
THE AGENDA:
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS,
REPORTS AND EVENTS
DECEMBER 2010-JANUARY 2011

By Richard Giragosian

1. "CHRONOLOGICAL REVIEW"

25-29 January: After protests and demonstrators mounted for five consecutive days, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak struggled to maintain power as police units were withdrawn from major cities and the military failed to deter tens of thousands of demonstrators from defying a curfew. The wave of protests and demonstrations, in large part inspired by the successful revolution in Tunisia that resulted in the overthrow of that country's long-serving president, forced Mubarak to dismiss the cabinet and appoint senior military officers to key government posts. But even that did little to calm the demonstrators and protests continued to grow and spread to other cities and towns throughout Egypt.

27 January 2011: The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) opened a formal debate of a report on violence against Christians in the Middle East, which included a section critical of Turkey because of the killing of Christians in Trabzon and Malatya. Although the debate examined the number of attacks against Christian communities in the entire Middle East, the PACE report calls on Turkey to fully clarify the circumstances surrounding the interruption of the celebration of Christmas Mass in the villages of Rizokarpaso and Ayia Triada in the northern part of Cyprus in December 2010 and to bring to justice those responsible. It also mentions the case of Italian priest Father Andrea Santoro being murdered in Trabzon in February 2006 and the killing of three Christians, one a German national, in an attack against a Christian publishing house in Malatya in 2007. The deaths in Trabzon and Malatya are still under review by Turkish courts and the investigation has uncovered evidence linking these killings to the Ergenekon terror network, a clandestine group that has been accused of attempting to undermine and overthrow the government.

24 January 2011: Officials from the Turkish Atomic Energy Authority (TAEK) dismissed allegations that a radiation leak from Armenia's dangerous and controversial Medzamor nuclear power plant poses a danger to Turkey, saying that changes in radiation levels have not been detected by any of its numerous detectors. The statement follows several recent reports in the Turkish media expressing concern that Armenia's nuclear power plant, characterized by the European Union and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as one of the five most dangerous nuclear facilities in the world, is leaking high levels of radiation and may be affecting the provinces of Turkey bordering Armenia. While Kars is 100 kilometers away from the Armenian nuclear facility, Iğdır is only ten kilometers from the nuclear plant. TAEK officials confirmed that a leak had occurred recently at the Medzamor facility, but explained that Turkish provinces bordering Armenia did not detect

levels of radiation that would be considered harmful to human health. TAEK also said it has dispatched three inspectors to Armenia to investigate the matter. In the statement, TAEK said it was closely monitoring the situation on the ground with 100 Early Warning Environmental Radiation Monitoring System Network (RESA) detectors, which automatically alert the TAEK Crisis Center in Ankara if airborne gamma radiation levels increases above the threshold. The EU has consistently pressured the Armenian government to shut down the nuclear plant. The nuclear plant was shut down in 1988 following a devastating earthquake in Armenia and but was reopened in 1995 due to a severe energy shortage.

19 January 2011: Several thousands people gathered in Istanbul to commemorate prominent Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink who was assassinated four years ago. Participants reunited under the same slogan that marked his funeral: “We are all Hrant, we are all Armenians.” Dink was a Turkish citizen of Armenian origin who was committed to normalizing relations between Turks and Armenians. His murder in 2007 galvanized the Turkish population and provided a new impetus for a bold effort in Turkish-Armenian diplomacy that culminated in President Abdullah Gül’s historic first-ever visit to Armenia by a Turkish head of state. The Dink family reiterated their plea for police and gendarmerie officials who were left outside the scope of the murder investigation to be questioned in light of the recent European Court of Human Rights decision that found Turkey guilty of not protecting Dink and his freedom of speech, and not properly investigating civil servants suspected of either neglect or direct involvement in the murder.

18 January 2011: In comments during a joint press conference with Cypriot President Demetris Christofias in Nicosia, Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian warned that Turkey would not be able to join the European Union until it normalized relations with Armenia, adding that although “Armenia has nothing against neighboring Turkey’s accession to the EU,” Yerevan holds that Turkey “will be unable” to enter the EU “unless it establishes constructive relations with its direct neighbors.” The Armenian president went on to say that “like friendly Cyprus, we are not in the habit of tackling problems through the language of threats and political speculations,” noting that “despite Armenia’s readiness to normalize Armenian-Turkish relations, the border between our two countries remains closed... (and) there are no diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey.”

