
THE AGENDA:
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS,
REPORTS AND EVENTS
FEBRUARY 2011 - APRIL 2011

By Richard Giragosian

1. “CHRONOLOGICAL REVIEW”

27 April 2011: Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced a new plan for the construction of a waterway to bypass the increasingly congested Bosphorus Straits. According to the plan, the Bosphorus Straits, which divide Europe from Asia, will be bypassed by a new 150 meter-wide “Canal Istanbul” that would link the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara that opens to the Aegean Sea via the Dardanelles. The planned canal would be approximately 45 kilometer-long (31 miles) with a depth of roughly 25 kilometers, designed to accommodate the transit of up to 160 vessels each day. The Turkish premier added that the canal would be completed by 2023, and explained that of the main objectives is to reduce traffic through the Bosphorus and to minimize the (environmental) threat.

26 April 2011: A Turkish energy ministry official stated to *Reuters* that Turkey will stop exporting Azerbaijani natural gas to Greece and will instead use this 750 million cubic meters of Azerbaijani gas for domestic consumption, while Azerbaijan will sign a new agreement with Greece for the sale of gas – which will again transit through Turkey.

26 April 2011: Commenting on the mounting violence in Syria, unidentified officials from the Turkish foreign ministry warned that the Syrian government was “escalating the situation”, suggesting that “the point of no return is approaching” where Turkey may be forced to criticize and confront the Syrian leadership. For his part, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been largely silent and cautious in his statements on the situation in Syria, but in the past demanded the resignation of Hosni Mubarak, the former Egyptian president and called for the resignation of embattled Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi. Turkey is especially concerned over the mounting crisis in neighboring Syria, however, which may trigger a potential influx of refugees across the 877-kilometer Turkish-Syrian border in the event violence escalates.

26 April 2011: The Azerbaijani Diplomatic Academy initiated a training program for Turkish diplomats entitled “Let’s Learn about the Caucasus”. During the opening of the training session, Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister and Rector of the Diplomatic Academy Hafiz Pashayev welcomed the participants and explained that “the joint participation of Azerbaijani and Turkish diplomats will increase mutual understanding between the state agencies, foreign policy diplomats and experts of the two fraternal states and contribute to the friendly relations” between Azerbaijan and Turkey. As part of the training program, the first of its kind between Azerbaijani and Turkish diplomats, Turkish diplomats will also have an opportunity to meet

with local governmental officials, scholars and experts. The training will include several courses focusing on Azerbaijan's foreign policy and economy, with some sessions conducted at the foreign ministry and parliament, and visits planned to several regions of the country.

24 April 2011: A group of several dozen demonstrators in Istanbul held red carnations and photographs of prominent Armenians in front of the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, an Ottoman-era building where a large group of Armenian intellectuals were arrested at the outset of the 1915 massacres and deportations of Armenians. Later that day, much larger crowds gathered at similar commemorative events held in Istanbul's Taksim square, the capital Ankara, and the cities of Muğla, Bursa, Diyarbakır and Izmir, marking the second consecutive year that Turkish demonstrators commemorated the anniversary of what many international experts say was the first genocide of the 20th century. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of Armenians in the capital Yerevan participated in a solemn ceremony, placing flowers at the genocide monument. In comments to journalists, Armenian President Serge Sarkisian reiterated Armenia's desire for "peace with Turkey" and went on to praise Turkish intellectuals and others who have spoken out for reconciliation. Concerning the Turkish government, however, Sarkisian was more critical, noting "today in Turkey, more than ever, reasonable voices are being heard, nevertheless, the official policy of Turkey carries on with the course of denial... For us one thing is incontestable: the policy of denial is a direct continuation of the Armenian genocide."

Coinciding with an impressive series of commemorative events marking the anniversary of the Armenian genocide, the tragic death of a young Armenian-Turkish soldier serving in the Turkish military threatened to mar the symbolism of progress in Turkish-Armenian relations. The death of 25 year-old Private Sevag Şahin Balıkçı was reportedly the result of an accidental discharge of a weapon, although Balıkçı's fiancée, Melani Kumruyan, disputed that official version of his death, explaining that she did not believe the death to be accidental, adding that the victim "was not someone who would joke around with guns."

