

The Turkey Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING

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Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program

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THE FORTNIGHT IN REVIEW

I. What the Columnists Say10

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THE TURKEY ANALYST

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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.

The Turkey Analyst aims to provide our industrious and engaged audience with a singular and reliable assessment of events and trends written in an analytical tone rather than a polemical one. *Analyst* articles reflect the fact that we have a diverse international audience. While this should not affect what authors write about or their conclusions, this does affect the tone of articles. *Analyst* articles focus on a newsworthy topic, engage central issues of the latest breaking news, and are backed by solid evidence. Articles should normally be based on local language news sources. The lead analyses appearing in the *Turkey Analyst* are unsigned, being written by one, two, or all of the three Editors.

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KEY ISSUE: A short 75-word statement of your conclusions about the issue or news event on which the article focuses.

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.

Those interested in submitting an article to the *Turkey Analyst* should send their submission, or an article query describing the main arguments of the article, together with a CV to: info@silkroadstudies.org.

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TURKEY IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL: WHAT ROLE COULD IT PLAY?

M. K. Kaya

Turkey's election to the United Nations Security Council represents a significant achievement for Turkish diplomacy. The fact that more than a hundred and fifty countries cast their votes for Turkey is evidence that the more diversified, multi-dimensional foreign policy pursued by the governing Justice and Development party, AKP, is paying off. However, the Turkish success in the UN portends a development that could eventually result in Turkey becoming less Western-oriented in its foreign policy.

BACKGROUND: For nearly sixty years, Turkish foreign policy priorities have been dictated by the requirements of the membership in the Western alliance. The alliance with the United States has formed the country's strategic bedrock. Turkey has seen itself as a Western country, and it has applied significant efforts since the end of the 1990s to become a member of the European Union. And it is from the pool of European countries that

Turkey was elected to its temporary seat in the United Nations Security Council. Yet the election is symbolic in another respect, as it represents the coronation of policies that have increasingly ventured beyond what has been traditional Turkish foreign policy.

The Turkish accession to the UN Security Council is the result of multi-dimensional endeavors and engagements; thus, it serves to underline the

change that is under way in Turkey's foreign policy priorities. In its rhetoric, the Islamic conservative AKP government remains committed to the goal of Turkish EU membership. Indeed, Turkish Islamic conservatives admittedly took a historic step when they broke with their tradition of virulent anti-Westernism. Yet in reality, the AKP has displayed



little enthusiasm for the EU since 2005. Its embrace of Europe was a step that was above all prompted by the realization that their way to power would remain blocked if they persisted in appearing hostile in particular to the United States. And by championing EU membership, the Islamic conservatives have been able to occupy the ideological high ground in Turkish politics as agents of modernization and liberalization.

Meanwhile, the AKP government has actively sought to strengthen Turkey's economic, political and cultural relations with its neighbors, with the country's so called "strategic depth". Relations have been cultivated with Iran and Syria. In addition, the twin policies of attracting Arab capital and of nurturing good relations with the world of Islam have enabled Turkey to gain significant prestige among Arab countries. Moreover, the bilateral relations between Turkey and African countries have evolved as never before, with the establishment of new embassies in several African countries.

The AKP had not been focused on the Caucasus and Central Asia until Russia intervened in Georgia. However, after the intervention, Turkey began dealing with the region more intensely. Although relations between the West on the one hand, and Russia and Iran on the other, are strained and marked by strategic and ideological adversity, Turkey has been actively courted by these two countries, and Ankara has notably not shown Tehran and Moscow any cold hand. In particular, the idea of a Caucasus Pact (subsequently changed to the Caucasus Platform) put on the agenda by Turkey during the Russian invasion of Georgia included only Russia,

Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia – leaving out the U.S. and Europe, a telling sign of the new thinking in Turkish foreign policy. Initiatives are taken in a way that often exclude Turkey's Western allies. Turkey's insistence that the question of Iranian nuclear capacity should be resolved by negotiations and in a way that takes Iranian interests into due consideration, and the



NATO Ships in the Black Sea

additional fact that Turkey has come to share the same view as Russia on the question of the presence of NATO ships in the Black Sea are other examples of a foreign policy that seems to evolve away from Western priorities.

