

The Turkey Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING

VOL. 1 NO. 3

26 MARCH 2008

ANALYSIS:

CHALLENGING TIMES FOR TURKEY'S DEMOCRACY

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Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program

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THE TURKEY ANALYST

Editors

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The Turkey Analyst is an English language journal. It is a publication of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Joint Center, designed to bring authoritative analysis and news on the rapidly developing domestic and foreign policy issues in Turkey. It is published biweekly, and includes topical analysis, as well as translations and summaries of selected Turkish news reports.

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BACKGROUND: ca. 500 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

IMPLICATIONS: 500 to 700 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

CONCLUSIONS: ca. 200 words that strongly state your conclusions about the impact of the event or issue.

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CHALLENGING TIMES FOR TURKEY'S DEMOCRACY

Turkey's regime crisis, ongoing since 2007, has reached an unprecedented, dangerous level. If not checked, it could threaten recent advances in Turkish democracy. Indeed, the Turkish state itself shows signs of breaking up into confrontation along ideological lines. Turkey is adrift, putting extra strain on the country's partners, the European Union and the United States. They need to reexamine their assumptions about the character of the Turkish crisis and its protagonists, and draw policy conclusions that will serve theirs and Turkey's interests in the long term.

BACKGROUND: Political stability and calm continue to elude Turkey. The country is fast approaching a climactic showdown in the spiraling confrontation over secularism that has rocked the country since 2007. The ruling Justice and Development Party (the AKP) is threatened with dissolution following the chief prosecutor's submission of a 163-page case for its closure on account of constituting a focal point for undermining secularism. 71 of its members, among them Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan and President Abdullah Gül, could be barred from politics for five years.

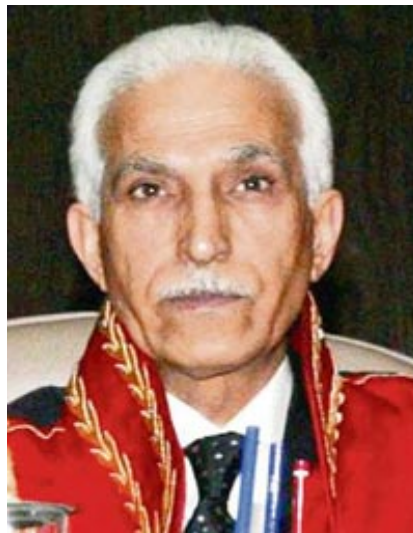
Faced with this case, now pending in the Constitutional Court, the AKP has reacted viscerally, with heavy criticism leveled at the chief prosecutor, and with its own "declaration of war", challenging the rule of law. Bülent Arinc, the former speaker of the parliament and a prominent figure in the ruling party, has even ominously reminded the

chief prosecutor that ultimately "death is the final arbiter".

The AKP has scheduled a proposed change of the constitution, curbing the powers of the chief prosecutor and altering the rules governing the constitutional court. Deniz Baykal, leader of the

opposition Republican people's party (CHP), has warned that such a move will have extremely serious consequences. The AKP is planning for a referendum to decide the matter. Such a referendum inevitably risks becoming a referendum about secularism itself, further exacerbating societal tensions.

The chief prosecutor's move against the AKP was followed a week later by a dramatic middle-of-the-night round-up of several prominent opponents of the AKP. Those summoned included the 83-year old publisher of Turkey's oldest newspaper, *Cumhuriyet*, prominent secularist Ilhan Selçuk; Kemal Alemdaroglu, former President of Istanbul University; and Dogu



Abdurrahman Yalcinkaya

Perincek, the leader of a fringe, left wing-nationalist party – all charged with engaging in “terrorist activities”. Perincek was subsequently arrested, while the other detainees were eventually released, pending forthcoming trials. Prime Minister Erdogan referred to the rule of law, and furthermore declared his government to be in “solidarity” with the prosecutor in the case against the alleged secularist coup-plotters. One worrisome fact exposed by this case is that the judiciary is politically divided, mirroring the division of society. The chief prosecutor is taking action against the government; while another prosecutor takes action against regime opponents, at a time and in a way that raises questions about the government’s motives. This in turn risks endangering the legitimacy of the investigation into the very real threat posed by shady and violent nationalist organizations.



Similarly, the police force is believed to have a growing Islamist inclination, pitting it against the staunchly secularist military. The increasing ideological gap and tension between these key institutions of the state do not bode well.

IMPLICATIONS: It is likely that Turkey will experience more of the same rather than a move

toward compromise. Political commentator Fehmi Koru, who is known to be close to the AKP government – and who interestingly could foretell the detention of Ilhan Selcuk – has named three former generals, one of them a former army chief, as being in line for arrest. Ahmet Altan, another commentator supporting the government, has declared that “Kemalist putschists are to be cleansed from the state”. After his release, Ilhan Selcuk expressed his worry that the prosecution is aiming at “the secular military and the independent judiciary”, with possible dire consequences.

