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AZERBAIJAN

Indonesian MPs sign appeal on recognition of Khojaly genocide

March 2 (AzerTAc). Azerbaijan`s embassy to Indonesia, the world`s biggest NGO Nahdlatul Ulama and the University of Indonesia co organized a ceremony on the 21st anniversary of the Khojaly genocide with participation of the Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation. The event was attended by Indonesian parliament speaker Marzuki Ali and MPs, religious figures, scientists, professors, Azerbaijani Diaspora representatives and ambassadors from OIC member countries. The aim of the event is to commemorate victims of the Khojaly massacre and facilitate implementation of the resolution of the OIC Parliamentary Union adopted in January 2012 in the Indonesian city of Palembang, calling for recognition of the Khojaly genocide. Speakers including speaker Ali noted that Armenia occupied the Azerbaijani land of Nagorno-Karabakh and committed genocide in Khojaly. The appeal on recognition of the Khojaly Genocide to be presented to President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was first signed by Mr. Ali. The appeal was signed by Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama, Prof. Agil Sirac, over 30 MPs and others. It is expected to collect over 100 signatures.

Average annual economic growth rates to make 5.1% in Azerbaijan

March 4 (AzerTAc). "Average annual economic growth rate will make 5.1% in Azerbaijan in 2013-2017 including 8% in non-oil sector. In this period, the average annual inflation rate will make 4.4%," Azerbaijani Minister of Economic Development Shahin Mustafayev said at the meeting with IMF mission head for Azerbaijan Raja Almarzoqi.

According to the ministry, the meeting hosted discussions on economic reforms in Azerbaijan, macroeconomic situation in 2012, recent development trends and macroeconomic forecasts for 2013-2017. The parties exchanged views on macroeconomic framework, development of non-oil and private sectors in Azerbaijan.

Oklahoma State Senate recognizes Khojaly massacre

March 5 (AzerTAc). The Senate of the State of Oklahoma has adopted a resolution recognizing the Khojaly massacre at its first session. The document highlights the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the occupation of Khojaly by Armenian armed forces with the help of motor-infantry regiment of former USSR and the killing of over 600 innocent people of Khojaly. Taking into consideration the fact of tragic events and commemorating the 21st anniversary of the Khojaly massacre, the Oklahoma Senate decided to send the document to the U.S. Congress, State Department and U.S. Embassy to Azerbaijan. The resolution was introduced by senator Tom Ivester, representing District 26.

Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy launches Executive MBA program

March 6 (AzerTAc). The Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy has launched a first ever Executive MBA- a dual degree program in Azerbaijan in collaboration with Maastricht School of Management, the Netherlands. The launch ceremony was attended ADA Rector, Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Hafiz Pashayev and Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Azerbaijan Arjen Uijterlinde, Deputy Minister of Education Gulu Novruzov, and Director of MBA Program at ADA Janine Clarke. The ADA Executive MBA is a flexible, modular degree that can be completed over 24 months. Lectures take place through seven ten-day sessions roughly every three months. These sessions are conducted both in Baku, Azerbaijan, and Maastricht, the Netherlands. The first 6 modules cover the

foundation and the core of the MBA. The final module focuses on one of the two specializations: Energy and Environment and International Business. Following on the seven modules, participants complete an Action Learning Project (ALP), wherein they apply their newly gained knowledge to address challenges in the relevant sector. Successful participants will receive a double degree from MsM and ADA.

President of European Commission: Re-opening of Khojaly airport will harm peace process

March 9 (AzerTAc). "Provocative actions should be prevented in order not to harm peace process. In relation to the Khojaly airport, the EU supports the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs' statements in April, 2011 and July, 2012. They expressed concern that the operation of this airport could lead to increased tensions. The conduct of flights would not help the peace process and the EU urges both sides to seek a negotiated solution," President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso said in his response letter to the European Azerbaijan Society's campaign. The European Azerbaijan Society (TEAS) is conducting campaign to draw awareness to the illegality of opening of the so-called Khojaly airport in occupied Azerbaijani territory by Armenia. According to the society, the TEAS wrote to various European stakeholders to stress the importance of the airport not being allowed to open in accordance with the Chicago Convention and civil aviation law which recognizes the airspace above the airport and surrounding occupied lands of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven adjacent regions of Azerbaijan. Barroso's letter reads that the EU calls upon both sides to act in accordance with international law and consistent with current practice for flights over their territory. The operation of this airport cannot be used to support any claim of a change in the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. Based upon these supportive statements, TEAS calls upon all EU and international actors to apply diplomatic pressure on newly-elected Armenian leader Serzh Sargsyan to ensure that Armenia honors its commitments to the OSCE Minsk Group and ICAO and does not seek to provoke Azerbaijan by opening an illegal airport in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

Baku to host WorldFood Azerbaijan 2013 exhibition

March 11 (AzerTAc). Azerbaijan International Exhibition of Food Industry WorldFood Azerbaijan 2013 will take place on May 22-24 in Baku.

Along with the WorldFood Azerbaijan 2013, the 7th AgriHort Azerbaijan and 2nd IPACK Caspian exhibitions will also be held. Companies from Azerbaijan, Turkey, Russia, India, Jordan, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Poland, Switzerland, Iran and Lithuania will participate in the exhibition. Ipack Caspian 2013 brings together specialists and businesses from many sectors, both manufacturers and consumers of packaging. The exhibition will be held simultaneously with Azerbaijan's biggest food industry exhibition – WorldFood Azerbaijan 2013. The 6th Azerbaijan International Agriculture Exhibition, AgriHort Azerbaijan 2012 includes interesting solutions from packaging companies from Holland, Moldova, Germany, Russia, Bulgaria, Italy and Spain. The exhibition covers areas including packaging machines, equipment for packaging and printing on the packaging, packaging materials, finished products and labeling products. WorldFood Azerbaijan 2013 trade show is dedicated to the food, beverage, food equipment and packing industry of the Azerbaijan Republic. Azerbaijan food policy is considered to be of high importance for Azerbaijan government. This gives a lot of good opportunities for potential foreign investors and businessmen, who work in food sector. So, the exhibition World Food Azerbaijan 2013 is also very important event in establishing new business contacts in order to promote your business in Caspian region. WorldFood and WorldFood Tech Azerbaijan 2013 are organized by the British exhibition company ITE Group and their partner in Azerbaijan Iteca Caspian LLC.

Azerbaijan's foreign trade hits \$3.5 billion

March 11 (AzerTAc). The Azerbaijani State Customs Committee (SCC) has announced results of foreign trade operations with 95 countries in January 2013. According to the Azerbaijani State Customs Committee, the total volume of foreign trade turnover of Azerbaijan averaged \$3.5 billion. The share of state sector in export operations reached \$2.9 bln while import operations made up \$0.6 bln respectively. Surplus balance made \$2.3 bln. Exports of non-oil products made \$113,7 mln from January 2013, the Committee said. Some 84% of foreign

trade operations were carried out with Italy, US, Russia, Turkey, Portugal, Thailand, India, Great Britain and Austria.

Ukraine offers Azerbaijan to refine oil at its refineries

March 12 (AzerTAc). Ukraine proposes Azerbaijan to refine oil at its refineries upon a toll manufacturing scheme, Energy Minister Eduard Stavitsky said at a meeting with his Azerbaijani counterpart Natiq Aliyev in Baku on Tuesday. It is planned to refine oil at the refinery in Odessa and Kremenchug. "We still have the pipeline, which works for the Kremenchug refinery and we can supply oil through it in case of an agreement," Stavitsky said. He said that at present, Ukraine's task is to fully restore the refining industry, and, in this regard, there is a need not only to supply oil, but to diversify it. Stavitsky said that Ukraine was ready to consider its participation in the development of infrastructural projects for energy supplies to Europe, in particular, in such projects as TANAP and AGRI.

Stavitsky also stressed that Ukraine was ready to consider the possibility of cooperation with Azerbaijan in the field of reconstruction of hydroelectric power stations, as the country has great experience in this field.

UK Deputy Foreign Minister: "We support the negotiations process"

March 15 (AzerTAc). "I know that Azerbaijan and Armenia have long-standing issue and it is very serious for Azerbaijan. The United Kingdom is not part of the negotiations on that we support the negotiations process which is led by the OSCE Minsk Group on this. We believe that there is a need for resolution of this disagreement based on Helsinki principles which include territorial integrity and also self-determination and non-use of force. And around these principles the different interest need to be reconciled and therefore, we would hope that the parties would find a way to engage on that. The peaceful resolution is a way to go," Permanent Under-Secretary and Head of the Diplomatic Service at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Simon Fraser said at the briefing in the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy. "I am not aware of what the plans of Armenian government are regarding Khojaly airport, but I know that there is a concern about this," Fraser said that he raised this during his meeting in Yerevan. "What I think important is to avoid surprises or unforeseeable actions in the situation like this," he added.