IMPLICATIONS: This change in Turkish foreign policy is explained not so much by what the United States and Europe have or have not done with regard to Turkey; it should rather be seen against the backdrop of an accumulated intellectual tradition of anti-Westernism. For decades, Turkish intellectuals on both the right and left have faulted the West, in particular the United States, for Turkey's troubles. All major political forces today, from the Islamic conservatives in government to the secularists and

nationalists in the opposition, are psychologically inclined to take an anti-Western stance.

Admittedly, Turkish-American relations have been severely tested by the Iraq war and its consequences. The failure of the AKP to “deliver”, when the Turkish parliament voted against letting the United States invade Iraq via Turkey, caused great consternation in Washington at the time. Meanwhile, the invasion enabled the Kurdish separatist PKK to establish itself in the safe haven of Kurdish-administered Northern Iraq and mount a new wave of attacks on Turkey. As nationalist Turks see it, the United States is engaged in an effort to undermine the integrity of Turkey, as Americans long prevented Turkey from taking any decisive action itself in northern Iraq and as the United States itself refrained from taking direct action against the PKK.

Meanwhile, Turkish-European relations continue on a less than cordial level. Yet, it would be wrong to explain the shifting priorities of Turkish foreign policy with the effects of the Iraq war or with the cold reception given Turkey in European capitals. The AKP has not become anti-American or anti-European; the AKP has in fact never been pro-American or pro-European in any deeper, ideological sense. The basic fact that the Islamic conservatives cannot afford to be hostile to the United States and that they depend on having Europe’s benediction remain unchanged realities for the AKP, the eastern and southern foreign policy re-orientations notwithstanding.

Still, a deeper strategic estrangement from the West may eventually very well result. With the evolution of closer relations with countries like Russian and Iran, the diversification of Turkish foreign policy is bound to interact with internal dynamics that continue to gather strength. These internal dynamics point towards a growing, cultural estrangement from the West. It is religious conservatism and nationalism, not

Western-style liberalism that are on the ascendancy in Turkish society. Turkey is not only becoming a religiously more conservative country; the opposition to this development is increasingly expressed in terms of anti-Western nationalism, as the West is seen as the supporter of Islamic conservatism in Turkey.

CONCLUSIONS: While the governing AKP cultivates relations with the Muslim Middle East in particular, the secularist opposition, deserted by a West that seems to have opted for a “moderately” Islamic Turkey, is tempted by “Eurasian” orientations, in search of new allies that unlike the United States and Europe would not confront the secular and unitary foundations of the Turkish republic. Officially, the Turkish armed forces remain as committed as ever to the strategic alliance with the United States, a fact that was reiterated by the new chief of the General staff, General Ilker Basbug, in his inauguration speech a few months ago. Yet, it was no coincidence that the new army chief, General Isik Kosaner, struck a very different, pointedly anti-American chord in his inauguration speech. Several retired generals have spoken out in favor of a Eurasian reorientation of Turkish foreign policy strategies, with Russia, China and Iran replacing the United States. There is no doubt that such a current of thought exists in military ranks, a fact to which General Kosaner’s speech testified, although it is obviously difficult, not to say impossible, to assess its current strength.

The seat in the United Nations Security council presents Turkey with a platform and an opportunity to further develop its relations with a wider range of countries. With mutually reinforcing internal and external dynamics, Turkey would seem to be on course to become less Western in its strategic priorities and cultural orientations alike. It remains to be seen whether its behavior in the security council will bear this out.

THE KURDS AND THE TURKISH STATE: INTERVIEW WITH METIN HEPER

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Metin Heper is professor of politics at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey. Heper has recently published an account of how the Turkish state has treated the Kurdish question, "The State and Kurds in Turkey – The question of assimilation" (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Professor Heper shared his views on the Kurdish question, about its history and about what the future may hold, with the Turkey Analyst.