While the lawsuit against the AKP has been widely condemned internationally, the spectacular arrest of secular opposition figures was barely noticed outside Turkey. Western commentators and policymakers have generally interpreted the confrontation in Turkey as one where freedom and democracy is represented by the ruling moderate Islamists; and authoritarianism by the secular opposition. The interpretation of recent developments in such a light would however amount to a superficial reading of Turkish politics.

In assailing the judiciary for opening a case against it, the AKP has painted itself as a principled defender of democratic freedom. But this stance lacks in credibility, since the AKP did not object to the chief prosecutor’s recent and parallel move against another party, the Kurdish nationalist DTP. Prime Minister Erdogan, on the contrary, approved of this case. But if Erdogan’s reaction has been belligerent, reactions from the secular camp to the latest events have been rather nuanced. Secular commentators in the media have generally deplored the pending lawsuit against the AKP, and have expressed their support for the judiciary’s continued investigation of the alleged activities of the “deep state” – the shady connections between violent nationalist groups and elements within the state bureaucracy.

While the moderation of the AKP is still largely taken at face value internationally, it has been increasingly challenged at home. As described in detail in the 22 February issue of the Turkey Analyst, the AKP has not tried to assuage the

worries of the secular half of the population. Its insistence in electing a

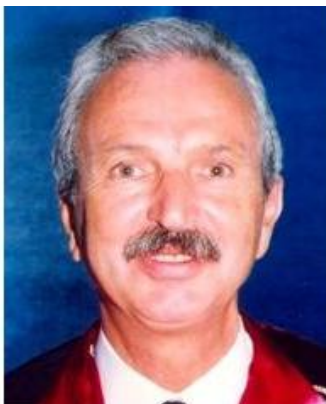


“religious” president, the calls for a “redefinition” of secularism, declarations by Erdogan such as “individuals can’t be secular”, the refusal to pay attention to the secular opposition regarding the symbolically charged issue of the Islamic headscarf, and the systematic insertion of Islamist cadres in the bureaucracy and judiciary have combined to erode the AKP’s image of “moderation”.

Words and deeds such as these have inevitably added credibility to the allegations of the chief prosecutor that the AKP in fact aims at altering the secular order. While this does not mean that closing the party could be a solution to Turkey’s problems, it does imply that the support for this rather extreme action has grown in recent months.

The AKP’s confrontational tactics in the face of the threat of dissolution have further alienated former liberal supporters. The association of the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association, Tüsiad, recently issued a warning, describing the current crisis as a societal “trauma” and calling upon the government to seek accommodation, instead of confrontation, with the

opposition. “The future of our country depends on the government abandoning its narrow interpretation of democracy as the simple rule of the majority”, declared the business association. Ertugrul Özkök, influential editor-in-chief of the



Selçuk, Alemdaroglu, and Perinçek

largest daily, *Hürriyet*, wrote that Turkey needs a societal consensus: “We can come together in a consensus that shields secularism and that doesn’t create suspicions in people’s minds”.

In fact, Turkey has reached an impasse precisely because the foundations of such a consensus are lacking. The Islamists, whether moderate or not, seem unable to resist their impulse to challenge secularism, while secularists, on their part, remain unable to translate their actual societal strength into a political force that can resist the Islamists at the ballot box. As formulated by social democratic commentator Zülfü Livaneli, “the secular democrats in this country are not an insignificant constituency, but they have unfortunately been unable to unite politically.”

The official custodians of the state’s secularism thus resort to party closure, damaging the image of the Turkish brand of secularism at home as well as internationally. Many of the comments following the latest attempt at closing down the Islamist party – the AKP’s antecedents, the Welfare and Virtue Parties were both successively closed down – indicate a growing appreciation of the democratic unacceptability as well as the long-

term impracticability of such measures. However, with the AKP opting for confrontation, the scope for secular moderation will be limited.

The Islamists may be gambling that the secular camp will ultimately, and unlike earlier showdowns, not dare to stand up to them. The judiciary's investigation of a plot emanating from the "deep state", with implied connections to the military, serves as a not very veiled warning to the General Staff. But the actions of the AKP can also be interpreted as a deliberate provocation by a party which is seeking – or wanting to appear to seek – martyrdom, a concept that is not alien to the Islamist tradition. Statements such as Arinc's above-quoted one about death could be indications of such a mind-set.



Bülent Arinç

CONCLUSIONS: Turkey is at a historical turning point. The country could be drifting towards growing authoritarianism, be it either of a

religious or a secular shape. Meanwhile, the democratic third way appears increasingly squeezed between the two extremes.