Azerbaijan's President receives ISESCO Secretary General

March 16 (AzerTAc). President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has today received Secretary General of ISESCO Abdulaziz Othman Altwajiri. The ISESCO Secretary General thanked President Ilham Aliyev for the support that he extends for ensuring excellent organization of an international conference to be held in Baku on strengthening cooperation to prevent terrorism. Abdulaziz Othman Altwajiri stressed the importance of the fact that the conference will bring together representatives from 50 countries and 20 international organizations. He noted that Azerbaijan had good experience in organize such high-profile international organizations. President Ilham Aliyev highly appreciated the interest in the international Baku conference. The Head of State expressed confidence that questions to be discussed at the event would contribute to increasing efforts towards prevention of terrorism. They also exchanged views on boosting cooperation between Azerbaijan and ISESCO in t

Minsk Group co-chair: Unsettlement of frozen conflicts affects OSCE's activity

March 16 (AzerTAc). "Unsettlement of the frozen conflicts in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova affects the general activity of the OSCE," OSCE Minsk Group co-chair Ian Kelly from the US said at a meeting of the organization's Permanent Council. In response to priorities mentioned by Deputy Foreign Minister Meshkov, who represents Russia at the Permanent Council, Ian Kelly noted that Russia played an important role in the organization and settlement of the conflicts must remain as priority. "The OSCE must do its best for resolution of these conflicts. Refraining from the threat or use of force, sovereign equality, equal rights and self-determination of peoples, territorial integrity of states and peaceful settlement of disputes are the fundamental principles of the Helsinki Final Act," Kelly added.

Macedonia prolongs visa-free regime for Azerbaijan

March 16 (AzerTAc). Macedonia prolonged visa-free regime with Azerbaijan, Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan for March 15, 2014. Macedonia's government believes that this step will increase the number of tourists coming to the country, strengthen economic relations with the countries, at the results, Macedonia will make more revenue.

Azerbaijani-Romanian Chamber of Commerce opens in Baku

March 16 (AzerTAc). The Azerbaijan-Romanian Chamber of Commerce opened in Baku. The opening ceremony was addressed by the Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies of Romania Valeriu Zgonea and head of the Azerbaijan Export and Investment Promotion Foundation (AZPROMO) Rufat Mammadov. Speakers stressed that the Chamber of Commerce would play important role in the development of economic relations between the two countries, identifying new areas of cooperation and the search for partners. Valeriu Zgonea said he was very happy during his stay in Baku. "It is gratifying that in a short time, Azerbaijan has achieved a very big development. Economic relations between the two countries need to develop further. Therefore, the holding of the Business Forum and the opening of the Chamber of Commerce are important factors. Romania is interested in development of relations with Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan and Romania are the countries developing steadily in their regions. It is important for mutual investments. The two countries have historically a lot in common", he underlined. Head AZPROMO R. Mammadov informed that the two countries develop their relations in many areas, including the economy. A striking example is the opening ceremony of the Chamber of Commerce, which will contribute to the expansion of ties between businessmen of Azerbaijan and Romania, he stressed.

Energy Minister: Azerbaijan`s non-oil industry to grow 18.1% this year

March 17 (AzerTAc). Azerbaijan`s non-oil industry will see a 18.1% growth this year, energy and industry minister Natig Aliyev has said. "In the coming three years the country`s non-oil industry will increase 11.2 % on average," he told an international conference in Baku devoted to national leader Heydar Aliyev`s role in ensuring Azerbaijan`s economic achievements. "Last year alone saw construction of 60 industrial facilities, while construction of more than 80 facilities continues." The Minister said "a total of more than hundred industrial facilities have been built in the country in the last five years".

Azerbaijan`s President receives ADB vice president

March 18 (AzerTAc). President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has today received vice-president of the Asian Development Bank, Xiaoyu Zhao. They stressed the importance of successful projects carried out between Azerbaijan and Asian Development Bank, and exchanged views on the current state of and prospects for cooperation.

International Conference on Strengthening Cooperation in Preventing Terrorism kicks off in Baku

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev attends opening ceremony of the conference

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March 18 (AzerTAc). President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has today attended the opening ceremony of the International Conference on Strengthening Cooperation in Preventing Terrorism in Baku. The event is organized by the United Nations, the Azerbaijani government and the Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO). President Ilham Aliyev delivered opening remarks. Other speakers at the event included Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Yury Fedotov and Director General of the ISESCO Abdulaziz Othman Altwajri. The two-day conference brings together representatives of 50 countries and 20 international organizations.

Azerbaijan`s President joins nationwide festivities on occasion of Novruz holiday

March 19 (AzerTAc). President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, first lady Mehriban Aliyeva and vice president of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation Leyla Aliyeva have today joined nationwide festivities

on occasion of Novruz holiday. The most glorious holiday of the Azerbaijani people, Novruz, is coming to our land. In connection with this holiday, which we have inherited from our ancestors and is the best reflection of our national spirit and memory, nationwide celebrations were held in Baku on 19 March. The square outside the Maiden Tower was crowded again. Surrounding buildings were decorated with colorful posters and the symbol of Novruz, a huge samani, adorned the square. Novruz is an old holiday which reflects the culture, national and spiritual values of our people and popularizes them in the world. It is hard to imagine a second such festival that would express the spiritual world, the national mentality and ideology, the ancient mythical beliefs, folklore and national identity of our people to the same extent as Novruz. Novruz is the holiday of the entire Turkic world, but Azerbaijan celebrates it more grandly. The greatness of our nation rests in the fact that no prohibitions have made it forget Novruz. Even in the most difficult times our people managed to protect and preserve the holiday, their national customs and traditions by carrying them through the years to the present day.

Azerbaijan gives Lithuania protest note over initiative to establish parliamentary friendship group with so-called Nagorno-Karabakh Republic

March 19 (AzerTAc). Official Baku has summoned Lithuania's Ambassador to hand him over a formal protest note after some of the country's parliamentarians came up with an initiative to set up a friendship group with the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. Deputy Foreign Minister Khalaf Khalafov received ambassador Arturas Zhurauskas to express Azerbaijan's concerns and protest over "the initiative to create a Parliamentary Friendship Group with Azerbaijan's occupied region". "Establishing such a group with the Nagorno-Karabakh, the occupied land of Azerbaijan, is a gross breach of Azerbaijani and international law". Khalafov said the initiative cast a shadow on the Azerbaijan-Lithuania relations, adding official Baku regarded the move as a violation of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and sovereignty, as well as support for separatism and disrespect for international law.

Ambassador Zhurauskas said he understood the concerns of official Baku, and that he would forward Azerbaijan's position to the Lithuanian government. The ambassador also said that an initiative proposed by a group of parliamentarians did not reflect the position of the Seimas and the government of Lithuania. Khalafov said "this answer does not satisfy Azerbaijan because MPs represent the Lithuanian legislature and are the people with a special status". "The Lithuanian MPs proposed to set up the friendship group with the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh Republic not on the level of personal relationship, but on the parliamentary level." Khalafov noted all respected international organizations and the international community recognized Nagorno-Karabakh as the territory of Azerbaijan.

The deputy FM expressed hope the Lithuanian government would investigate the case, and take all necessary measures to prevent a repetition of such cases in future.

Tennessee House of Representatives recognizes Khojaly massacre

March 19 (AzerTAc). The House of Representatives of Tennessee on Monday issued a resolution on the 21st anniversary of the Khojaly massacre. The resolution commemorates the victims of the crime committed by Armenian armed forces in Khojaly and underlines that the occupation of Azerbaijani territories by Armenia is reflected in the international organizations' documents. The statement draft #HR0048 submitted by congressman Joe Towns was adopted with 35 votes for and 7 against. The relevant resolutions on Khojaly Massacre were also issued by other US States – Massachusetts, New Jersey, Georgia, Mississippi, Maine, Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. The Khojaly massacre has so far been recognized by the parliaments of Pakistan, Mexico, Columbia, the Czech Republic, Romania and Bosnia Herzegovina. The town of Khojaly was situated within the administrative borders of the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. Its population constituted over 7,000 people. Because of its communication advantage of having a civilian airport, just before the start of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict it had become a shelter for refugee Meskhet Turks who fled the bloody inter-ethnic clashes in Central Asia as well as Azerbaijani refugees deported from Armenia. Late into the night of February 25, 1992, Khojaly came under intensive fire from the town of Khankendi and Askeran already occupied by Armenian forces. At night the Armenian armed forces supported by the ex-Soviet 366th regiment completed the surrounding of the town already isolated

due to ethnic cleansing of the Azerbaijani population of its neighbouring regions. The joint forces occupied the town, which was ruined by heavy artillery shelling. In just a few hours, 613 civilians were killed, including 106 women, 70 elderly and 83 children in Khojaly on that bloody night. A total of 1,000 civilians were disabled. 56 people were killed with outrageous brutality, eight families were totally exterminated, and 25 children lost both parents, while 130 children lost at least one parent, in what became the most brutal crackdown on civilians during the three years of the conflict's military phase. Moreover, 1,275 innocent people were taken hostage, while the fate of 150 remains unknown. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict emerged in 1988 when Armenia made territorial claims against Azerbaijan. Since the lengthy war that displaced over one million Azerbaijanis, Armenian armed forces have occupied over 20 percent of Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territory, including Nagorno-Karabakh and seven adjacent regions. The UN Security Council has adopted four resolutions on Armenia's withdrawal from the Azerbaijani territory, but Armenia has not followed them to this day.

Seimas chairman reaffirms Lithuania's recognition of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity

March 21 (AzerTAc). Chairman of Lithuania's Seimas Vydas Gedvilas has reaffirmed his country's support of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. In his meeting with Azerbaijani ambassador Hasan Mammadzade, the Seimas' Chairman said: "Lithuania's position on the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains unchanged, and we recognize Azerbaijan's territorial integrity." He also touched upon an initiative of several parliamentarians to set up a friendship group with the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.

"Individual initiatives by the parliamentarians are not an official position of the Seimas," Mr. Gedvilas noted. Ambassador Mammadzade said establishing such a group with the Nagorno-Karabakh, the occupied land of Azerbaijan, was a gross breach of Azerbaijani and international law. "Official Baku regarded the move as a violation of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and sovereignty, as well as support for separatism and disrespect for international law," said the Ambassador. Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Seimas of Benediktas Juodka, who was also present at the meeting, said the initiative of a group of the Lithuanian parliamentarians did not correspond to the country's foreign policy.