Q: Professor Heper, in your view, what constitutes the root cause of the Kurdish problem in Turkey?

A: The bulk of the literature on the Kurdish issue in Turkey starts with the assumption that the root of the problem is that the Turkish state has attempted to "assimilate" the Kurds. The present paradigm suggests that the Kurds then resorted to rebellion, and that the state suppressed those rebellions so that it could continue to assimilate the Kurds.

Those working with that paradigm argue that the state denied the existence of Kurdish ethnicity, and that it has tried to render so called "errant Turks" into genuine Turks. In my book, I point out that the state in fact did not deny the existence of ethnic

Kurds. What the state did, was that it refrained from an open recognition of the reality of Kurdish ethnicity – notably during periods of "troubles", that is when there was rebellion in the Kurdish areas, specifically in the 1920s and 1930s. It was hoped that such a policy would prevent Kurds from stressing their secondary identity, which would have made it difficult for them to live with the primary identity of being Turks in a generic sense.

After all, why would the rulers of a country in which, for centuries, peoples of different faiths and ethnic origins had been able to live in relative

harmony, decide one day to assimilate one of these peoples, particularly the one, which, compared to some others displayed fewer differences?

Q: Of course,



to that one may retort that there is a difference between the experience of the Ottoman Empire and that of the Turkish republic. In the literature, it is usually assumed that the Turkish republican endeavor represents a radical departure from the ethnic tolerance that characterized the Ottoman period, and critics of the republic hold that it is based on narrow nationalism. But you do not seem to see any basic discontinuity between the Ottoman and republican periods?

A: It is worth noting that when a Turkish nationalism began to evolve at the start of the twentieth century, leading Turkish intellectuals did not act as proponents of views that would render the Turks hostile towards the different, of either ethnic or religious variety. There was no resort to exclusivist nationalism; indeed a longing for common Ottoman citizenship lingered on. The Young Turks, for instance, placed their emphasis on egalitarianism; their Turkism, which developed

as a corollary to Ottomanism, stood for solidarity, it did not favor any Turkish ethnicity at the expense of the other elements of the empire. The universalization of the Turkish language, a policy which the republic was to pursue more radically, was seen as necessary for enabling the non-Turks to participate in and make contributions to the social, economic and political life of the country.

In the view of the Ottomans, Anatolia was made up of “Kurd and Turk”. Educated Kurds were favored for state employment at all levels. In the late nineteenth century, the Kurds were given priority for being integrated with the Turks. That did not change with the advent of the republic. Indeed, it was the same things that had triggered the Kurdish uprisings in the late Ottoman era as it was to do in the early days of the republic: the causes were non-ethnic; the uprisings were caused by the threat that the “alarming increase in Western penetration” posed to Islam and



traditional society. There were also complaints about socio-economic conditions and a reaction to the centralizing policies of the Ottoman state. History repeated itself in the 1920s.

The republican leadership did not depart from Ottoman tradition; they did not try to make the Kurds into Turks. From the very beginning, the word “Turk” was not used as an adjective; it remained a generic name denoting the primary identity of all those peoples who shared a common culture and/or thought of themselves as citizens of Turkey. The founder of the republic, Kemal Atatürk, wished to unite the Turks and the Kurds on a common platform of “contemporary civilization”. It was thus a civic nationalism.

However, Atatürk had toyed with the idea of granting the Kurds autonomy in the South-east area; he and the rest of the leadership changed their mind when they realized that the Kurds did not live in separate enclaves, but were spread out in many parts of the country. And although they spoke of

“contemporary civilization”, the founders were well aware of the fact that Islam continued to constitute an important dimension of the value systems and attitudes of not only the Kurds, but also of the Turks.