14 January 2011: During a visit to Azerbaijan, European Commission chief Jose Manuel Barroso announced that Baku has expressed support for the proposed Nabucco pipeline between Turkey and Austria. Barroso stated that the promised agreement should dispel doubts over the feasibility of the multi-billion-dollar Nabucco project and added that the pledge represented an important step towards creating the Southern Gas Corridor, which envisages the construction of

several pipelines including the Nabucco line. The EU views the Southern Gas Corridor project as an essential component of energy security. Azerbaijan has also announced similar pledges to increase gas supplies in recent months, including to Russia, agreeing in September to expand gas exports to two billion cubic meters this year, and more recently, concluding a five-year agreement with Iran to supply a minimum of one billion cubic meters of gas annually. Syria has also recently agreed to start importing natural gas from Azerbaijan next year, under a new agreement that depends on the completion of a gas pipeline between Syria and Turkey. The construction of the Syrian portion of the pipeline is set for completion by March 2011, while Turkey is due to finish its preparations by the end of 2011. The pipeline would add to a regional network connecting Syria with Turkey, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Iran, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Europe.

14 January 2011: In the wake of massive protests and deepening unrest, Tunisian President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali fled the country and, together with his immediate family, sought exile in Saudi Arabia. The wave of protests that swept the president from power after ruling Tunisia for 23 years, was initially triggered by popular reaction to the 17 December self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor in the Western city of Sidi Bouzid after police confiscated his goods. The national protest was driven by online social networks like Facebook and Twitter and only accelerated as demonstrators shared homemade digital videos of each confrontation with the police.

6 January 2011: During a visit to Kars, Prime Minister Erdoğan called for the demolition of a local monument widely seen to symbolize reconciliation between Turks and Armenians. The prime minister criticized the 30-meter statue as a “freak” and noted his displeasure that the sculpture was situated near the tomb of Hasan Harakani, an ancient Islamic scholar, saying that the location was “unthinkable.” He said the statue should be demolished.

The sculptor of the monument, Mehmet Aksoy, defended his unfinished “Monument of Humanity” and warned that the Turkish government risks being seen as “the Taliban” if it presses its demands to destroy the statue. The monument was first commissioned in 2006 by the mayor of Kars at the time, Naif Alibeyoğlu.

28 December 2010: In comments during a television interview, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu reportedly said that “the influence of the Armenian Diaspora” will significantly decline in terms of efforts at genocide recognition in the U.S. Congress if the Turkish-Armenian protocols are ratified.

27 December 2010: Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu announced that Israel would not apologize to Turkey for the raid on the Mavi Marmara flotilla to

Gaza. Netanyahu also rejected as “a different, personal opinion,” Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman’s inflammatory comments about Turkey, in which he said that Turkey’s demands for an apology over the Mavi Marmara raid were “beyond chuzpa,” signaling a change from official Israeli state policy of not directly responding to Turkish statements on the issue.

23 December 2010: Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu announced that “we are pleased” that a bill in the U.S. Congress regarding the recognition of the Armenian genocide issue was not brought to a vote in the U.S. House of Representatives. Davutoğlu explained that “we closely monitored the developments” and “this incident once again proved that assessment of historical incidents by political authorities is principally wrong,” adding that Turkey is “ready for every kind of confrontation and every kind of study” but noted that “we can not accept use of those historical incidents as blackmailing towards our country and it is not true to revive historical issues like the sword of Damocles swinging on Turkish-U.S. relations.”

15 December 2010: In a lawsuit filed in a U.S. District Court in Los Angeles, three descendants of Armenians who lost their property in the Ottoman Empire sued the Turkish government for restitution of more than 63 million dollars for land and property that includes the U.S. military Incirlik Air Base. The lawsuit seeks damages from the Turkish government and two leading Turkish banks of hundreds of millions of dollars, citing the illegal seizure of their homes, business and farmland. The lawsuit accuses the Republic of Turkey, the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey and T.C. Ziraat Bankası, one of Turkey’s largest and oldest banks, of stealing and then profiting from land that was illegally seized during the Armenian genocide. This is the first lawsuit filed in a U.S. court against the Turkish government in which the plaintiffs are seeking reimbursement for specific parcels of property illegally seized during the Armenian genocide, and seeks the “fair market rents and other relief for plaintiffs, the rightful owners and their heirs, of approximately 122.5 acres of property located in the Adana region of Turkey.” The lawsuit follows a recent decision by the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruling that descendants of Armenian genocide victims could pursue legal action against insurance firms that failed to honor the policies of Armenian genocide victims, providing an opportunity for further legal claims against Turkey in the California court system.