Talks to solve Nagorno-Karabakh conflict slowed down, says European Commission report

March 21 (AzerTAc). Negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have regrettably slowed down, the European Commission has said in its report on the progress in implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Azerbaijan. "There has been no progress in the talks mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs aimed at settling the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. Front-line incidents, the Safarov case and the opening of the airport in Nagorno Karabakh have shifted priorities towards defusing tension rather than seeking a solution," the report noted. "There was also no progress on the incident investigation mechanisms supported by both sides at the Sochi Summit in January 2012." The European Commission said: "The European Union Special Representative on the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia visited the region on three occasions to support the work of the OSCE Minsk Group, and the EU funded project 'European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Nagorno Karabakh', aimed at developing confidence-building measures, entered its second phase."

Pennsylvania General Assembly recognizes Khojaly Massacre

March 21 (AzerTAc). The General Assembly of the U.S. State of Pennsylvania has adopted a resolution recognizing the Khojaly Massacre. The resolution No. 171 was introduced by Members of the House of Representatives Thomas Murt (prime sponsor), Vanessa Lowery Brown, Thomas Caltagirone, Mark Cohen, Gordon Denlinger, Mauree Gingrich, Tim Hennessey, Dick Hess, William Kortz, Nicholas Micozzie, David Millard, Harry Readshaw, and Curtis Sonney. The resolution says February 26, 2013, marks the 21st anniversary of the Khojaly Massacre in Azerbaijan, adding the observance of this tragic date inspires reflection by individuals across the globe. The resolution says that on February 25 and 26, 1992, Armenian armed forces, accompanied by military troops of the former Soviet Union, attacked and occupied the besieged town of Khojaly as part of the armed aggression and ethnic cleansing that had been taking place in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of

Azerbaijan since 1988. It notes that when the residents of the town attempted to flee the area, they were fired on by the Armenian and Soviet troops, resulting in the largest massacre of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. "It is estimated that 613 civilians were killed, 150 civilians went missing, 487 civilians were wounded and 1,270 civilians were taken hostage. The massacre was reported by major news organizations and has been viewed by the Human Rights Watch/Helsinki organization as a violation of customary law regarding the treatment of civilians in war zones. This tragic event is a sobering reminder of the terrible carnage that can be inflicted in wartime and the enduring need for greater understanding, communication and tolerance among people," the resolution emphasizes. The resolution also praises the role of the U.S. Azeris Network in promoting the awareness of the Khojaly Massacre in the United States. "The U.S. Azeris Network coordinates with Azerbaijani-American communities to educate others about important events in the history of Azerbaijan. The U.S. Azeris Network plays a pivotal role in preserving the memory of this terrible tragedy and through its efforts, the legacy of those who died will never be forgotten." The Members of the House of Representatives resolved that the copies of the resolution "be transmitted to the United States Department of State, the United States embassy in Azerbaijan and to each member of Congress from Pennsylvania". Pennsylvania became the 11th U.S. State to recognize the Khojaly Massacre after Massachusetts, Texas, Maine, New Jersey, Georgia, New Mexico, Arkansas, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Tennessee.

Mexican parliament hosts Novruz function

March 24 (AzerTAc). A conference dedicated to the international novruz day has been held at the building of the Mexican Chamber of Deputies. The event was attended by Azerbaijani ambassador to Mexico Ilgar Mukhtatov, heads of diplomatic missions of Iran, Iraq and Pakistan, MPs and representatives of the Mexican Islamic Women`s Society. Speaking at the ceremony, Mukhtarov congratulated peoples marking the holiday. He noted the UN General Assembly announced 21st of March as the International Novruz day at the initiative of Azerbaijan. He noted Novruz was included into the representative list of intangible cultural heritage of humanity. The participants saw a presentation on Novruz prepared by the Azerbaijani embassy, and were briefed about the history and features of Novruz holiday. The event was also addressed by heads of diplomatic missions of Iran, Pakistan and Iraq.

New Jersey General Assembly recognizes March 31 as Day of Azerbaijani Genocide

March 26 (AzerTAc). The General Assembly of the U.S. State of New Jersey has issued a commemorative resolution that recognizes March 31 as Azerbaijani Remembrance Day marking the 95th anniversary of the Azerbaijani Genocide. The resolution says that the genocide of March 1918, in which more than 20,000 innocent Azerbaijani people lost their lives was an event that represents one of the most condemnable atrocities in the history of the world. The resolution notes that the Armenian Dashnak-Bolshevik troops massacred innocent Azerbaijanis in Baku, Guba and Shamakhy, as well as in residential areas in Baku governorate. It says over 12,000 people were massacred in the city of Baku alone. The General Assembly of the New Jersey joins with Azerbaijani citizens in recognizing and remembering the victims of this devastating event in the hope that their memories can serve as the conscience of the world,â€ the resolution says. The resolution signed by the NJ Assembly Speaker was personally presented by State Assemblyman and Deputy Democratic Majority Leader, Thomas P. Giblin (D-NJ) to the President of Azerbaijan Society of America (ASA), Tomris Azeri.

'Azerbaijan is a completely independent state from economic point of view'

March 26 (AzerTAc). "Azerbaijan is a completely independent state from the economic point of view. Azerbaijan is developing only thanks to its own capabilities," President Ilham Aliyev said in his speech in nationwide festivities on the occasion of Novruz holiday. The President said "we are building our policy solely on our own capacities. The ongoing economic reforms are improving people's daily lives. At the same time, the leading international financial and economic institutions are also seeing these realities and evaluating them. The credit ratings of some leading European countries which are faced with the crisis are being downgraded by international rating agencies, while the credit rating of Azerbaijan is rising." "According to the estimates of the Davos World Economic Forum, number one economic forum in the world, the Azerbaijani economy is ranked first in the CIS

and 46th in the world in terms of competitiveness. All these statistics give reason to say again that the prudent political and economic reforms conducted in Azerbaijan are bearing fruit.” The head of state noted “Azerbaijan has also become a donor country for international financial institutions. Our strong financial situation allows us to invest our financial resources, including outside the country, which increases our influence opportunities. We are the leading country in the region. Not a single project or initiative can be implemented in the region without the consent of Azerbaijan.”

Azerbaijan-Turkey-Georgia business forum due in Gabala

March 28 (AzerTAc). Trilateral business forum Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey will be held on May 21 in Azerbaijani city of Gabala. According to the Ministry of Economic Development, the forum, which will be arranged for the third time, will feature discussions on economic cooperation and prospects for expanding of relations. The previous forums were held in Tbilisi and Kars.

President of Azerbaijan endorses Plan of Actions on “Year of Information-Communication Technologies - 2013 in the Republic of Azerbaijan”

March 29 (AzerTAc). President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev endorsed the Plan of Actions on the “Year of Information-Communication Technologies - 2013 in the Republic of Azerbaijan”. Under the presidential order, the coordinator of the actions is the Information and Technology Ministry of Azerbaijan. The Cabinet of Ministers of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic is assigned to provide realization of the actions connected to the development and use of information-communication technologies in the territory of the Autonomous Republic and implementation of the actions to form e-government.

Azerbaijan`s ICT sector to grow 4-4.5 times in next 10 years, ICT Minister

March 31 (AzerTAc). “Azerbaijan`s ICT market will grow 4-4.5 times in the next 10 years,” Azerbaijani Minister of Communications and Information Technologies Ali Abbasov said in an interview for Rossiyskaya Gazeta. He noted that the country`s GDP would increase two times in accordance with the “Azerbaijan 2020: a look into the future” conception. “It could be achieved by the development of the non-oil, as well as ICT sector,” the ICT Minister added. Ali Abbasov also informed about the future prospects of the ICT sector, projects implemented in the frame of the “ICT year”, as well as achievements in the “E-government” project. The Azerbaijani Communications and IT Ministry plans to increase its income in the ICT sector to \$8-9 billion in 2020. The income obtained from the sector amounted to AZN 1.3 billion (\$ 1.7 billion) in 2011. The volume of the country`s GDP amounted to 50 billion manat in 2011. Bringing this figure to 100 billion manat is one of the main goals for the next 8-10 years.

KAZAKHSTAN

Kazakhstan ranks highest in CA in tourism index

[Central](#) [Asia](#) [Online](#), Mar 3, 2013
GENEVA – Kazakhstan topped all Central Asian countries in the World Economic Forum's newly released 2013 Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index.

The survey, released March 6, ranked Kazakhstan 88th out of 140 countries – a five-slot improvement from the last previous survey in 2011.

Kyrgyzstan ranked 111th (107th in 2011), while Tajikistan finished 114th (118th in 2011). Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan weren't ranked. Pakistan finished 122nd, compared to 125th in 2011. Switzerland and Haiti finished in 1st and 140th places, respectively.

The survey ranked dozens of factors in the categories "regulatory framework," "business environment and infrastructure," and "human, cultural and natural resources."

Foreign Minister Visits India

[Astana Calling](#), Mar 8, 2013

The Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan, Erlan Idrissov, paid an official visit to India from March 3-5. In meetings with India's political leadership and senior business figures, the dynamic development of the bilateral relationship between Kazakhstan and India was heralded not only as a positive step for the two countries, but for the whole region and the wider international community.

In Mr Idrissov's meetings with Vice-President Mohammed Ansari, and External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid, both sides stressed the importance of their good relations for regional and global security. They discussed also the issue of the rehabilitation of Afghanistan, and cooperation between Kazakhstan and India in international organizations such as the United Nations.