Consequently, despite the fact that Turkey had constitutionally adopted civic nationalism, in practice that nationalism was for a long time supplemented by cultural nationalism. That approach obviously did work against the non-Muslim citizens of Turkey, but not against the Kurds. Thus, the acculturation that had been going

on between Kurds and Turks for many centuries continued. That shared history meant that the concepts of assimilation as well as accommodation were alien for the Turkish state; an adequate degree of cultural homogeneity was presumed to exist among the Muslim citizens of the state. The state thus considered the Kurds as well as other Muslim communities of non-Turkish ethnic origin as “first class citizens”; in the view of the state, the granting of group rights to the Kurds would have amounted to discrimination against a cross-section of the population who were not “minorities”, and who were, in contrast, an integral part of the mainstream population.

Indeed, since 2004, when the state began limited TV broadcasting in Kurdish, as well in some other ethnic languages, an uneasiness has arisen among several ethnic groups in Turkey; the latter registered their opposition to such broadcasting by arguing this would be tantamount to the state viewing them as “second class citizens”.



Q: It is thus erroneous to describe the Kurdish question as being about ethnicity?

A: Since the assimilation of the Kurds has not been the official policy of the republican state the first round of “troubles” – the uprisings in the 1920s and the 1930s – was

basically attributed to Islamic factors and to foreign complicity. The second round, which started with the uprising of the PKK in the 1980s, was attributed to radical leftism. Consequently, the measures adopted by the state in order to deal with the “troubles” have also been non-ethnic. In “normal times”, the state has had no trouble

granting the Kurds the right of cultural expression, because it has not denied the ethnic identity of its Kurdish citizens. However, during times of trouble, a policy of non-recognition, if not denial, was adopted as a way of preventing the ethnic identity of the Kurds replacing a primary identity of Turkishness in the generic sense. All along, at least at its higher echelons, the state displayed a sympathetic, if not a compassionate attitude towards the Kurds, even in the heat of “troubles”. Indeed, even during the periods of “troubles” no generalized and lingering hostility developed between the Kurds and the Turks.

Q: But are there not signs that indicate that the harmony between Turks and Kurds is in jeopardy? I have in mind for instance the incidents that took place in the province of Balikesir in early October,



when violence broke out between Kurdish and Turkish inhabitants. That incident resulted in a flurry of commentaries in the media that Turkey risks going through things similar to what happened in the Balkans in the 1990s.

A: I find such comments extremely exaggerated. That is in the nature of the media, to dramatize events beyond proportion. I have no worries whatsoever about the future of the ethnic harmony in Turkey. Turks and Kurds have lived together for centuries; indeed how are we supposed to separate the two? That is impossible. Incidents like the one in Balikesir have occurred before, and each time, after emotions have run high, the incident has been quickly forgotten. The same will happen this time.

THE FORTNIGHT IN REVIEW

SECTION I: WHAT THE COLUMNISTS SAY

The question of how history is to be interpreted dominated the Turkish debate during the last fortnight. The celebration of the 85th anniversary of the republic, and in particular a new film about the founder of the republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, has given rise to a fierce debate that shows no signs of abating. The debate has once again revealed that Atatürk, 70 years after his death, is still a living figure that defines identities and causes great controversies. Can Dündar, a journalist and documentary film maker, declared that his intention with the film “Mustafa” was to humanize the founder of the republic, to portray him as an ordinary human being with ordinary flaws. The many critics of the film have above all objected that Dündar has distorted history, not least by portraying Atatürk as a cruel dictator. Finally, the resignation of the deputy party leader of the governing AKP, Dengir Mehmet Mir Firat, has generally been perceived as a sign that the AKP is taking a hard line nationalist stance in the Kurdish question.

BILA: A STRANGLED REPUBLIC

According to Fikret Bila of Milliyet, the republic that celebrates its 85th anniversary is not at ease. It is pulled down, it is being pushed backwards. Its foundations are weakened. Every effort is made to undermine it. The founding principles of the republic - secularism and a unitary state - are challenged as never before. The exploitation of religious sentiments by right wing governments during the last fifty years has made the republic into something very different from the original republic. The foes of the republic have understood perfectly why Atatürk chose to entrust the youth with the mission of defending the republic. They have carefully raised a religious youth that has come to occupy the positions of power.