What is clear is that the AKP has interpreted its landslide victory in the general election of summer 2007 as a green light for Islamicization, and has since acted as if might is by definition right. The secular camp has once again – this time more or less out of desperation – resorted to a counter-measure that will find few supporters internationally, and that will further contribute to the ideological isolation of Turkish secularism from the West. If that seems to be a logical, immediate conclusion in the face of current events, these should not obscure the fact that Turkey's secular tradition has historically been the vector of Turkey's Westernization, and thus of its democratization. The current and very peculiar situation in Turkey, where the country's moderate and centrist secular forces lack strong representation in the political spectrum, and where traditionally pro-Western, secular forces are increasingly tempted by an isolationist neo-nationalism, does not detract from this longer-term reality. It rather raises the question whether or not the secularism of Turkey can reconnect to the West.

Prime Minister Erdogan has the ultimate power to defuse the crisis and avert Turkey's descent into chaos. It would go a long way to ease tensions if the government desists from its scheduled plans to tailor the constitution according to its particular needs. In such a case, Erdogan would be hailed as a responsible statesman by broad sections of a relieved Turkish society, and the deliberations of the constitutional court would take place in a radically different political atmosphere.

FOREIGN POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF THE TURKISH CRISIS

In the past month, Turkey experienced high levels of internal and external turmoil. Turkey launched a large military operation in northern Iraq, which created acrimony as the subsequent pullout was questioned by the opposition. Meanwhile, the country's internal turmoil deepened. This internal crisis is making the conduct of a coherent foreign policy increasingly difficult, with serious implications for its ability to play a role as a regional power.

BACKGROUND: The military operation against the terrorist PKK organization began with air strikes, but morphed into a ground operation in heavy weather conditions. Controversies over the incursion and especially the pullout followed. Following the achievement of some military objectives, the military offensive was terminated just a day before the visit to Ankara of U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. This led critics to charge that the government was pulling out on orders from Washington, and harsh words on the issue were exchanged between the General Staff and the opposition – something novel in itself.

The combination of intersecting internal and external turmoil has created a political crisis in Turkey that appears likely to become protracted. It is already clear that this is affecting the country's foreign policy. During its first term, the AKP followed a policy of reforms for EU membership passionately, and managed to initiate the formal membership negotiation process, something all previous governments had failed to achieve. However, following its re-election in Summer 2007, the AKP has not exhibited a similar eagerness for negotiations and reforms. Some EU

actions undoubtedly contributed to this. In particular, the efforts led by France and Germany to halt Turkey's possible membership created a substantial backlash in society and elites alike, and fed long-standing allegations of European double standards. Moreover, as far as the AKP is concerned, the 2004 decision by the European Court of Human Rights to allow the prohibition of the Islamic headscarf in universities led many party stalwarts to cool attitudes toward European institutions in general.

Instead, in the latter part of its first period in government, the AKP – whose roots are in the Islamist “National View” (Milli Görüş) line of thinking – attached considerable importance to improving relations with Muslim countries, particularly in the Middle East. The AKP had gained sympathies in the Middle East in 2003 by not allowing the U.S. to use Turkish soil for the Iraq War. This boosted the party's established relations with the Middle Eastern countries' intelligentsia. Closer relations were established especially with Iran, Syria, Sudan and Hamas, all of which are blacklisted by the U.S.. This approach attracted a reaction both from the U.S.

and Israel. In the case of Israel, this led the very good relations that had been painstakingly established before the AKP came to power to deteriorate. Ties were not broken, but growing tensions were apparent, especially as leading Turkish government officials repeatedly labeled Israel's tactics as terrorist.

However, its focus shifting toward the Middle East, the AKP appeared simply to ignore the states of the Caucasus and Central Asia, which received considerable attention during the leadership of Turgut Özal and Süleyman Demirel. In this sense, the AKP's foreign policy to some extent drifted in the direction of that espoused by the Islamist-led government of Necmettin Erbakan in 1996, which focused on Islamic countries, neglecting Europe and the secular states of Central Asia and the Caucasus. The major difference is the AKP's continued commitment to a European vocation, in stark contrast to Erbakan's anti-European stance.

Turkish-U.S. relations remained stressed after the invasion of Iraq, but have recently entered a period of relaxation, particularly given substantial intelligence exchange during the Turkish incursion into northern Iraq. America's approval of the Turkish military offensive helped calm anti-American sentiments in the country somewhat, which had grown rapidly in recent years. Following on this

gradual improvement, U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney visited Ankara in late March. His thick agenda included the possible deployment of additional Turkish forces in Afghanistan; America's regional missile shield system; Iraq; Iran; as well as energy security issues – particularly the transfer of the natural gas and oil from the Caspian Basin to Europe via Turkey.

IMPLICATIONS: The court case lunched recently by the chief prosecutor to close down the AKP is certain to affect not only Turkey's internal balances, but also its external politics. It will take



Christofides and Talat

over six months for the case to reach a conclusion, but its impact is already deep.