The business relationship between Kazakhstan and India was an essential part of the Foreign Minister's visit. In 2012, trade and investment between the two countries passed the USD 500 million mark for the first time, with exports from Kazakhstan amounting to USD 190 million and imports from India to USD 335 million.

The main sectors for cooperation are hydrocarbons, pharmaceuticals and transport infrastructure. Mr Idrissov held separate talks with the Indian Minister for Oil and Natural Gas, Veerappa Moily, and a group of Indian businessmen from this sector. The Indian company ONGC Videsh Limited has already acquired a 25% stake in the Satpayev Oil Block in the Caspian Sea, and India is keen to expand cooperation in the oil and gas sectors.

To improve the trade relationship further, Kazakhstan has suggested the formation of a Kazakhstan-India Chamber of Commerce. Educational and cultural links between the two countries were also on Mr Idrissov's agenda. India is setting up an Information Technology Center of Excellence at the Eurasian University in Astana, which will be equipped with a super computer. The first trainees from the Eurasian University began studying in India in February this year.

Mr Idrissov also addressed the wider context of relations between India and the Customs Union in which Kazakhstan is joined with Russia and Belarus. The Foreign Minister spoke enthusiastically to Indian businessmen about the great opportunities, notably in hi-tech industries, which the Customs Union opens up.

In discussions with journalists, Mr Idrissov also spoke more specifically about Kazakhstan's relationship with Russia, telling them of plans to sign a new cooperation treaty between Kazakhstan and Russia at the Regional Cooperation Forum in Yekaterinburg this autumn.

The Foreign Minister was upbeat, too, in his assessment of the recent talks held in Almaty on the nuclear situation in Iran. He looked forward to greater success when the next round of talks is held in Almaty in April.

English to be taught starting from 1st grade in Kazakhstan

[Tengrinews](#), Mar 11, 2013 by Gulnara Zhandagulova

Children will be learning English starting from the first grade in all Kazakhstan schools. The novelty will be introduced country-wide starting from the new academic year (September 1, 2013), Tengrinews.kz reports referring to Minister of Education and Science of Kazakhstan Bakytzhan Zhumagulov.

“367 000 children will go to the first grade this September in Kazakhstan. All of them will start learning English. The English Language will become part of the curriculum starting from the first grade. It is the polylingualism our President was talking about,” the Minister of Education and Science said at the meeting with heads of foreign music universities in Astana.

Some of the schools are even planning to teach several subjects in English besides the English Language subject. These could be the subjects like English Literature and English History.

At present the Ministry is focusing in training enough teachers to do the classes.

Earlier Tengrinews.kz reported that 165 Kazakhstan schools were running a pilot project: they started teaching English from the second grade.

There are 7755 general education schools in Kazakhstan according to the 2010 report of the Statistics Agency of Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan company suggests solution for wastes disposal

Tengrinews, Mar 12, 2013

A Kazakhstan drinks producer has suggested a solution for wastes disposal, Tengrinews.kz reports. Lemonadoff company started accepting empty plastic bottles used for their drinks at 10 tenge (\$0.07) per bottle. The bottles are then recycled.

Lemonadoff suggests that this measure will be beneficial for the ecology and will create a precedent for other producers. According to Director General Abdulaziz Ermetov, roadsides in Kazakhstan are littered with garbage, including plastic bottles. “Unfortunately, our people are not very concerned about the environment. That’s why we have decided that a monetary remuneration for empty bottles would be a good motivation for people,” he said. “I know that machines accepting used bottles are quite popular in Europe. They are often placed in supermarkets. We are now working on implementation of a similar project in Kazakhstan. But we start from little things: now used PET-bottles of Salute and Lemonadoff can be returned for money and not just thrown away.”

All the bottles we receive are crashed in special equipment before processing. The company is now in talks on supplies of recyclable materials to several companies producing plastic goods. The company says that it is not receiving very many bottles for the time being because of low awareness of the population and their insufficient concern about the environment.

The wastes disposal problem is quite acute in Kazakhstan and in Almaty in particular. A waste-processing plant opened in Almaty in 2007 but was later suspended.

Lemonadoff company was established in 2005. Its main activities include production of draught and bottled soft drinks. In autumn 2012 the company introduced a new product at the health food market: Salute innovative drinks. “This is a completely new product for Kazakhstan market that has no equivalents,” Ermetov said. “Salute Beauty Inside contains pomegranate extract that is often referred to a “the youth draught”. The pomegranate extract and a complex of vitamins improve skin and hair and help general health improvement. Besides, the drink contains L-Carnitine amino acid that helps transform fatty acids into energy and helps people become slimmer.”

According to him, the drink was made in cooperation with the leading companies Fortitech and Lonza. The development process involved experts from the United States, Denmark and Switzerland. The Kazakhstan company’s idea of “beauty and health drinks” is part of a wide trend at the market: the global giant Coca-Cola has announced a new healthy drinks line with active food additives in France. “While French consumers are still waiting, Kazakhstan residents already have a chance to drink innovative drinks for beauty and health. The news from Coca-Cola show that functional drinks are a

new trend among producers and we are pleased to become one of the first in the world to dive into it,” the Director of Lemonadoff Food said.

Afghanistan asks for Kazakhstan's support in entering Organization for Cooperation of Railways

Tengrinews, Mar 15, 2013

Afghanistan is asking for Kazakhstan’s support in entering the Organization for Cooperation of Railways, Tengrinews.kz reports citing Director of KazIndustry and expert of the Center for Modern Afghanistan Research Mohammad Daud as saying at Kazakhstan-Afghanistan business forum.

“Transit via our neighboring countries is the main barrier for cooperation. Uzbekistan declared a conventional ban that stopped transit of some of the goods. Besides our railway station accepting the goods has a very weak infrastructure. It is unable to cope with the arriving cargoes. What can we do? Afghanistan has its own railroad. It has to take the initiative and enter the CIS Organization for Cooperation of Railways. Kazakhstan could support Afghanistan in Russia, so that it can enter this organization more quickly. Then the transit problem would be fully resolved and we would be able to accept goods independently,” Mohammad Daud explained.

According to Kazakhstan Chamber of Commerce, the commodities turnover between Kazakhstan and Afghanistan in January-December 2012 reached \$321.5 million. Afghan entrepreneurs are interested in food, flour, construction materials and oil products.

“Kazakhstan has the leading position in the region and Afghan party realizes that. Many of our businessmen also want to invest but there is currently very little information about Kazakhstan. There are also visa problems for entrepreneurs, that’s why not all businessmen willing to work can come here,” Daud said.

Last October Afghanistan authorities asked Kazakhstan to introduce simplified visa procedures between the countries. The suggestion was made by Afghanistan’s Minister of Trade and Industry Anwar-UI-Haq Ahady during the fifth meeting of Kazakhstan-Afghanistan Inter-Government Commission for Trade and Economic Cooperation.

JIM LIVINGSTON: Kazakhstan a world apart from "Borat"

The Patriot Ledger, Mar 16, 2013 by Jim Livingston

Many of us were first introduced to Kazakhstan in the highly successful 2006 spoof film “Borat,” in which the Asian republic is portrayed as extremely backward.

Despite the crude and primitive image of the country presented to the world in “Borat,” Kazakhstan has long had an honored place in the space community as home of the Baikonur spaceport from which Sputnik, the first manmade satellite, was launched in 1957, igniting the space race.

Kazakhstan was then still part of the Soviet Union, and other Soviet space firsts launched from there included the first human in orbit (Yuri Gagarin, 1961), first unmanned moon landing, first circumlunar mission (giving mankind its first look at the back side of the moon), first female in orbit, first space station, and the first landings on Mars and on Venus. Today it remains the launch site for manned travel to the International Space Station, including the travel of private citizens who can afford the modest fee of fifty million dollars for a space adventure.

Space Adventures is a Virginia-based space tourism company working with the Russian space agency, which now leases the Baikonur spaceport from Kazakhstan. Despite the impressive price, and the physically demanding training required of the space tourists, the company has already sent seven private citizens on separate weeklong trips to the space station, including one woman.

While on the station, you circle the globe every 90 minutes, enjoying spectacular views of the Earth 200 miles below and of the myriad of stars shining in the blackness of space. If you choose, you can also assist the professional cosmonauts with their scientific experiments. One client later said, "I knew that it would be magic, and it was beyond my wildest dreams." For those with even fatter wallets, Space Adventures is offering a mission around the moon scheduled for launch in 2015, with the first seat already sold for \$150 million.

Not everyone can afford those prices, so Space Adventures will soon be able to send you about 60 miles up for a brief suborbital flight that will cost you only about \$100 thousand, a relative bargain. But here Space Adventures is running into heavy competition, because several other companies are getting into the suborbital business.

One aggressive competitor is Virgin Galactic, brainchild of Richard Branson of Virgin Atlantic. Rather than launching from Kazakhstan, they'll be launching from Spaceport America, a newly constructed spaceport in southern New Mexico. Virgin Galactic is offering two-hour suborbital trips for \$200 thousand, and over 500 future astronauts have already put up that deposit for the chance to travel into space.

Another company in the suborbital space race is XCOR Aerospace (\$95 thousand for a 45-minute flight), launching from a spaceport in Mojave, California. That's still a bit pricy for me, and I get dizzy even on amusement-park rides, but if you're keen for a space adventure, you'd better sign up fast. The first commercial suborbital flights will probably be going up early next year, either from New Mexico, from California, or from Kazakhstan.

The attention to Kazakhstan generated by "Borat" actually stimulated tourism there, which has increased tenfold since the film. But many Kazakhs are still angry with Sacha Baron Cohen, the British comedian who wrote and starred in the deeply insulting film. They would probably be willing to contribute a few million dollars to send Cohen into space - on a one-way trip.