23 April 2011: In an annual statement released to commemorate the 24 April anniversary of the start of the Armenian Genocide of 1915, U.S. President Obama defined the anniversary as a "horrific" slaughter and "one of the worst atrocities of the 20th century," but Armenian-American groups were disappointed by his not using the genocide reference. On the other hand, officials for the Turkish foreign ministry criticized the statement for distorting the facts and based more on "domestic political considerations" than on history.

21 April 2011: After violent protests took place in the southeastern provinces of Turkey, The Higher Election Board (YSK) reversed its decision to ban a number of Kurdish politicians to run in the upcoming elections due to earlier convictions. YSK voted unanimously to allow several independent candidates. Leyla Zana, Gültan Kışanak, Sabahat Tuncel, Hatip Dicle, Salih Yıldız and Ertuğrul Kürkçü will be able to run in the June 12 elections.

20 April 2011: Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu warned that Turkey's accession bid to join the European Union was at risk of deadlock because of the Cyprus problem and strong objections to Turkey's membership by Germany and France. Foreign Minister Davutoğlu added that negotiations with the EU were at a "bottleneck" and noted that "the problem is not the technical process, but the political blockage," adding that Turkey and the European Union had serious disagreements in their respective positions. The foreign minister's remarks followed a meeting of the EU-Turkey Association Council in Brussels. There has been little progress in the negotiations, only 13 of the 35 chapters have been opened and one provisionally closed since accession talks began in 2005.

20 April 2011: In a statement released by the Turkish foreign ministry, Ankara welcomed a decision by the U.S. government freezing the assets of five members of Turkey's outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control formally identified the five men as "specially designated narcotics traffickers", triggering a freeze of their assets in the U.S. and making it illegal for Americans to engage in business with them. The men are senior members of the PKK leadership team of the PKK. The statement also called on other countries to adopt similar restrictions "carry through on their obligations" regarding counter-terrorism.

20 April 2011: In a rare interview with an Armenian media outlet, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu defined Turkey's "clear vision" of the Caucasus as "the establishment of a long-lasting, comprehensive and sustainable peace and stability" in the region, and added that "we want to focus on building a secure, sustainable and prosperous future in the region for the benefit of peoples by creating regional integration." The foreign minister noted, however, that the lack of progress over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict poses a real obstacle to regional peace and stability, adding that although the issues of normalizing the Turkish-Armenian relations and the Karabakh conflict differ, as "each has its own dynamics and its own negotiating platforms," they also have "an undeniable interaction between the two tracks." He also vowed that "we have to persist in our efforts to promote dialogue and keep all negotiation tracks open."

18 April 2011: In preparation for the Turkish parliamentary elections set for 12 June, the Supreme Election Board (YSK) issued a controversial ruling barring twelve pro-Kurdish independent candidates from running in the election. The decision officially disqualified the dozen candidates due to past convictions and legal technicalities in their applications. Seven of the prospective candidates were included on the party list of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). Because BDP is seen as incapable of surpassing Turkey's election threshold of garnering a minimum of 10 percent of the vote to enter parliament, the party relies in its members running as independent candidates.

17 April 2011: Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu met with Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadarov and Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi for a trilateral meeting in Urmia, a border city in northern Iran. Convened at the initiative of the Iranian hosts, the foreign ministers discussed a diverse set of issues and adopted a concluding statement. That final statement included nine key points, including pledges for greater cooperation in the areas of economy, tourism, science, culture, as well as improving coordination of measures to combat terrorism and human trafficking. The ministers further vowed to improve cooperation within regional and international organizations, and to pursue conflict resolution based on the principles of territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders. The trilateral meetings have become a regular format, with the Turkish, Iranian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers meeting at least twice a year, reflecting the need to coordinate broader regional issues.