9 December 2010: After a brief, two-day disruption, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline resumed operation after repairs to a leak in the Turkish segment of the pipeline. The BTC pipeline transports both oil from Azerbaijan and, as of June 2010, from Turkmenistan, and plans to increase the transport of oil from the Kazakh Tengiz oilfield. The 1,768-kilometer BTC pipeline, including 443 kilometers in Azerbaijan, 249 kilometers in Georgia and 1,076 kilometers in Turkey, has a capacity that exceeds 50 million tons of oil a year.

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

New Report: “Murder in Anatolia. Christian missionaries and Turkish ultranationalism.”

On 12 January 2011, the European Stability Initiative (ESI) released a new report on the murders of Christians in Turkey that analyzed the links with deeper trends in Turkish ultranationalism.

The following is a brief summary of the report:

In April 2007, a gruesome triple murder took place in the Central Anatolian city of Malatya. The victims, tortured, stabbed and strangled, were two Turks and one German. All three were Protestant Christian missionaries who had recently moved to Malatya. Five young men, armed with knives and covered in blood, were found at the scene of the crime only moments after it happened.

What made the Malatya killings different from an ordinary murder case was the suspicion, present from the outset, that this was not an isolated attack by a group of nationalist youngsters. As the investigation unfolded, serious questions began to emerge, which have not yet been answered.

So far 30 court hearings have taken place in the Malatya trial. At the most recent hearing in December 2010 a new defence lawyer representing the suspects once again accused the murdered Christians of “planning to eliminate our religion, dividing up our country, bribing our people and financially supporting terror organisations.” He also tried to intimidate the judges, shouting that “this is a Protestant court.” The next hearing will take place on 20 January 2011. Considering the seriousness of the charges, it is striking how little attention has been paid to the Malatya trial in recent months in Turkish and international media. For anybody who is genuinely interested in understanding contemporary Turkish politics, and the spectacular court cases which currently look into the dark world of ultranationalist associations and their links to different parts of the state, the Malatya murder trial is a very good place to start.

The full paper is available at: www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_document_id_124.pdf

New Journal Article: “Turkey’s Membership in the EU: Realistic or Merely Wishful?”

In the 6 January 2011, edition of the Harvard International Review, Sabancı University Professor Bahri Yılmaz published a new article examining the feasibility of Turkish membership in the EU.

Professor Yılmaz was a visiting fellow at Pembroke College, Cambridge and at the Center for European Studies at Harvard University, and has worked as the Chief Advisor to the Ministry of State for European Union Affairs in Ankara from 1997-2002.

The following is a brief summary excerpt from the article:

“Utterly failed,” were the words chosen by German Chancellor Angela Merkel to describe the status of immigrants, especially those from Turkey, in a nation that has tried to dramatically change its stance towards minority issues.

Since September 2010, the German and Turkish media have been debating over a controversial publication “Germany Does Away with Itself”. The author Thilo Sarrazin, a board member of the German Central Bank and a center-left politician, describes in his book the danger of an integration-resistant Muslim community for German society in the coming years. Sarrazin claims that Muslim immigration and high birth rate among Turkish immigrants will damage Germany’s long term economic potential...

(...)

We all know now that a long road lies before the Republic of Turkey. This road is full of political and economic obstacles. In the long run, Turkey should follow a two-pronged strategy at the same time: Turkey should move with unbroken vigour to obtaining full-membership through the negotiation process and the economic integration in the European Single Market. Meanwhile, Turkey can also diversify its economic and political relations with the countries in the region. It is often forgotten that the political integration of Turkey in the EU requires a sustainable and stable economic development in the first place — in the spirit of Jean Monnet’s concept of political integration through economic integration. The EU can help accelerate the accession process by supporting reform process in Turkey with consistent and reliable

policies. Ankara and Brussels have a lot of work ahead if Turkey's full membership into the European Union still remains their common objective; yet if each can meet the other in the compromise, Turkey will surely have a brighter future.

The full paper is available at: <http://hir.harvard.edu/turkey-s-membership-in-the-eu-realistic-or-merely-wishful>