No doubt, this protracted crisis will decrease the government's ability to act. For example, while the legal procedure is in place, the AKP will find it hard to improve Turkey's position in negotiations with the EU. It seems unlikely that the AKP could concentrate and effectively channel the energy of the bureaucracy, which is already showing signals

of being dysfunctional, something that would be necessary for the EU process to move forward. The AKP faces a continued challenge in persuading a recalcitrant military leadership on concessions on Cyprus. The military staunchly opposes the opening of air and naval ports to Greek Cyprus – the main proximate cause of the breakdown in negotiations with the EU. Though the recent meeting between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders did indicate some positive

domestic policies intersect: leading military circles, as do many neo-nationalists – continue to see the U.S. as a backer of the AKP, in fact holding the view that America helped it to come to power in the first place. This leads leading military and civilian officials that are opposed to the AKP to instinctively respond negatively – or directly to reject – proposals brought by the government concerning broadened cooperation with the U.S., or responses to requests from Washington.



Cheney and Gül

signals, establishing a strong political will in Ankara for a durable solution in Cyprus under these conditions is unlikely. Indeed, as the government is increasingly exposed and under fire, it is unlikely to allow itself to be outflanked on the right in the Cyprus issue, something the nationalist opposition would be sure to capitalize upon.

No doubt, other foreign policy priorities will be affected by current developments. While it is not yet known what promises Cheney got from his meetings with high officials, it is unclear that either the government or the military were persuaded by his requests. Here, foreign and

In a sense, this policy can be deciphered as a message by secularist and military circles to the U.S. to give up its support for the AKP. In other words, these circles seek to indicate that they – not the AKP – is America's main interlocutor in security issues, and that they will obstruct such cooperation as long as America keeps backing the AKP. This state of affairs has been the case for some time, and is one of the main reasons behind the complicated relations between Ankara and Washington in the past five years.

Another element limiting the level of relations is the Islamist roots and base of the AKP. The perception of the U.S.

as an invader in the Islamic world is widely held among the AKP rank and file, and among party functionaries. As a result, not least in order to satisfy public opinion among its own base, the AKP has promoted relations with states and organizations blacklisted by the U.S. and done little to quell anti-Americanism in society, in fact often abetting it.

The U.S. request for more Turkish troops to be deployed in Afghanistan is also affected by these two factors. The General Staff, which should normally be bound to the political leadership, is nevertheless in reality in a position to declare its unwillingness to send more troops. The

government, influenced both by this stance and by the domestic political risks in having Turkish soldiers involved in direct combat operations against fellow Muslim Afghans, insists that Turkey can only send a few hundred non-combatant soldiers in the framework of ISAF, and only after the closure case against the party is finalized.

However, this reluctance to take a role in Afghanistan is detrimental to Turkey's broader role in the European security architecture. At a time when Europeans are unwilling to step up to NATO's challenge in Afghanistan, it is natural that American eyes turn to Turkey. Indeed, Turkey has been a key ally for half a century, and has NATO's second-largest military force. Moreover, its expertise and experience in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism widely surpasses that of any European power, something that was proven not least in the recent Iraq incursion.

Turkey would hence be in a position to benefit considerably from contributing to the Afghanistan effort. It would gain significant international prestige and an important strategic advantage as a responsible European and regional power. Moreover, Turkey would gain a substantially stronger position with regard to its ability to continue to undermine the PKK both in Iraq and internationally. Indeed, a grateful America would find it much more difficult to resist Turkish

efforts to again fight the PKK in Iraq, providing Ankara with more leeway in its operations there; moreover, Turkey would be likely to count on increased American assistance in combating PKK financing internationally, not least in putting pressure on recalcitrant European states in doing more in this regard. (For more detail see article in *Jane's Intelligence Review on PKK Financing*)

However, in Ankara, the two main forces that are to decide on these issues – the government and the general staff – appear more concerned with their mutual ideological struggle; arguments concerning Turkey's national interests do not appear to be the guiding force in deliberations. Indeed, the growing tensions in Turkish politics appear to cloud the possibility of rational evaluation of the pros cons of such crucial foreign policy decisions.

CONCLUSIONS: The following months are likely to see a growing political struggle in Turkish domestic politics, which is unlikely to settle down in the foreseeable future. The lack of an alternative to the AKP in the Turkish political system makes the outcome of this struggle all the more murky. And as long as the political crisis deepens, Turkey will not be likely to have the capacity to enter into any long-term foreign policy engagements. However, it is also conceivable that the AKP could in fact show itself more open to requests from the U.S. and the EU in order to compensate for the internal pressures on it.