The system of education does not serve to produce a secular youth. Neither the state nor the private sector has dispensed any real efforts to secure the growth of a secular minded youth.

SAHIN: THE SCENE IS CHANGED

The changes in the leadership of the AKP signals that the political scene of Turkey has been altered, notes Haluk Sahin in Radikal. Causing great consternation among his liberal supporters, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has reverted to a nationalist rhetoric. Erdogan understands perfectly well the strength of nationalist feelings. He knows that the AKP has to appeal to nationalist opinion in order to hold on to its gains in western and central Turkey in the upcoming

local elections of March 2009. Of course, it is important to capture Diyarbakir from the Kurdish nationalist DTP, but not at the prize of losing Istanbul, Ankara, Kayseri, Izmir and the nationalist hinterland. The fact that Dengir Mehmet Mir Firat is replaced by Abdülkadir Aksu, an altogether different kind of Kurd, is extremely telling. Meanwhile, with Erdogan going more nationalist and populist, it will apparently be up to President Abdullah Gül to reassure Europeans that the AKP has not really changed. I believe that the accentuated divergence in the messages of Erdogan and Gül must be understood in that light.

KISLALI: THE MILITARY AND THE AKP SEEMINGLY UNITED

It would seem that the Armed forces and the AKP government are united in the common effort of defeating the separatist terrorism of the PKK, writes Mehmet Ali Kislali in *Radikal*, who thinks that developments since the election last year, significantly the decisions of the Constitutional court, may have had a sobering effect on Prime Minister Erdogan. And it would not be surprising if the clear positions taken by the new Chief of the General staff concerning the defining questions of secularism and the unitary state had influenced the Prime Minister. It should however be noted that there are circles that do not subscribe to the view that the AKP has accepted the red lines of the military.

ÜLSEVER: A DEFINING PARTING OF WAYS

The parting of ways between Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat is a defining moment for the AKP, writes Cüneyt Ülsever in *Hürriyet*. The corruption allegations against Firat may have contributed to that parting of the ways. But the real reason is that they had come to hold different positions regarding the Kurdish issue. It is well known that the new deputy party leader, Abdülkadir Aksu, is viewed with sympathy by the Armed forces and the protectors of the status quo.

DÜNDAR: I AM BEING LYNCHED

I am practically being lynched, says Can Dündar, the director of the controversial film "Mustafa", in an interview with Ayse Arman in *Hürriyet*. Of the more than three hundred articles about the film, most are critical. Now I know what it means to confront taboos. I have made this film for one reason only: I have studied the subject of Atatürk for years, and I have found out that the man that rises from the depth of the hidden archives is not the man that we are taught to revere. More and more, the official Atatürk obscures the real life Atatürk; he was not a boring figure, but a very radical revolutionary and an interesting personality. It is absurd, but while paying lip service to Atatürk and elevating him to an untouchable icon, the state has in fact censured him. His diaries have not been published, and the school book that he wrote has been subjected to censorship.

SECTION II: DOMESTIC POLITICS

LEFTIST OPPOSITION PARTIES BOYCOTTED THE CELEBRATIONS OF THE REPUBLIC

30 October

The main opposition leader Deniz Baykal of the Republican People's Party (CHP) and Democratic Left Party (DSP) leader Zeki Sezer boycotted the celebrations of the Republic Day held at the parliament in a protest against President Abdullah Gül. Sources say that Baykal held a meeting with a group of deputies at CHP's central office in Ankara during the ceremony. CHP also did not attend the reception hosted by Gül at the presidential palace. CHP deputy Sükrü Elekdag was the only member of the party who attended the ceremony, but he said that he was there as a retired ambassador, not as a representative of CHP. Deniz Baykal said in a written statement on Wednesday, explaining his boycott, that "Under these conditions, when the values of the republic are eroded and corrupted, celebrations other than the visit to Anitkabir (the Mausoleum of Kemal Atatürk) do not carry any meaning ascribable to Republic Day". The parliament Speaker Köksal Toptan responded to this statement by saying that the ceremony in the parliament was about the republic, not the president. Other representatives of significant political parties and almost all of the commanders of the armed forces joined the ceremony. (*Hürriyet*)

