with many fearing Net censorship.

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Speaking to journalists before the meeting, Schmidt said he would tell Gül such filtering would be not only useless but in fact counterproductive. "I will talk about the importance of the Internet," he explained. "I will say there would be no use in Internet filtering. I will explain to him that these kinds of restrictions are of no use. I will underline the fact that restrictions won't work out, but on the contrary will only harm Turkey's image." He added, "There may be a good purpose behind these kinds of systems. Yet if these systems aren't transparent enough, they can be abused quite easily." \Turkish Press Review\

Gül calls for calm on the eve of a key week

Opposition anger that their MPs have not been freed from jail can only be assuaged by attending Parliament's opening session, the president says. Turkey's president has called for calm and for the country's opposition parties to attend Tuesday's opening session of Parliament after each complained bitterly about courts refusing to release their members from prison.

The main opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP, however, would not guarantee that it would take its parliamentary oaths on Tuesday. While upset that one of its deputies also remains behind bars, the Nationalist Movement Party, or MHP, pledged to attend Tuesday's ceremony. The main pro-Kurdish party, however, has refused to even reluctantly enter Parliament, demanding that its conditions.

"The only place for a solution to all these problems is the Parliament. I call on all political parties having seats at the Parliament to work together on this legitimate and democratic ground by taking into consideration views of all segments of the society," Gül said in a written statement Saturday.

While insisting that these problems not overshadow the successful election process, the president said these problems could be an opportunity for a major reform to increase the legal system and the democracy to the universal level. Gül continued his calls on Sunday where he targeted at the legislative as the source of the ongoing problem. There are problems stemming from legislations that can be solved through mature conversations," he said.\Hurriyet Daily News\

Davutoğlu set to take 4-Nation Mideast Tour

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu will soon embark on a visit of four Middle Eastern countries: Syria, Jordan, Iran and Saudi Arabia. His official meetings are set to cover recent unrest in Syria, efforts to set up a unity government in Palestine, and other regional issues. The dates for Davutoğlu's Mideast tour have yet to be decided. \Turkish Press Review\

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