THE FORTNIGHT IN REVIEW

SECTION I: DOMESTIC POLITICS

The chief prosecutor's launching of a court case to close down the ruling AKP dominated Turkey's domestic scene, prompting a growing debate within and outside Turkey both of the merits of the case and the closing down of parties in general. In addition, the mid-night summoning of oppositional figures in connection with the Ergenekon investigation prompting speculation of the linkage between the two processes.

ERDOGAN: CLOSURE CASE AGAINST THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

16 March

Prime Minister Erdogan, speaking in Siirt on March 15, made his first statement regarding the case demanding the closure of the AKP. Referring to those who submitted and supported the case, he stated that no one could make the AKP, which received the votes of 16,5 million people, the "focal point" of the anti-secular activities. Mr. Erdogan stressed that this was a move not only against the AKP, but also against the will of the people. Mr. Erdoğan described the AKP as a party emerging from the demands of the people and emphasized its embracing character, remarking that it employs deputies from 80 out of 81 Turkish provinces. He also stated that the AKP is the only party that can establish and sustain a democratic, secular and social state operating under the supremacy of the law. Mr. Erdogan highlighted the undemocratic character of the move and maintained that those who tainted the democratic character of the state and overshadowed the political and economic stability will carry the

burden. He added that the judicial system could not be used against the will of the people, wherein its power rests, and that the rule of law could not be sustained whilst ignoring the will of the people. (*Milliyet*)

POLITICAL PARTIES REACT TO AKP CLOSURE CASE

16 March

News of the case submitted to the Constitutional Court to close the governing AKP generated a range of reactions from other political parties. The Deputy Chairman of the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), stated that they do not endorse the closing of any party, and added that it was unfortunate that a governing party took the developments to the extent that the head prosecutor of Turkey submitted a case to close down the AKP because of its involvement in anti-secular activities. Zeki Sezer, the leader of the Democratic Left Party (DSP), which formed an alliance with the CHP during the latest general elections, stated that the AKP has problems with the secular and

democratic republic, and declined to further comment the matter as it is presently in the hands of the judicial authorities.

The chairman of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), Devlet Bahçeli said, "I want to say that before starting such a process in such an environment, the chief prosecutor should have calculated the political shortcomings and the scale of the damage more carefully. Opening a case proposing to close a party which is governing this country for 65 months is creating a situation which will have grave political consequences, if we set aside the legal dimension".

The Kurdish-rooted Democratic Society Party (DTP), which also has a group in the Turkish National Assembly and which is subjected to a parallel closure case, evaluated the developments from a different perspective. They expressed their disapproval by stating that this case demonstrated the need for expanded democracy. They referred to the people who, following the news of the case, turned out to be guardians of democracy – seemingly a jab at the ruling AKP which had endorsed the closure case against the DTP and efforts to lift the parliamentary immunity of DTP members, but deemed the case against itself a violation of democracy. (*Radikal - Turkiye - Vatan*)

REHN: "THERE IS NO WAY THIS COULD HAPPEN IN EUROPE"

16 March

The European Commission officer responsible for enlargement, Olli Rehn, stated that "the move from Turkey's chief prosecutor to close the AKP is not in line with democracy. You cannot see any such attempt in a European country that follows the principles of democracy. In a European country, political issues are discussed in the parliaments and are decided in the elections, not in the court halls. In democracies, governments do not interfere with the judiciary and the judiciary does not interfere with politics. I hope that these events do not exhaust the political energy in the country and do not distract attention from EU reforms. I trust the government with regard to the reforms."

The co-chair of the commission of the combined parliaments of the Turkish National Assembly and the European Parliament, Joost Lagendijk

stated, "I was struck with disbelief when I learned of the news. It is a grave mistake [...]. This behavior is emblematic of a state that does not trust its citizens. I am referring to the strict secular circles. They imply that they do not trust the people that the citizens elected or the judgment of the citizens. They are attempting to orchestrate a legal coup, as they could not defeat the AKP by political means. Turkey's relations with the international community will be greatly harmed if the AKP is closed down. We hope that this will not occur. If it does, the people will show their determination with a greater majority in the next elections. These events clearly demonstrate how desperate those supporting the case are". (*Hurriyet*)

PRIME MINISTER: I AM NEITHER ANGRY NOR UPSET

18 March

Despite his sharp remarks regarding the case to close the AKP, Prime Minister Erdogan eased tensions by stating that he was neither angry nor upset. In a press conference on March 17, Mr. Erdogan stated, "What I want to say to the people is that there is no need for distress. We will continue side by side with the people as we did before. Until Friday (the day the case was submitted) the stock market decreased to 38,000. We must consider this; if democracy is harmed, the economy is instantly affected. We long for another republic in its 100th anniversary, a Turkey that significantly improved in the fields of arts and sciences. We will not allow such barriers to prevent our efforts." (*Radikal*)