DTP'S PROPOSALS FOR SOLUTION OF THE KURDISH ISSUE

30 October

The Democratic Society party, DTP, collected its proposals for a solution to the long-standing Kurdish problem in a 64 pages long book. The book was sent to the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and all the ministers and deputies on October 23. The book is a compilation of the "Political Attitude Document," which foresees autonomy for Kurds living in Turkey. It provides answers to the question "What do Kurds want?" According to the book the answer to that question is that radical changes are called for in the political and administrative structure of the state. The

proposal envisages granting broader authority to local administrations, including giving the right for locals to elect their own governors and calls for "a smaller state and a greater society". The book also stresses the importance of ensuring the free use of the Kurdish language in public as well as recognizing the Kurdish identity under the new constitution and changing the notion of a "Turkish nation" into a "nation of Turkey". *Sabah 30/10-08*

ERDOGAN VISITS HAKKARI

30 October

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan paid a visit to the Southeast provinces this weekend, a move that led to protests and violence. During Erdogans visit in Hakkari, DTP supporters protested violently, clashing with police, throwing stones and setting fire to vehicles. Police fired into the air and used pepper spray to disperse the protesters. Protesters surrounded the DTP office in Yüksekova and chanted slogans supporting the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). In central Hakkari, demonstrators used stones to attack a convoy of 17 vehicles carrying AKP members. Erdogan responded to the violence's by saying that "Democracy and terror cannot coexist together". He continued by saying that the protests were undemocratic; "You say that you are using a democratic right to protest, but then burn cars belonging to innocent people, what kind of democratic right is that?" (*Zaman*)

FIRAT OUT, AKSU IN

7 November

The AKP's Deputy Chairman, Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat resigned from his duty, to be replaced by Abdülkadir Aksu. Firat said that it was his own decision to leave his position and that he will continue his duties by remaining as a deputy. Firat's resignation follows on accusations of corruption and drug trafficking put forward by the deputy chairman of the CHP's parliamentary group Kemal Kilicdaroglu. However, AKP claims that these accusations have nothing to do with Firat's resignation. Erdogan stated that Firat had spoken to

him three days ago, and that he had expressed that he was tired and wanted to leave his duty as the AKP's Deputy Chairman due to health problems. (*Radikal*)

ALEVI DEMONSTRATIONS IN ANKARA

7 November

Today the Alevi Bektasi Federation held a demonstration in Ankara. However, several Alevi organizations did not participate, as the demonstration was sponsored by the Kurdish DTP. The chairman of "Cem Foundation", the main Alevi organization, Professor Izzetin Dogan, said that the Kurdish movement seeks support from the Alevi movement. DTP responded by saying that they wanted to support the first Alevi

demonstration. Hidir Bulut, another Alevi leader, said that this demonstration will not lead to any progress being made in the Alevi question and that the demonstration will not be seen as representative by the majority of Alevis. Bulut also stressed that it is important for the Alevi not to participate in the Kurdish DTP's political game. "The aim for this demonstration is to weaken the AKP in the southeast provinces, but it will not be successful." He continued by saying that AKP is a very good choice for the Alevi and that the party will double its support among Alevi voters in the upcoming local elections. (*Yeni Safak*)