15 April 2011: In a long-expected move, Russia formerly announced the removal of all visa requirements for Turkish citizens entering the Russian Federation for less than 30 days. The start of visa-free travel to Russia follows the signing of a bilateral agreement signed in May 2010, making Russia the 58th country that does not require visas for visiting Turkish citizens. The move to liberalize the visa regime is expected to help increase trade and services related to construction and tourism, with projections estimating a corresponding rise in bilateral trade from 26.2 billion dollars in 2010 to roughly 40 billion dollars this year. Similarly, the number of Russian tourists is expected to spike dramatically, with over one million new tourists expected to visit Turkey, while the number of Turkish tourists going to Russia is expected to rise from 300,000 to 500,000.

8 April 2011: Turkish officials announced that the Russian natural gas company Gazprom will begin offshore exploration under the Black Sea for South Stream pipeline project in May, in part based on Russian expectations that Turkey will approve the construction of the new gas pipeline designed to carry gas to Europe under the Black Sea. Although Turkey is a key actor in the rival, European Union-supported 10.8 billion dollar worth Nabucco project to deliver gas from

Turkmenistan to Europe, there have been signs of a new Turkish willingness to join the alternative Russian-led project. Russia plans to launch the 21.5 billion dollar underwater pipeline, which will transport up to 63 billion cubic meters of gas to Europe, by 2015 to help in diversifying its gas supplies.

7 April 2011: Speaking in a press conference in Ankara, Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan revealed that Turkey was engaged in creating a “road map” designed to end the war in Libya, including a ceasefire and the withdrawal of pro-government forces from a number of cities. But the Turkish premier also noted that Turkey’s offer to mediate a peace deal between the Libyan opposition and embattled ruler Muammar Gaddafi was rejected despite a round of meetings between Turkish officials and representatives of both sides. Prime Minister Erdoğan explained that Turkey was seeking a ceasefire “right away” and was pushing pro-Gaddafi forces to “withdraw from the cities they are besieging in some Libyan provinces,” adding that “uninterrupted humanitarian aid should be provided to all...without any discrimination and safe humanitarian corridors should be established for this purpose.” The Turkish government has repeatedly voiced its opposition to NATO air strikes against targets in Libya and has already offered refuge to more than 500 Libyans. The UN Security Council adopted a resolution last month that imposed a no-fly zone over Libya and allows for “all necessary measures” to protect civilians from attacks by pro-Gaddafi forces.

6 April 2011: Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu announced that Turkey stands ready to “render every possible help to Syria on reform process” in an attempt to ease tension there. The comments came in a meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Syrian capital Damascus in which they discussed the expanding conflict and anti-government demonstrations in Syria. The Turkish foreign minister was referring to a move by the Syrian president to launch a series of reform initiatives including sacking the cabinet, ending the country’s long-time emergency rule and releasing dozens of political detainees, in a bid to appease the protesters. A wave of unprecedented protests demonstrations erupted in parts of Syria last month, triggering violent and deadly clashes between protesters and Syrian security forces.

29 March 2011: In comments during a conference on Turkey organized in London, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu surprised participants by announcing that Turkey intends to nominate an ethnic Armenian as Turkey’s next ambassador to France. Davutoğlu identified prominent economist Daron Acemoğlu as the proposed ambassador. Acemoğlu, born in Istanbul in 1967, studied at the London School of Economics and is currently the head of the economics department at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He was nominated twice for the Nobel Prize in recognition of his work in economics.

29 March 2011: Turkish President Abdullah Gül formally presided over the signing ceremony to ratify a bilateral treaty on strategic partnership with Azerbaijan. The treaty was first concluded in August 2010 and was ratified by the Turkish Parliament earlier in March.

29 March 2011: Turkish State Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç stated that Turkey and Iran should form an “alliance” to support each other in order to preserve global peace and to solve regional problems. Arınç also noted that Turkey and Iran enjoyed close relations in the commercial, economic, tourism, educational and cultural areas and promised that relations “will be at a much better level in the upcoming years.” He added that while bilateral trade stood at roughly 10 billion dollars, he expected it to increase of 20 billion dollars in the next few years.”