BAYKAL: NO PARTY SHOULD BE CLOSED

18 March

The chairman of the Republican People's Party (CHP) Deniz Baykal has addressed the case to close the AKP. Mr. Baykal stated that it is unacceptable to embrace the closure of any party in a democratic political environment. However, Mr. Baykal said that this was not a political, but rather a legal case prepared within the framework of its judicial responsibilities, and added that some reactions were exaggerated. He concluded by stressing that a more respectful stance should be taken vis-à-vis constitutional institutions. (*Sabah*)

DSP: CHANGING CONSTITUTION WOULD BE HARBINGER OF CHAOS

19 March

Democratic Left Party (DSP) Chairman Zeki Sezer stated in a press conference in the parliament that the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli's proposal that individuals, rather than political parties, should be punished was unfeasible. Mr. Sezer said that "The statements that Prime Minister Erdogan made regarding the Islamic headscarf issue while in Madrid provided an impetus to the events. We now witness attempts to influence the process by making amendments in the constitution with the proposal of the MHP, while the case is ongoing. This symbolizes new chaos. Attempts to amend the constitution while the case is processing will damage the rule of law" (*Sabah*)

FORMULAS FOR THE AKP TO EVADE THE CASE

20 March

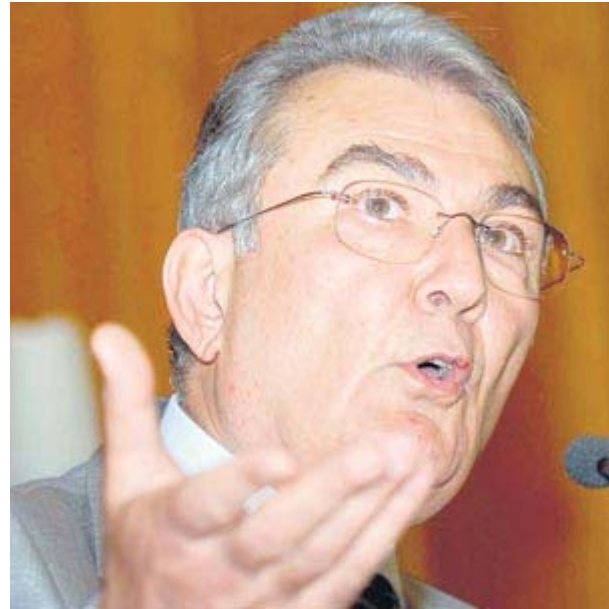
The AKP is trying to prevent the Constitutional Court from closing the party, and for this purpose, four formulas are on the agenda. First, there is the "Venice" formula, which states that political parties can only be closed as a result of the promotion of violence and racism. The formula also allows individuals, people in the party administration, to be banned from politics. The second is the "Brussels" formula, which requires the permission of the parliament to close political parties. The third is the "Japanese" formula, which makes the decisions of the Constitutional Court subject to a vote in the parliament. The last formula would remove the authority of the chief prosecutor to open a closure case, instead granting it to a council that would include representatives from various legal institutions. (*Radikal*)

CHANGING THE 68th AND 69th CLAUSES OF CONSTITUTION

21 March

The AKP's legal staff has proposed to negotiate with the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) in order to prevent political parties from being closed. The proposal includes amendments to the 68th and 69th articles of the constitution.

According to the proposal, it would be impossible to open a case to close down a political party based on crimes committed by individual party leaders or administrators. Hence individuals, in the first place, will be responsible for their acts. Racism, incitement to violence, terror, separatism, accepting money from a foreign state, or a party program's discordance with the constitution would constitute reasons to close the party. (*Sabah*)



BAYKAL: AKP IS TRYING TO CREATE ITS OWN "DEEP STATE"

22 March

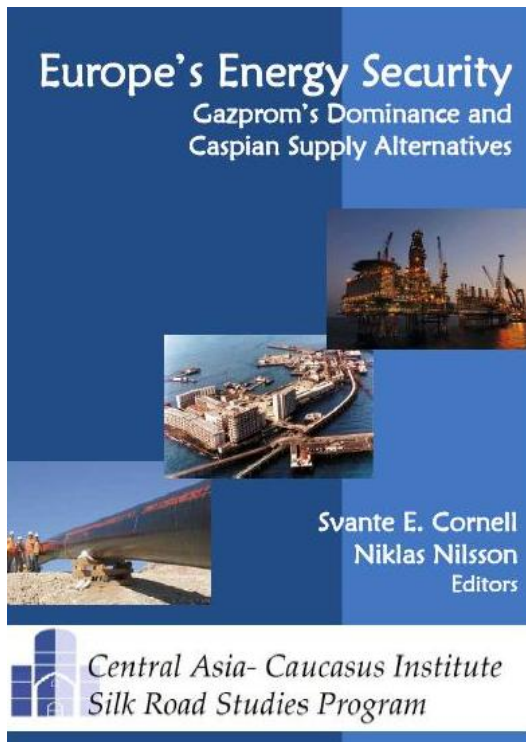
CHP chairman Deniz Baykal reacted against the taking into custody of *Cumhuriyet* newspaper columnist Ilhan Selçuk, Workers' Party chairman Dogu Perinçek and the former rector of Istanbul University, Kemal Alemdaroglu. He accused the AKP of attempting to create its own "deep state". Mr. Baykal said: "We face new problems every day in the second term of the AKP. Conflicts unheard of in a democratic country have become normal in Turkey. The price is paid by the republic, national unity and the democratic culture of Turkey. The legal system and the rule of law are under serious threat. The AKP is attempting to amend the constitution according to its wishes". (*Sabah*)