SECTION III: FOREIGN RELATIONS

THE WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM IN TURKEY

30 October

The World Economic Forum opened a regional meeting in Turkey that will try to find solutions to the global economic crisis. The meeting that will last for three days will focus on business opportunities that might arise from the crisis, energy and resources security, Central Asia's role in the world and Turkey's position as a bridge that connects Europe with Asia and Middle East. The managing director, Borge Brende said, Turkey and other countries with developing economies "can't decouple from the potential recession we are now seeing in the U.S. and in Europe." He continued by saying, "But we would like to sit down together and develop strategies on how to overcome this as fast as possible and to have sustainable growth again." (*Sabah*)

TURKISH-U.S TIES CAN BE HARMED BY U.S RECOGNITION OF THE CLAIMED ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

30 October

The chief foreign policy advisor of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Ahmet Davutoglu, warned the future U.S government that it should avoid "offending" Turkey by endorsing Armenians claims of genocide, to ensure that the reconciliation process with Armenia will continue. Davutoglu told the reporters that "A step in the wrong direction will pose a risk not only to the Turkish-American strategic cooperation but also to Turkey's efforts to reach out to Armenia". Barack Obama has made promises to the Armenian-American voters that he will recognize the allegations of genocide and support a congressional resolution endorsing the claims. Turkey has repeatedly warned that U.S recognition could have damaging impact on Turkish-U.S ties. Another topic that was discussed during the Washington meeting was Iran's nuclear program and Davutoglu predicted a "success story" in Turkish-U.S ties in the coming term no matter who is elected to the White House, he said, "The new president will be the best friend of Turkey". (*Sabah*)

THE PEACE TALKS CONTINUES BETWEEN THE TURKISH CYPRIOT LEADER AND HIS GREEK COUNTERPART

3 November

The Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat and his Greek Cypriot counterpart Demetris Christofias met on Monday within the framework of the comprehensive peace talks which were launched in September. Talat and Christofias have met five times before and will continue to discuss the issue of administration and power sharing and negotiate the legislation of united Cyprus. The talks mark the first major push for peace since the failure of a U.N. reunification plan in 2004, which was approved by Turkish Cypriots but rejected by the Greek Cypriots. (*Hürriyet*)

THE PRIME MINISTER OF LEBANON IS GRATEFUL TO TURKEY

4 November

Turkey and Lebanon signed a cooperation deal against terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime. Ankara has recently intensified its efforts to resolve long-standing conflicts in the Middle East, which the Prime Minister of Lebanon, Fuad Siniora was very grateful for. Since last May, Turkey has mediated indirect peace talks between Israel and Syria. Ankara has expressed hope that progress in the talks may also help the initiation of peace efforts between Israel and Lebanon. (*Hürriyet*)

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW CHANGES ARE NEEDED

5 November

The Foreign Minister Ali Babacan said to the media during his visit in Rome that constitutional changes are necessary in order to successfully implement reforms in the process of becoming an EU member. The media asked Babacan if it is the constitutional court in Turkey that has made it hard for the parliament to make changes and implement reforms. He answered that there are minor problems. He added that these issues will be dealt with and that a solution will be found. (*Yeni Safak*)

EU COMMENDED TURKEY FOR ITS ROLE IN THE CONFLICT IN CAUCASUS

5 November

The European Union said on Wednesday that Turkey must speed up political and legal reforms if it wants to improve its chances of EU membership. The European Commission declared for the first

time Turkey as a functioning market economy, which is a crucial step for eventual EU membership, but the Commission also said that the country's reforms had been put on hold because of recent political rows. The EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn said "despite its strong political mandate, the government did not put forward a consistent and comprehensive program of political reforms". The annual progress report states that the slow process of reforms was in part due to the attempts to ban the ruling AKP. Rehn commended Turkey for its role in the conflict in Caucasus, but urged Ankara to help end the division of Cyprus after the launch of reunification negotiations. The annual report listed areas where progress towards democratic standards has been made, including the role of the military, anti-corruption efforts, human rights, gender equality and respect for minorities. However the report is unlikely to significantly affect the negotiations regarding Turkey's EU membership. Entry talks with Turkey started in 2005, but there has not been as much progress as was initially hoped for. EU-Turkish relations have been negatively affected by continued disagreement over the Cyprus issue, and by the opposition of France to Turkish membership. (*Hurriyet*).