Jim Livingston, who lives in Braintree, is a member of The Planetary Society and can be reached at jdliiv@mit.edu. Read more of his columns.

Kazakhstan to Host Expo 2017 on Future Energy

Special to the Diplomatic Courier

Mar 23, 2013 by Nurlan Kapparov

In 2017 the world's eyes will be on a young nation with a bright future—Kazakhstan. A former Soviet Republic turned engine of economic prosperity, Kazakhstan and its capital city of Astana will host Expo 2017 on the theme of "Future Energy". This will be the first time that an international exhibition of this kind takes place on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

The theme of Expo 2017, "Future Energy", is well suited to the host country and the region it is leading toward a brighter, cleaner, more prosperous future. Kazakhstan is uniquely positioned to host this exhibition. As a significant oil producer, it is looking to the future and starting the process of greening its economy.

Located in the strategically vital area between Europe and Asia, Kazakhstan has come a long way in the 20 years since it gained independence. When the Soviet Union fell apart, many wondered if Kazakhstan had the long-term viability necessary to establish itself as an independent country. In little more than two decades, it has begun the process of democratization and created a booming economy that has been named one of the world's 20 Most Attractive Investment Destinations by the World Bank. It is now considered one of the world's fastest growing economies (along with China and Qatar) and has benefited from over \$160 billion in foreign investment since 1991.

As part of the next stage of the modernization process, Kazakhstan has committed to building a green economy and taken the initiative to create the “Green Bridge Partnership”. This partnership, which gained support at the Rio+20 conference on sustainable development in June last year, brings together governments, international organizations, and private businesses to find transnational solutions to sustainable growth. It is also intended to provide a platform to discuss and implement the best available green technologies and best green practices in Central Asia.

And it is on this platform that Expo 2017 will be built. The exhibition is expected to attract five million visits. It will serve to highlight the energy and environmental issues facing Central Asia and, at the same time, attract the world’s best experts on energy efficiency technologies. Its physical structure will reflect the chosen theme. It will be hosted on a self-contained site that will be fully self-sufficient in terms of energy. Each building will have solar cells and the site will be powered by its own wind farm. Participants will be able to travel around the site via sustainable transport and dine on organic food. Because the Expo tradition is built around innovation, Kazakhstan and Astana in particular make ideal hosts for Expo 2017. As a brand new capital city that is leading an economic revolution in Central Asia, Astana’s Expo will allow visitors to experience the possibility of a future world with a cleaner, more secure energy supply. An exhibition on this scale will build international awareness of the energy and environmental challenges that need to be faced in the region. It will also attract some of the best expertise available in the world on subjects such as energy saving technologies and alternative energy solutions, including solar, wind and biomass.

By hosting Expo 2017, Kazakhstan will leave its mark on the international environmental agenda. Hopefully, the impact will be long-term and will help find solutions to some of the pressing energy and environmental needs of the region.

Nurlan Kapparov is Kazakhstan’s Minister of Environmental Protection.

This article was originally published in the Diplomatic Courier’s March/April 2013 print edition.

Under Construction: Kazakhstan's Space-Age Capital

[NPR](#), Mar 26, 2013 by Claire O’neill

In 1997, Kazakhstan, recently freed from the Soviet Union, packed up its border-location capital, and moved it to the inhospitable steppe, smack in the middle of the country. That’s where the country’s president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, thought it should be. It was named “Astana,” which translates to ... “capital.”

“Rich in oil and other mineral resources,” reads a National Geographic article, “Kazakhstan has lavished billions on the new capital,” inviting notable planners and architects from around the world to build a city from scratch.

It’s one of the youngest capital cities in the world. And many have marveled at what has emerged. It’s been described by National Geographic as “brash and grandiose,” The Guardian as “the space station in the steppes.”

Photographer Fabrice Fouillet was watching a documentary about architect Norman Foster when he first caught sight of Astana — and the structure Foster designed: the Khan Shatyr Entertainment Center, basically the world’s biggest tent.

“I like architecture,” Fouillet writes from France, “and the ostentatious monuments of Astana were fascinating me.” Shortly thereafter, Fouillet found himself in the remote Central Asian city with a camera. He shot this series in July 2012.

“The new official buildings are sometimes colossal, bordering on disproportion, the skeletons of ill-assorted buildings rise from this suburban-like area, which vacillates between authenticity and artifice ...” he writes on his website, which has the full series.

Many of the photos coming from Astana reveal architectural achievements in all their completed splendor. Fouillet, though, has a slightly stranger take — a clinical view of modern monuments emerging from scaffolding and sand.

KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyzstan plans to establish Guarantee Fund Institute

01/03-2013 10:21, Bishkek – 24.kg news agency , by Anastasia BENGARD

It is planned to establish a Guarantee Fund Institute in Kyrgyzstan. A relevant draft bill will be discussed at today's parliament hearings.

The main task of the guarantee funds is to increase small and medium enterprises' access to financial and credit resources by providing guarantees. Despite the high liquidity in the banks and big demand for loans, the banking sector of the Kyrgyz Republic does not increase lending to the real sector due to high credit risk. The big problem is the lack or absence of floating charge. It hinders the growth of small business, employment and population's income.

As noted, two guarantee funds Kara-Balta and Jalal-Abad operate in the country with technical support from USAID Local Development Program in Kyrgyzstan. They have issued 53 guarantees at 5.4 million soms, which is 25.85 percent of total sum of loans. There have been granted loans in the amount of 21.2 million soms. Total revenue of grant receivers made up 138.9 million soms. There were created 43 new jobs and supported activity of 264 people. The recoverability on the guarantees makes up 100 percent.

Initiators of the draft bill hope that if the bill is adopted, small and medium-sized businesses will get more loans resulting in increase of production capacity.

Kazakhstan to celebrate 85th anniversary of Chyngyz Aitmatov

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It's noted that in 2012 fall, Kazakhstan will hold Kyrgyz Culture Days "with purpose to introduce the rich Kyrgyz cultural and historical inheritance, the modern Kyrgyz art and the folk art to the Kazakh public.

The parties agreed on joint anniversary of Chyngyz Aitmatov, the national Kyrgyz writer. Also, they plan tour of the State National Russian Theatre named Ch.Aitmatov to Astana.

Kyrgyzstan to mark April Revolution Day

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Kyrgyzstan will mark the April Revolution Day. An appropriate order was signed by the President of Kyrgyzstan Almazbek Atambayev on March 4, Information Policy Department of President's Office of Kyrgyzstan reported.

According to the document, an organizing committee on holding the events in Bishkek, Osh and other cities, headed by the Prime Minister Zhanoro Satybaldiyev, has been established.

The government in its turn was charged with financial and organizational support issues.

Valentina Shevchenko from Kyrgyzstan becomes WKC Muay Thai world champion

05/03-2013 07:14, Bishkek – 24.kg news agency , by Anastasia MOKRENKO

Valentina Shevchenko from Kyrgyzstan became the world WKC Muay Thai champion. She defeated Mexican Malena Munoz by knockout in the first round. The press center of the Kyrgyz Republic's Muay Thai Federation informed.

Reportedly, so Valentina Shevchenko has added another WKC title in the weight category of 60 kg to her world Muay Thai titles under versions of WMC and IFMA.

According to her coach Pavel Fedotov, in early June, she will defend the title in the Mexican capital Mexico City. Her sister Antonina Shevchenko in weight category of 63.5 kg will fight in the same tournament for WKC world champion title.

Bishkek to host international forum for protection of snow leopards

06/03-2013 14:42, Bishkek – 24.kg news agency , by Munara BOROMBAYEVA

"In the early summer Bishkek will host an international forum for the protection of snow leopards. It will be attended by representatives of 12 countries, where this unique animal live," State Secretary of the State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry under the government of the Kyrgyz Republic Abdiev Bakhtiar said today at a press conference.

According to him, snow leopard is a symbolic animal for the Kyrgyz. "It is depicted on the emblem of Bishkek. And we must do our best to preserve its population," Bakhtiar Abdiev said.

"We are planning to hold a forum at a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to attract public attention. Secretariat, established with the help of international donors, will help us in this field," he said.

"State is not to spend budget money on organization of the forum. At the time we are actively attracting donors, including USAID, UNDP, NABU and others," Bakhtiar Abdiev said.

Mikhail Fedorov: Issyk-Kul forum went beyond Kyrgyzstan and relates to all humankind

12/03-2013 10:32, Bishkek – 24.kg news agency , by Anastasia BENGARD

"Issyk-Kul forum went beyond Kyrgyzstan and relates to all humankind," Mikhail Fedorov, Head of Ural State University of Economics said today at a session of a parliamentary Committee for Education, Science, Culture and Sports.

According to him the planned meeting is a unique platform for formation of a new ideology. "The forum will differ from all those that take place in the modern world. Most of them are economic, but little regard the humanitarian sphere, art, painting, education, morality. What Chingiz Aitmatov, great writer, started in his time, must be continued. It should become an annual event," Mikhail Fedorov said.

As Vice Speaker of Parliament Asiya Sasykbaeva stated previously, leaders of Sverdlovsk oblast of Russia were ready to support the holding of the international forum of Chingiz Aitmatov at Issyk-Kul in 2013. This is the third forum, devoted to the well-known writer.

Central Asia security to be discussed in Bishkek on initiative of CSTO

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The security of Central Asia issue will be discussed in Bishkek on the initiative of CSTO. Nikolai Bordyuzha, Secretary General of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, who arrived on a working visit to Kyrgyzstan, informed the Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambayev.