LEFTIST JOURNALIST ILHAN SELCUK TAKEN INTO CUSTODY DURING ERGENEKON OPERATION

22 March

Ilhan Selcuk, a columnist in the anti-AKP daily newspaper *Cumhuriyet* and a prominent leftist political figure in Turkey, was taken into custody on Friday within the framework of the Ergenekon operation. Eleven more people were taken into custody, including the Workers' Party leader Dogu Perinçek and the former rector of Istanbul University, Kemal Alemdaroglu. Although there is no official statement from the law enforcement official responsible for the Ergenekon Operation, it is said that Mr. Selçuk was taken into custody on claims of "acting on behalf of an organization

without being a member of the organization". Some analysts maintain that the operation is a new step in the power struggle between secularists and Islamists. Many AKP officials, including Prime Minister Erdogan, have stated that the case to close down the AKP was launched in order to cover up the Ergenekon issue. The Ergenekon gang is suspected of being responsible for a series of bombings targeting *Cumhuriyet* newspaper offices last year. It is also said that the group had been plotting a series of bomb attacks and assassinations, and were responsible for the killing of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink. (*Hurriyet*)



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SECTION II: FOREIGN RELATIONS

Summary: The warming of the political climate on Cyprus, and a meeting between the two Cypriot leaders was a focal point in Turkish discussion of foreign relations, together with the visit to Ankara of U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney. This visit was widely interpreted to be related to U.S. efforts to counter Iran, while NATO's Afghanistan operation was another main point on the agenda.

CHRISTOFIAS: WE ARE READY TO REACH A VIABLE SOLUTION

19 March

On the subject of the upcoming meeting with the Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat on Friday, Greek Cypriot President Dimitris Christofias emphasized his aspirations for a viable solution. Mr. Christofias stressed the importance of preparations in order to ensure progress. He added that his side was ready to work hard and that the two sides must reach a consensus, as a new failure would be devastating for the future. (*Hurriyet*)

CRUCIAL DAY FOR CYPRUS

20 March

On Friday, the two leaders of Cyprus will meet for the first time, and the European Union and the United States are looking forward to the meeting. However, the two sides have differences regarding the process. The opening of the Lokmaci gate is anticipated as a concrete outcome of the meeting. It is widely professed that a new "window of opportunity" will open after the end of Mr. Papadopoulos' term. Turkey has confidence in this opportunity and is attempting to initiate a new negotiation process. The Turkish and Greek sides acknowledge that the prospect of uniting the island will be lost if the efforts to instigate a new negotiation process fail. As mentioned,

both sides have significant differences concerning the process. While the Greek side wants to base the negotiations on the March 8 agreement, the Turkish side claims the Annan Plan as the basis of the negotiations. (*Sabah*)

TWO LEADERS OF CYPRUS AGREED TO START NEW PROCESS

21 March

The first meeting between Mr. Christofias and Mr. Talat since Mr. Christofias' election victory raised hopes for reopening talks that are very important for Turkey's aspirations for EU membership. "This is a new era. Our target is to find a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus problem as soon as possible," Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat stated after the meeting. Mr. Christofias stated that they were optimistic and they both agreed to cooperate in good will. He said, "I look forward [...] to having results in three months' time which will help us maintain a dialogue under the auspices of the Secretary General". The leaders also agreed to open a crossing point on Ledra Street. It is said that the opening of the crossing point will increase confidence and improve the atmosphere for the difficult negotiations ahead. (*Hurriyet*)

CHENEY "COMING FOR IRAN"

23 March

The Vice President of the United States will arrive in Turkey tomorrow. In his tour, which includes the Middle Eastern states, it is said that Mr. Cheney aims to search for support for a possible operation against Iran and will request the use of Turkish bases. It is said that Mr. Cheney explains the reasons for a military operation by the United States on the DEBKAfile news site, which is known for its affiliation with the Israeli intelligence services. A high level authority speaking to the website stated that the main topic of discussion on Mr. Cheney's agenda would be Iran. On the subject of Mr. Cheney's visit to Ankara, it is said that Turkey is one of the most important countries in the alleged military plans as U.S. warplanes and missiles headed for Iran must use Turkish airspace and bases. (*Sabah*)