16 March 2011: The Turkish Air Force deployed two F-16 combat aircrafts to force a cargo plane en route from Iran to Syria to land in southeast Turkey after receiving a warning that the plane was transporting nuclear weapons. After the plane was forced to land upon entering Turkish air space, military inspectors and experts were dispatched to an airport near Diyarbakır. Despite the warning, the plane was only found to be carrying a shipment of 150 tons of food and no “material contrary to international standards.” Syria has aroused suspicion since it was discovered to have been attempting to construct an undeclared nuclear reactor at a remote desert site called Dair Alzour until it was bombed by Israeli warplanes in September 2007.

9-12 March 2011: In the first in a series of planned meetings between Turkish and Azerbaijani military officials, Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov met in Ankara with Turkish General Staff Chief General Işık Koşaner. The Azerbaijani official also met with Turkish First Deputy Foreign Minister Feridun Sinirlioğlu and Deputy Undersecretary Fatih Ceylan to discuss bilateral relations, the current state of Turkish-Armenian diplomacy, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and regional security issues. The meeting also follows an agreement signed late last month by Turkish Defense Minister Vecdi Gönül and Azerbaijani Minister of Defense Industry Yaver Jamalov on the joint production of missiles for multiple rocket launch systems. Under the terms of that agreement, Azerbaijan’s Ministry of the Defense Industry and Turkey’s Roketsan will start joint production of 107 and 120-mm missiles. An earlier “protocol of intent” on the production of hardware with Turkey’s Otokar company was also signed in October 2010 and negotiations are now underway on the joint production of light-armored tactical vehicles, the joint production of drones and military helicopters, and with Turkey’s Mechanical and Chemical Industry Corporation, the planned production of a 40-mm revolver grenade launcher.

26 February 2011: Turkey's former Prime Minister and the leader of the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi) Necmettin Erbakan died in a private hospital in Ankara. Born in Sinop, on the coast of the Black Sea in northern Turkey, Erbakan later graduated from Istanbul Technical University and after returning to Turkey following graduate school in Germany, was elected to the Turkish parliament in 1969, representing Konya.

25 February 2011: During a visit to Ankara, French President Nicolas Sarkozy reiterated his opposition to Turkish membership in the EU and said that Turkey was unfit for the EU, urging an "alternative partnership" instead in order to prevent the accession talks from reaching a "deadlock". The French president also met with Turkish President Abdullah Gül, who insisted that membership remained a priority for Turkey and urged France not to block the country's accession talks, warning that Turkey "expects the entire EU to keep the promise they made ... and give us the opportunity to complete the process successfully." Sarkozy was in Turkey in his capacity as chairman of the G-20 group of leading economies. Regarding Turkey's EU accession process, of the 35 policy chapters that EU candidates must negotiate with Brussels, Turkey has opened talks on only 13 since the accession negotiations began in 2005. Eight chapters remain frozen by the EU after Turkey's refusal to open its ports to Greek Cypriot vessels under a trade pact with the bloc, while France and Cyprus have blocked several others.

2. REPORTS OF INTEREST & NEWS FROM ACADEMIA AND THE "THINK THANK" WORLD

New Academic Article: "Resetting U.S.-Turkish Relations: Charting a New Way Forward."

In a new academic article published in the Spring 2011 edition of the "Journal of Strategic Security", Aaron Stein, from the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) in Istanbul, analyzed the state of U.S.-Turkish relations and offered a set of policy recommendations to "mend relations".

The following is a brief summary of the 18-page article:

After nearly nine decades of benign neglect, Turkey has set about re-establishing its influence in the Middle East. Although most observers agree that the United States and Turkey share a number of overlapping goals in the Middle East, Turkey's recent rapprochement with Iran has drawn the ire of the United States. In tandem, Turkey's relations with Israel, Washington's closest ally in the region, have deteriorated rapidly following Israel's war in Gaza and the events aboard

the Mavi Marmara. These coinciding events have further complicated U.S.-Turkish relations and have led a number of pundits in Washington to openly question Turkey's ideological orientation. If Ankara and Washington want to mend relations they should acknowledge that their disagreements are not about their overall vision or intention for the region, but over how to implement and carry out foreign policy. Both Ankara and Washington should do a better job of enumerating their long-term regional policy goals and engage in a broader dialogue to clearly transmit these ideas to each other, while working together to achieve them.