According to the President's press service, during meeting the parties discussed priority issues of the cooperation, arrangements effected under the auspices of CSTO, including the summit planned for May 2013 under the presidency of Kyrgyzstan.

Also, Nikolai Bordyuzha informed the president that CSTO secretariat worked out a plan of orders implementation, agreed with heads of the CSTO member-states. It was noted that, as chairman of the CSTO Collective Security Council, Almazbek Atambayev approved it.

The Secretary General noted they expect participation of representatives of CSTO secretariat and political analysts from CSTO countries in the CSTO and Security in the Central Asia round table. Recall, being a Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan, Almazbek Atambayev has criticized Nikolai Bordyuzha, accusing the CSTO Secretary General of dreaming to impose an "external government" on Kyrgyzstan. Soon the conflict was resolved. The CSTO Secretary General and the President have held a number of meetings since 2010; the last time they met was November 2012 in Bishkek.

Kyrgyzstan and Austria sign agriculture and trade cooperation agreements

15/03-2013 06:49, Bishkek – 24.kg news agency , by Julia KOSTENKO

Kyrgyzstan and Austria signed agreements on cooperation in agriculture and trade spheres on March 14 in course of an official visit of Heinz Fischer, President of Austria, to Kyrgyzstan.

The parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation of Kyrgyzstan and the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management of Austria.

In addition, an agreement was inked by representatives of Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Federal Economic Chamber of Austria. Several other agreements will be expectedly signed between the countries during a business forum today, March 15.

Kyrgyz song contest held in New York

01/03-2013 12:47, Bishkek – 24.kg news agency , by Kanykei MANASOVA

Kyrgyz song contest was held in New York, Kyrgyz Club International Association of Compatriots reported.

According to its information, participants had to sing any song of national performers. The event itself was held at a karaoke center with a wide variety of songs in Kyrgyz. The improvised concert had a warm atmosphere, gathering music fans and those who just wanted to meet with compatriots.

As noted, following the contest results, Aidai Abdrazakova and Mirbek Omurkanov were chosen winners and got \$200 prizes. The concert was a part of the Kyrgyz language and culture popularization and promotion program among compatriots abroad.

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TURKEY

Istanbul aims for 2020 Olympics

More than 400 sports leaders and government officials held the International Sports Summit in Istanbul on March 1 as the first step toward Istanbul's bid for the 2020 Olympics.

Suat Kilic, Turkish Minister of Youth and Sports, claimed at the meeting that Istanbul is deserved for the host of the 2020 Olympics because it has been on this process for a long time. " We had bid for four times and now on the fifth."

He said that the bidding process has been supported by the Turkish government and parliament while Istanbul has become the top 5 tourist destination in the world, receiving 15 million tourists every year. Hasan Arat, who heads Istanbul 2020 Bid committee, is optimistic about the city's fifth bid, stating that over the past several years the city has seen the development of new venues and infrastructure improvements. Turkey's fast growing economy can also greatly benefit the bid.

Former London Mayor Ken Livingstone was also present at the meeting, offering his advice to Turkish Olympics organizing committee. "I would vote for Istanbul if I have one vote."

The summit aims to introduce Istanbul, an ambitious candidate for the 2020 Olympic Games, and talk about the socio-economic contributions that would come from hosting the Olympics.

The first of its kind, the International Summit will become an annual event in the near future, according to the official statement.

Hosting a series of prominent speakers, from football coach Fatih Terim to representatives of Turkish and Brazilian Olympics committees, panels at the event focused on the economics of the Olympics, violence in sports events, the notion of fair play and the forming of brands in sports.

Istanbul 2020 is a bid for the 2020 Summer Olympics by the city of Istanbul and the National Olympic Committee of Turkey. The winning bid will be announced on September 7, 2013 at the 125th IOC Session in Buenos Aires.

The main rivals against Istanbul are Tokyo and Madrid.

The National Olympic Committee of Turkey announced the selection of Istanbul as Turkey's candidate on July 7, 2011. Turkey's candidacy was announced officially by Prime Minister Erdogan on August 13, 2011. 1/3/2013

Turkey creates IFF radar system

The Turkish military-industrial company Aselsan has created a radar system for "friendly-hostile" differentiation for air defense systems, combat aircrafts, helicopters and ships.

The company has been working on the creation of the radar system for about seven years. According to the newspaper, a successful test of the system was conducted on F-4 fighters.

There are seven countries operating IFF radar systems. The company states its intention to start mass production of the recognition systems in the coming months.

Creation of the IFF system is part of the national program aimed at providing the Turkish army with arms, equipment and outfit of domestic production. Currently, Turkey has achieved 50 percent self-sufficiency in this sector.

Today Turkey produces Altai tanks, UAV ANKA, and aircraft carriers. Furthermore, the country declared its intention to produce guns and the second type of UAV. 1/3/2013

Kars-Tbilisi-Baku Railway ministers' meeting

Turkey's Transportation, Maritime Affairs and Communications Minister Binali Yildirim attended a ministers' meeting on the Kars-Tbilisi-Baku Railway in the north-western province of Istanbul.

As part of the meeting, Yildirim came together with Georgian Economy Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili and Azerbaijani Transportation Minister Ziya Mammadov.

At the end of the meeting, the three ministers signed a protocol to speed up the completion of the Kars-Tbilisi-Baku Railway.

"Our aim is to begin test rides on the railway by the end of 2013," Yildirim stressed. 1/3/2013

Turkey provided more than 200 wells in Niger

Turkey provided the digging and equipment of more than 200 wells in Niger in five years.

Dug by Turkey's International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA), wells changed the lives of Nigeriens who were suffering from lack of clean water and used to walk for kilometers to reach potable water.

TIKA official Emir Sultan said each well becomes a hope for the Nigeriens and they would continue to open up wells in the country. 1/3/2013

Turkish and Greek foreign ministers finalize more than 20 agreements

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu attended a working group meeting with his Greek counterpart, Dimitris Avramopoulos, in Istanbul on March 3, finalizing more than 20 agreements a day before a Turkish-Greek High Level Strategic Partnership Council summit.

Both ministers overviewed the agenda of tomorrow's meetings and finalized the more than 20 agreements expected to be signed during the summit.

The delegations of the two countries expressed their satisfaction with the number of agreements and said the council's second summit would add dynamism and boost bilateral relations. They also agreed to closely follow the implementations of the agreements and stay in close touch in the upcoming period.

Avramopoulos and Davutoğlu also met Feb. 15 in Ankara to conduct preparations for the gathering.

"[While] boosting good relations between Turkey and Greece, we want to create a model network of relations for the region and for the eastern Mediterranean," the Greek minister had said regarding moves to expand the areas of cooperation between the two neighbors. 4/3/2013

Greek PM arrives in Turkey

Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras arrived on March 4 in Istanbul.

Samaras is accompanied by a delegation of his cabinet members and Greek businesspeople.

He held a bilateral meeting with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the two leaders appeared in a joint press conference after participating in a meeting of the Turkey-Greece High Level Cooperation Council.

Samaras and Erdogan also participated in a Turkish-Greek Business Forum at Istanbul's Ciragan Palace.

Erdogan said that the trade volume between Greece and Turkey increased more than 100 percent in the past 10 years.

Speaking at the Turkish-Greek Business Forum in Istanbul, Erdogan underlined that they aimed at increasing the bilateral trade volume between Turkey and Greece to 10 billion USD in the shortest time possible.

We must display determination by the end of 2015 to reach a trade volume of 10 billion USD, Erdogan also said. 4/3/2013

Turkish PM calls for joint effort with Greece to settle Cyprus issue

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on March 4 urged his Greek counterpart to extend joint efforts to end a dispute over the eastern Mediterranean island of Cyprus which has been divided between a Turkish north and a Greek south since 1974.

"Let's overcome this issue and bury this problem deep in the history. I believe with a strong political will, Mr Samaras' government and my government will receive a result which is crucially important for regional peace, security and stability," Erdogan told a joint press conference with Greek Premier Antonis Samaras in Istanbul after a meeting of the Turkey-Greece High Level Cooperation Council.

Erdogan cited "a positive and a constructive atmosphere" in relations between the two countries, which he said would improve mutual understanding and good neighborhood ties.

Erdogan said Turkish and Greek minorities living in Greece and Turkey constituted "a bridge of friendship" between the two nations, adding that welfare of the minorities would strengthen Turkish-Greek ties.

The Turkish premier said Monday's meeting of the Turkey-Greece High Level Cooperation Council saw the penning of more than two dozens of agreements, which he said was a testimony to the development of relations.

Erdogan said trade volume between the two countries reached \$5 billion, adding that more than one million Turks and Greeks visited each others countries over the past two years. 4/3/2013

Greek premier cites 'constructive talks' with Turkish officials

Samaras described his talks with Turkish officials "constructive" for relations between his country and Turkey.

"Today is a good day for Turkish-Greek relations. And it is in our hands to make more such good days," Samaras told a joint press conference with his Turkish counterpart Erdogan.

Samaras said gathering of Turkish and Greek businesspeople as well as cabinet members of the two countries offered new windows for cooperation and new business opportunities.

"Bringing politicians and businesspeople closer helps bring peoples closer and serves in economic development and peace," Samaras said. 4/3/2013

Turkey signs cooperation protocol with Islamic bank

Turkey signed a memorandum of understanding with the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) on March 2.

The MoU was signed by Turkish Economy Minister Zafer Caglayan and Ahmed Mohammed Ali Al-Madani, IDB's president in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

The deal seeks to boost trade and investment between Turkey and and the members of the Islamic Development Bank.