RUSSIA'S SUPPORT IS NEEDED IN THE RESOLUTION OF THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

5 November

Foreign Minister Ali Babacan praised Russia for hosting talks between the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan on the long-running dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh, dismissing suggestions that Moscow's diplomatic drive is an attempt to steal the mediator role from Ankara. Babacan said that, "It is a fact that no solution can be achieved in Nagorno-Karabakh without Russia's support and consent." With a regional initiative, "Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform", Turkey aims to bring itself, Armenia, Russia, Azerbaijan and Georgia together, in an attempt to facilitate a cooperation. Babacan also stressed that it is however not possible to reach a resolution in the region without including Russia and the U.S. The presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia agreed over the weekend in Moscow to instruct their foreign ministers "to speed up further moves in the negotiating process". (*Zaman*)

OBAMA MAY PUT PRESSURE ON TURKEY'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORDS

6 November

President elect Barack Obama is welcomed by most ordinary Turks, but his election could also lead to change with more pressure put on the government to speed up the reforms for a better state of human rights in the country. Obama has also made it clear that he supports Armenian claims of genocide during the World War I. Experts say that Obama is likely to revive the Democratic tradition of applying more pressure about human rights which is a key demand of the European Union in the membership process. EU has urged Ankara to do more when it comes to political reforms and Washington may come to join the EU line in pressuring Turkey for a better human rights record. Turkey have managed for decades to block Armenian efforts to win U.S recognition for the genocide claims, but with new Obama era it is high time for Ankara to promote a more comprehensive policy, experts say. (*Zaman*)

THE NABUCCO PROJECT IS EXPERIENCING ITS FASTEST PERIOD

7 November

The energy commissioner of the European Union, Andris Piebalgs, started his visit to Ankara on Thursday and met with president Gül and Prime Minister Erdogan. The aim for the visit is to push for the Nabucco gas pipeline project that faces stiff competition from Russia. The aim for the Nabucco Project is to decrease Europe's dependency on Russian gas by diversifying the energy supply routes. The European Commission believes that the Turkish transit deal can be signed by the end of the year. Piebalgs told the Anatolian Agency after his meetings, that EU would accelerate the Nabucco project and that Turkey is a very important actor for the project. The Turkish Energy Minister, Hilmi Güler said that, "the important thing here is to fill the inside of the pipeline. We continue our energy diplomacy and negotiations with the other supplier countries. Today, the Nabucco project is experiencing its most expansive period". The U.S seems however unsatisfied with the low speed of the project. (*Hürriyet*)

EU MEMBERSHIP; TIME TO REFOCUS!**7 November**

The government is preparing for a number of reforms during the next year, but amending the constitution will be delayed until after the local elections in March 2009. In a report that was released on Wednesday, the EU Commission urged Turkey to speed up the reform efforts. The Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn said, "The road toward EU membership goes not through excuses but through concrete reforms in Turkey". The report criticizes Turkey for its limited progress in many areas; since the period that was marked by severe political crises over the election of president and the closure case against the ruling AKP is over, it is time to re-focus. The government responded to the criticism by saying that it was "balanced and constructive" and that it will now focus on reforms. The government believes that constitutional changes are necessary after the controversial decisions made by the Constitutional Court which cast shadows on the parliament's authority to amend the constitution. Critics say however that any constitutional change passed in the parliament is bound to be revoked by the Constitutional Court. Foreign Minister Babacan said in Rome on Wednesday that "It seems like the parliament can never have the power to rewrite the entire constitution because the Constitutional Court can cancel all or some of the changes made in the parliament" and stressed that it is "systemic errors" that needs to be addressed first. He referred to the case against the AKP and stated that it had revealed that there are systemic errors in the separation of powers among the judiciary, the executive and the legislative. He continued by saying that the recommendations that were made in the EU's progress report will be used in the promotion of reforms. (*Zaman*)