The full paper is available by contacting the TPQ staff.

New Report: “Challenging the South Caucasus security deficit.”

In April 2011, the Madrid-based think tank, Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE), released a new report assessing the security situation in the broader South Caucasus, with a particular focus on the role of Turkey as a regional actor and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Authored by Jos Boonstra, a Senior Researcher at FRIDE, and Neil Melvin, the Director of the Armed Conflict and Conflict Management program at the Stockholm-based think tank SIPRI, the 28-page report also offered a set of practical recommendations for Turkey, the European Union and the international community as a whole, for bolstering regional stability and security in the South Caucasus.

The following is a brief summary of the report:

This working paper has two objectives. The first part evaluates the roles and involvement of the main states and international organizations active in the South Caucasus. The trend of large states –foremost Russia and Turkey– seeking greater influence through increased activism is considered together with the decline of concerted international approaches through regional organizations and the UN. The paper argues that these two trends have further weakened security in the region. The authors propose that there is a need to revive the role of international organizations, foremost the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). But a renewal of international organizations is not enough to resolve the region's security challenges. Genuine long-term stability in the South Caucasus will require both the provision of enhanced security as well as of development. The EU is best placed to deliver on these twin objectives.

The second part of the paper outlines the framework of a new engagement by the EU in the region. This will involve acknowledgement that solutions in the region will take time and that no blueprint for resolving problems is possible today. Instead, the focus for the EU should be on building consensus on how to reach a comprehensive final settlement for the region's security challenges. This will likely involve agreement on a multilevel package concerning the resolution of conflicts, enhancing security and development and fashioning new regional cooperation, both north to Russia and west to Turkey.

The full paper is available by contacting the TPQ staff.

New Working Paper: “Addressing the security challenges in the South Caucasus. The case for a comprehensive, multilateral and inclusive approach.”

As part of its regular series of Policy Briefs, the European Policy Center, a think tank based in Brussels, released a new, brief four-page report in March 2011 that focused on security challenges in the South Caucasus, with an added emphasis on Turkey. The Policy Brief, written by EPC Policy Analyst Amanda Paul and Dennis Sammut, the director of LINKS, stressed the need to recognize the merit of the Turkish initiative for a “Caucasus Security and Co-operation Platform,” and called on the European Union to show “greater political will” and adopt a “sufficiently unified approach to take this (Turkish) idea forward.”

The following is a brief summary excerpt from the Policy Brief:

The South Caucasus needs European support that is not a short-term game but rather a long-term commitment. In its engagement with the region over the next decade Europe needs a bold approach with a transparent and clearly stated end game. The ultimate aim should be to negotiate, agree and sign a comprehensive South Caucasus Security and Co-operation Treaty that would unblock the current impasse in the negotiations on the unresolved conflicts, not through a piecemeal approach, but rather by placing the various problems in a common context and providing solutions to which all interested parties could become stakeholders.

Various elements of such an idea have also been pursued through diplomatic means, for example through the Turkish initiative for a “Caucasus Security and Co-operation Platform”. Unfortunately, there has not yet been sufficient political will or a sufficiently unified approach to take this idea forward. Furthermore, such initiatives have frequently

excluded a number of partners, with proposals either being drawn up in the interests of one or other of the states, or with the intention of promoting the proactive foreign policy of the state initiating it. For example the Turkish initiative totally excluded the EU.

The Policy Brief also addressed Turkish-Armenian diplomacy, noting that

“The disappointment at the failure of the Turkey-Armenia rapprochement to move forward with the protocols signed in October 2009 is just one of many examples of good but isolated initiatives that failed because of problems in the wider context to which they were related. In this instance Azerbaijan was able to place sufficient pressure on Ankara, insisting that Turkey make a link between the rapprochement process and the solution of Nagorno-Karabakh, which was something Armenia could not accept. The international community has not been able to create the conditions whereby such initiatives become mutually reinforcing.’