Caglayan met with Saudi Arabia's Minister of Transport Jubarah bin Eid al-Suraysiri and Minister of Housing Shawaysh bin Saud al-Dhuwayhi on March 3 as part of a visit in capital Riyadh.

Caglayan was in Riyadh to hold a series of talks and participate in a Turkish-Saudi Arabian Business Forum.

Speaking to reporters after the meetings, Caglayan said he briefed the Saudi ministers about Turkey's newly introduced incentive system, calling for the investment of Saudi funds which he said had withdrawn from the United States and Europe.

Caglayan Saudi investors were willing to do more business with their Turkish counterparts, adding that a Turkish construction company had recently won a tender to build housing units worth of \$450 million. 4/3/2013

Turkish FM hopeful for solution process in Cyprus

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu has said that Nicos Anastasiades, newly elected leader of Greek Cypriot administration, had voted 'yes' in Kofi Annan's Cyprus plan referendum, which Davutoglu defined as a psychological advantage in solution process in Cyprus.

Davutoglu said that Turkey had never neglected Cyprus, and kept abreast of Cyprus issue.

"That is the time that Greek Cypriots should behave more ethically and realistically. Greek government has a will to make significant progress in Cyprus issue, and to work together," said Davutoglu.

Davutoglu said that he had talked to the UN secretary general, telling him that Turkey and Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus were always ready to start all over for re solution of Cyprus issue.

"Anastasiades has maneuver skills to take steps on basis of public opinion of Greek Cypriots, and Turkey will assess the process according to further steps of Anastasiades," said Davutoglu.

Davutoglu also answered questions about his meeting with US Secretary of State John Kerry and said that he had talked to Kerry about relations between Turkey and Israel.

"Turkey has not shown any biased attitude towards any nation or government throughout its history, and Turkey exerts the utmost effort for a two-state solution for Palestine issue," said Davutoglu.

"We have not seen any concrete steps from Israel in last three years. Israel wants to rectify relations with Turkey; however, Israel knows what to do to normalize our relations," said Davutoglu.

Davutoglu responded to questions also about the solution process for Kurdish issue.

Davutoglu pointed that a problem either in Middle East or Balkans or somewhere else, Turkey was a country to be applied for the solution for refuge and said, "Such a cure-all regarded country, should be confident of herself and heal her own domestic wounds".

Davutoglu stated that delay of that solution would enable any local trauma to affect its abroad and vice versa and added, "In this mobility situation in the region, some may desire to expand the mobility as a threat to us. Some may think that Turkey has gained too much power and would like to prevent it or would try to create polarization between Turkey and its neighbours".

Stating that nations become nations after they overcome their own problems, Davutoglu told, "What is vital is to make a decision at a crucial point, not to portray a confusion". 5/3/2013

Chapter 22 expected to be opened in June

Turkey is ready for the opening of a new chapter in European Union (EU) accession talks.

The draft of Chapter 22 on "Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments" was sent unofficially to the European Union Commission. "We are now waiting for the member countries to evaluate it," said Egemen Bagis, Turkey's Minister of EU and Chief Negotiator.

Bagis said, "After we get the opinions of the member countries, we will deliver the draft officially to the commission on Friday and the procedure will take start."

Bagis accepted the courtesy visit of Ombudsman Mehmet Nihat Omeroglu and they talked about the new Ombudsman's Office. Bagis expressed his pleasure with meeting the first ombudsman of Republic of Turkey.

The office is important for two reasons, said Bagis. "The first reason is that we would not be a member of EU without establishing this institution. The second one is that this office is a follow-up to the system of 'bas kadilik' (chief public judge) in the Ottoman Empire."

Bagis added the new office is totally neutral and has some rights guaranteed by law.

Ombudsman Omeroglu described the new institution as "management in daylight" focusing the transparency needed in state institutions.

The office will begin receiving complaints from people and other institutions about public administrations on March 29, 2013. 5/3/2013

Kerry wants Turkey's inclusion in TAFTA

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said on March 6 that US Secretary of State John Kerry wanted Turkey to be included in Transatlantic Free-Trade Area (TAFTA).

Davutoglu said they would follow closely the process of Turkey's inclusion in TAFTA.

Davutoglu received a Turkish-American Business Council (TABC) delegation and talked about US-EU Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership project (TTIP). Davutoglu informed the council on Turkey-USA relations within framework of TTIP.

Another issue discussed at the meeting was Turkey's regional policy. The situation and the peace process in Middle East were evaluated.

The council also informed Davutoglu on its own activities. 6/3/2013

Erdogan meets with Surinamese vice president in Ankara

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan met with Surinam's Vice President Robert Ameerila, who pays a formal visit in the Turkish capital, Ankara.

"Surinam is among the countries which Turkey wants to develop its relations with as part of our country's Latin American initiative. Our relations with Brazil, ties that would develop with Surinam and Chile alike will boost our influence in the region," Erdogan told a joint press conference with Ameerila after a bilateral meeting.

Erdogan said Surinam's rising profile and developing economy made it an important country in the region, adding the Surinamese support would help Turkey boost its relations with the Association of Caribbean States.

"You cannot ignore anywhere. If you have a claim to become a big state, you need to reach every corner of the world," Erdogan said.

The Surinamese vice president, on his part, said that Turkey and Surinam had a great potential for cooperation, adding that his country was also willing to develop ties with Turkey.

"I am here today to elevate our relations a notch higher. What we want is a transparent cooperation that we could both benefit," Ameerila said, adding that Turkish businesspeople could explore many opportunities in Surinam.

Prior to the press conference, Erdogan and Ameerila penned a cooperation agreement in commerce and economy between the two countries. 8/3/2013

"Turkey among top seven to invest in", claims US envoy

USA's Ambassador in Ankara Francis Ricciardone on March 8 said, "The US government has reviewed the world in terms of strategic business opportunities and placed Turkey among the top seven countries suitable for commerce and investment."

Ricciardone attended "Turkey-US Cooperation Days Eskisehir Meeting" organized by Eskisehir Industrialists and Businessmen Association (ESIAD) in Eskisehir.

Ricciardone emphasized that there was a great potential between Turkey and the EU in terms of trade and investment and stated that the potential would increase if businessmen and NGOs cooperated.

"Since our President Barack Obama's Turkey visit in 2009, US exports to Turkey increased by 65 percent and Turkey's exports to US increased by 75 percent. We have decided to push the limits and are working on whether we could double the trade between two countries. We think highly of Turkey's determination to be among the top ten economies in the world and 2023 targets," Ricciardone said.

Stating that around 200 US companies were actively doing business in Turkey and the companies were increasing day by day, Ricciardone said, "Some major US companies have come to Turkey since I began my assignment. This is an indication that US firms would like to do more business in Turkey."

"The US government has reviewed the world in terms of strategic business opportunities and placed Turkey among the top seven countries suitable for commerce and investment. Turkey is the only country from Europe out of these countries. The US is aware of the fact that Turkey is a part of the Europe with the customs union agreement," Ricciardone added. 8/3/2013

Davutoglu cites "serious differences" with Iran over Syria crisis

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu has said his country and Iran had deep running differences concerning their approach to the crisis in Syria.

"We have serious differences of opinion with Iran over the Syrian issue. We hope that Iran would come to understand the new dynamics in the region," Davutoglu told Thursday a conference at the London School of Economics on challenges in global and regional politics.

Davutoglu said Iran remained silent to the Syrian regime's killing of its own people, adding that the UN Security Council has been unable to act on the crisis in Syria as well.

Over Iran's controversial nuclear program, Davutoglu said Turkey had a clear position on the issue, adding, "we do not want to see a nuclear power in our region -- Iran, Israel or any other country. But we believe that all countries have a right for a peaceful nuclear program."

Responding to a question on Turkey's relations with Israel, Davutoglu said relations would not go back to normal until Israel extended an official apology and paid redress for the families of the victims of the Mavi Marmara attack, and the Jewish state lifted its blockade on Gaza.

In May 2010, Israeli commandos raided a Gaza-bound aid flotilla, killing nine Turkish nationals on international waters. 8/3/2013

Turkey's "Gokturk-3" satellite to be launched to space in 2019

Turkey will launch its radar observation satellite "Gokturk-3" to space in 2019.

A senior official with the Turkish National Defense Ministry, Mujdat Uludag said that they were making preparations to send "Gokturk-3" to space in 2019.

"We began working on a 'Satellite Launch Center' so that we can send our satellites to space with our own means. We will begin working on the launch center within 2013," Uludag also said. 9/3/2013

Turkish FM Davutoglu meets UNHCR commissioner Guterres

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu discussed the humanitarian assistance to be sent for the Syrians with Antonio Guterres, United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees, referring to the speech Guterres delivered in Geneva last month.

Davutoglu underlined Turkey's efforts for the Syrians, the acceleration of the political solution process in Syria and he also emphasized that war crimes should be punished.

Guterres thanked Turkey for the efforts it has made for the Syrians so far saying that they would help with the humanitarian assistance as much as they could.

"We are in contact with the opposition and the Syrian regime," Guterres added.

"Real solution will be possible if the political transition process is carried out," Guterres also said. 11/3/2013

Turkish Red Crescent relief ship off to Somalia

A humanitarian aid ship of the Turkish Red Crescent carrying food and construction materials was set to depart on Wednesday for Somalia as part of Turkey's drive to contribute to the African nation's efforts to fight starvation and to reconstruct their country.

The aid vessel is loaded with concrete plant and paving stone factory supplies, relief supply kits, sugar, flour, and it is set to leave the Derince Harbor in the northwestern province of Kocaeli in the evening.