LAGENDJIK: 2008 RISKS BEING A LOST YEAR FOR TURKEY

23 March

The co-chair of the EU-Turkey Mixed Parliamentary Commission, Joost Lagendjik, stated that 2008 could be a lost year for Turkey. Refusing to comment on the substance of the Ergenekon operation, Mr. Lagendjik expressed his disapproval of the way journalist İlhan Selçuk was taken into custody. Mr. Lagendjik stated that two camps have emerged in Turkey, and added that it was not a surprise in the light of recent developments. He underlined that tensions will increase significantly if the two sides continue to struggle with each other in this way, and referred to the case to close down the AKP, and the subsequent Ergenekon operation. Regarding the connection between the case and operation, Mr. Lagendjik stated, "I do not know if there was an actual connection between them or if one is a retaliatory move against the other; however, this is how it is perceived from the outside". Mr. Lagendjik also stated that the recent developments and increased tension in Turkey would affect the EU process and reforms and proceeded to state that "the worst danger is turning 2008 into a lost year like 2007. This is the most significant potential danger of the struggle". (*Milliyet*)

CHENEY INSISTED ON MEETING WITH BUYUKANIT

24 March

U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney is currently in Ankara, the last destination of his 10-day trip. His agenda includes Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran. Mr. Cheney will meet President Abdullah Gül, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Turkish Chief of Staff General Yasar Büyükanit. Mr. Cheney insisted on a meeting with Mr. Büyükanit as a result of his remarks opposing sending more soldiers to Afghanistan. Mr. Cheney will call for stronger cooperation in the struggle against the PKK, and encourage dialogue after visiting Massoud Barzani, leader of the Regional Kurdish Administration in Northern Iraq. According to diplomatic sources, the main aim of the visit is Iran. The Bush administration allegedly wants Turkey to deal with Iran in a harsher way and to approve the steps taken as countermeasure against Iran "without criticism". Ankara, insisting on a dialogue with Iran, sent a message to Iranian President Ahmadinejad, who wanted to visit Turkey this month, explaining that due to the diplomatic traffic the proposed visit must be suspended until April. (*Radikal*)

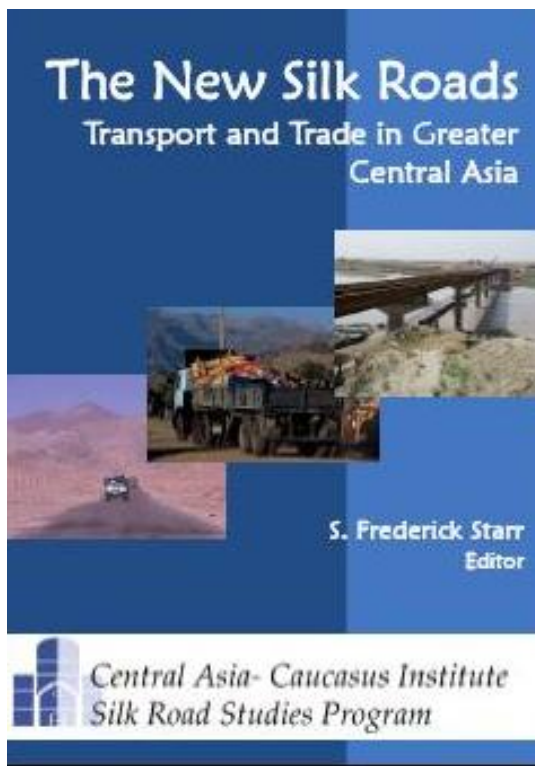
TURKMEN LEADER GURBANGULY BERDYMUKHAMEDOV TO DISCUSS NABUCCO PIPELINE IN TURKEY

24 March

The Turkmen President will discuss project plans with the government of Turkey to build a natural gas pipeline not crossing Russia, a source in the Turkmen government told Reuters on Friday. "The Trans-Caspian and Nabucco pipelines are on the agenda. But in this visit, the discussion will probably be limited to an exchange of opinions." The West particularly wants Turkmenistan, which borders Iran, to join the US- and EU-backed Nabucco pipeline project, designed to help Europe diversify its gas imports and stem reliance on Russia. Meanwhile, Turkey and the European Union have agreed on a site near Ankara, Ahiboz, for the start of the Nabucco

pipeline, a high level Turkish energy ministry official told Reuters. The European Union's support, including financial aid, will help build the physical infrastructure that will turn Ahiboz into an energy hub, the official said.

Gas supplies for the project have thus far only been secured in Azerbaijan. (*Turkish Daily News*)



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