The full paper is available at the EPC website: www.epc.eu

New Journal Article: “Building Trust and Flexibility: A Brazilian View of the Fuel Swap with Iran.”

In a new article published in the Spring 2011 edition of *The Washington Quarterly*, Professor Diego Santos Vieira de Jesus of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, examined the May 2010 Turkish-Brazilian attempt to broker an agreement, known as a “fuel swap”, to “deal with the controversial Iranian nuclear program.”

The following is a brief summary excerpt from the article:

In May 2010, Brazil and Turkey –the non-permanent members of the UN Security Council– ventured into uncharted waters by brokering an agreement to deal with the controversial Iranian nuclear program.

...Although many great powers said that the fuel-swap agreement brokered by Brazil and Turkey would not be able to prevent Iranian enrichment or eliminate concerns regarding the Iranian nuclear program, it at least represented a starting point and a confidence-building measure from which to build after five years of failed negotiations with Iran. Just after a similar 2009 proposal by the Vienna Group had failed,

only a few members of the UN Security Council were optimistic about the ability of then-Brazilian President Lula da Silva and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to reach an agreement with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

...Although Iran was still skeptical about Turkish actions, it recognized Ankara's growing independence from Washington and its desire to prevent new sanctions.....If the United States and some of its allies were using sanctions to reduce the chance that Israel would take military action against Iran, Brazil and Turkey sought a different approach to produce better results with Iran and probably other countries often classified as "rogue states."

The Washington Quarterly is published by the Washington-based think tank, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). The full article is available at: www.twq.com

3.EVENTS OF NOTE

Event of Note: GMF Brussels Forum: "Turkey, 'Zero Problems' and the EU"

The German Marshall Fund (GMF) Brussels Forum is an annual high-level meeting of the most influential North American and European political, corporate, and intellectual leaders to address pressing challenges currently facing both sides of the Atlantic.

On 27 March 2011, the GMF Brussels Forum held a working group entitled, "Turkey, "'Zero Problems' and the EU." The following is a brief synopsis of the working group meeting:

"Turkey has been developing a new foreign policy approach for the last two decades. Achieving a state of "zero problems" with its neighbors was one of the main goals of this new policy. Such an approach was also expected to enable Turkey to project soft power in its neighborhood and become a regional power that could play a role on an even larger scale. Given the complicated nature of Turkey's neighborhood and the conflicts Turkey has with some of its neighbors, this was an ambitious goal. Turkey has achieved some concrete results with this new policy. Bitter relations with some neighbors have been replaced by close cooperation; and in other cases there is an ongoing process to resolve conflicts. One of the pay-offs for Turkey has been

expanded trade with its neighbors, which is very important in a time of global economic troubles.

However, it would be wrong to say that Turkey is anywhere near “zero-problems with its neighbors.” It still has a sealed border with Armenia, the Aegean problem with Greece and ongoing issues with Cyprus. On the other hand, as in the case of sanctions against Iran, Turkey may need to make tough choices between zero problems with neighbors and acting in harmony with its traditional allies. This session aims to discuss the implications of this new foreign policy approach for Turkey, for its neighbors, and the transatlantic partners.

And, last but not least, a discussion on Turkey in Brussels would not be complete without an update on the progress and hurdles of Turkey’s bid to join the European Union.”

The session also focused on several “guiding questions”, including: What are the implications of Turkey’s “zero-problems with its neighbors policy” from a transatlantic perspective? Is there a trend of nonalignment in Turkish foreign policy? Is it possible for Turkey to integrate its neighborhood policy with its alignment with the transatlantic community? What are the implications of this policy for Turkey’s EU bid?

For more information about the event, and for the complete transcript, go to: http://brussels.gmfus.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Turkey-Zero-Problems_Mar27.pdf