"We want to make Somalia a more livable country. Within this context, we have loaded about 11 thousand tons of supplies," said Utku Calim, Turkish Red Crescent's chief official in charge of international programs.

Calim said that the ship was expected to reach the Mogadishu Harbor in 15 days and it would take another 15 days to unload the supplies. He added that the relief supply kits would be distributed to 2,700 Somali families.

The Turkish Red Crescent said the relief materials consisted of heavy construction equipments, canned food, five tons of sugar and five tons of flour, 2,700 relief supply kits, furniture equipments, air conditioners, garbage dumpsters, concrete plant and paving stone factory supplies, and a water pump. 13/3/2013

Turkish Premier visited Denmark and the Netherlands

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan paid formal visits to Denmark and the Netherlands on March 19 to 21, 2013 upon the invitation of his counterparts.

The first stop of Erdogan's formal visit was the Danish capital of Copenhagen where Erdogan met with Queen of Denmark Margrethe II and Prime Minister Thorning Schmidt, made official contacts and attended round table discussions.

Erdogan then travelled to Holland where he was received by Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands on Thursday. Erdogan also met with the Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte and attended a meeting with Turkish and Dutch company representatives in Rotterdam.

"These visits will contribute to our bilateral relations as well as Turkey's EU accession process and discussion of international matters," was also stated. 13/3/2013

Turkish FM Davutoglu meets Syrian Interim PM Hitto

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu met with the Syrian Interim Prime Minister Ghassan Hitto in Ankara on March 22.

Speaking to reporters before meeting Hitto, Ahmet Davutoglu congratulated Hitto for his new post. "Turkey always respects the decisions of Syrian opposition," Davutoglu said.

"Turkey will continue to do whatever is necessary so that the political transformation in Syria takes place in the shortest time and through most peaceful means," Davutoglu underlined.

"Mr. Hitto has assumed a crucial mission at a time when Syrian history as well as regional history are at a tough phase," Davutoglu noted.

"The people of Syria in the past two years suffered immense pain and they displayed great resistance for human dignity," Davutoglu stated.

"Turkey has always been on the side of Syrian people during the two years of Syrian crisis and we host more than 100,000 Syrian refugees in camps," Davutoglu emphasized.

"The peoples of Turkey and Syria have been living together for centuries. Syrian opposition has taken another crucial step after forming the Syrian National Coalition. An interim government was established and Mr. Hitto has become their prime minister. We have always respected the decisions of the Syrian people and opposition," Davutoglu indicated.

Hitto, in his part, thanked Turkish people for their support.

"Turkish people are always with the Syrian people. We are grateful for this," Hitto underlined.

"Two things remained on my mind after visiting the camps where Syrians live in Turkey," Hitto said.

"One of them has to do with a sentence written at the entrance of the camp and which read 'They are Turkey's guests'. This message reflects the relations between our peoples. And, the second one was about the high level assistance to Syrians at the camps. I thank Turkey for the hospitality displayed. The upcoming term would be a difficult one for us. In this time frame, all fronts must get united. This time frame will necessitate for the Turkish government and people to work closely with us. We will never forget that the Turkish government stands by us," Hitto said.

"We expect Turkey to continue to display the stance it has demonstrated so far. God willing, the Syrian people will win victories," Hitto also said. 22/3/2013

Israel apologizes to Turkey over flotilla deaths

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has apologized to Turkey for a deadly naval raid in 2010 and announced a full resumption of diplomatic ties with Ankara.

After the gesture, officials from both countries said diplomatic relations had been fully restored and that ambassadors would be reinstated.

The diplomatic breakthrough was facilitated by U.S. President Barack Obama at the end of his three-day visit to Israel.

A statement from Netanyahu's office said the agreement came during a telephone call Friday between the Israeli prime minister and his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The statement said Netanyahu apologized to the Turkish people for the loss of life that occurred during the 2010 raid and that he expressed regret over the deterioration in bilateral relations between the two countries.

A statement from Erdogan's office said he accepted the apology. It also said an agreement had been reached on the issue of compensation in the naval raid.

Ties between Israel and Turkey have been strained since May 2010, when Israeli commandos raided the ship, the Mavi Marmara, leading the death of nine Turkish activists.

President Obama said Friday at a press conference in Amman that he has been encouraging Israeli and Turkish officials to repair their damaged relations. During talks earlier with Netanyahu, Obama said the time seemed right to push for a breakthrough.

Senior Obama administration officials said the U.S. president was present during Friday's phone call between the Israeli and Turkish prime ministers and they said Obama also spoke on the phone with Erdogan.

A U.S. foreign policy expert, Natan Sachs with the Brookings Institution, described the diplomatic breakthrough to VOA's Encounter program as a "huge success."

"It is really one of those rare situations in the Middle East where you have a win-win," said Sachs. "It's good for Israel. It is good for Turkey and it is very good for an ally of both, the United States."

The Mavi Marmara was carrying humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip in 2010 in defiance of an Israeli blockade aimed at preventing weapons from reaching militants. A confrontation on the vessel led to the killing of nine Turkish activists and the wounding of several Israeli soldiers. 23/3/2013

Turkey to launch its third high-speed train line

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan inaugurated on March 24 Turkey's third high-speed train that links up the central cities of Eskisehir and Konya with four round trips daily.

The new line completes a three-city network with an existing route between capital Ankara and Eskisehir, and another one between Ankara and Konya.

Turkey's high-speed train operations began in March 2009 with the Ankara-Eskisehir line which offers 20 round trips daily.

The line has held 26,411 services and carried 7.3 million passengers so far, forcing inter-city passenger bus fares on Ankara-Eskisehir route to drop dramatically from 55 percent to 10 percent, while increasing railway use on the route from 8 percent to 72 percent.

Services started on Ankara-Konya line in August 2011 and the number of daily services on this line is 16. So far, 7,825 round trips have been made, and 2.07 million passengers travelled on this line.

After high-speed train started serving, the share of passenger buses on Ankara-Konya route plummeted from 70 percent to 18 percent, while railway travel increased to 65 percent. There was no train service on this route prior to the launching of the high-speed train line.

Turkey's high-speed trains have carried a total of 9.4 million passengers so far. 24/3/2013

Turkish PM sends letter to Obama on EU deal

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has sent a letter to U.S. President Barack Obama so that Washington would continue talks with Turkey for a free trade agreement simultaneously with the EU, Economy Minister Zafer Çağlayan said on March 26.

"If the status quo continues, we may have to put the Customs Union [with the EU] on hold as the Customs Union is now working against Turkey," Çağlayan said.

However, Turkey has asked Germany to aid it in joining a prospective U.S.-EU free trade agreement (FTA) so that Ankara is not left out in the cold in terms of international trade, Çağlayan told reporters while meeting with Nils Schmid, the deputy premier and economy and finance minister of Baden-Württemberg.

"Difficulties arising from visas, quotas placed on the free movement of Turkish products, and the fact that Turkey cannot sign free trade agreements with countries who already have FTAs with the EU all cause unfair competition for Turkey," Çağlayan said.

The U.S. and EU launched moves on Feb. 13 to open negotiations on a new free trade pact, which would result in free trade between the two entities, in order to eliminate or minimize barriers everywhere.

The FTA between the EU and third parties enable these other countries' goods to enter European markets or Turkish markets via Europe with zero duties, but the decision to provide the same privileges to Turkey is up to the discretion of the third party. 26/3/2013

Davutoglu called for UN seat to Syrian opposition

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu attended the Arab League's 24th Ordinary Summit in the Qatari capital of Doha on March 26 where he said, "We must start working for the Interim Government (of Syria) to get its place at the United Nations."

Davutoglu delivered a speech at the opening of the summit where he conveyed the greetings of President Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan. He also expressed his appreciation to Sheikh Hamad bin

Halife es-Sani, the League of Arab States and H.E. Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor Al Thani, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Qatar, for their kind invitation.

Stating that the summit marked the beginning of a new chapter in the quest of a free, democratic and prosperous Syria, Davutoglu said, "It represents a historic milestone as the legitimate representatives of the Syrian people today have rightfully taken the seat of their country in the Arab League."

Davutoglu emphasized the lack of support of the international community and said, "It is unacceptable that the international community, UN Security Council in particular, stands idle as the Syrian Regime fired around 150 missiles so far which resulted in great loss of lives. We are making an utmost effort to respond the ramifications. We are now hosting almost 200 thousand Syrians in 17 camps. Over 100 thousand Syrians live outside the camps in towns and cities. We are doing our best to care for our guests in all fields pertaining to daily life such as health, education and social needs. On the other hand, Turkish Red Crescent is delivering humanitarian relief to Syria at the zero point of the border in conformity with international legitimacy and humanitarian principles."

"Since the last Core Group of the Friends of the Syrian People that was held in Rome a month ago, almost 5 thousand Syrians have died," Davutoglu added.

Stating that there was no excuse for the issue of Syria, and Syrians have been fighting for three years, Davutoglu said, "We have no luxury to wait and see; that is to say, try to contain the conflict in Syria until the Regime exhausts itself. The threat stemming from Regime's destructive policies will not get lighter by time; on the contrary, will be exponentially heavier. The decision belongs to the Syrian people. We must start working for the Interim Government to get its place at the United Nations."

Emphasizing on the Palestine issue in his talk, Davutoglu said, "Whatever the course Turkish-Israeli relations can take, we will continue to defend the Palestinian cause, stand by the oppressed and criticize Israel when and if necessary. We will continue doing everything to empower our Palestinian brothers until they become full member to UN as an independent state and Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital forever." 26/3/2013

Turkey ready to negotiate two-state solution for Cyprus: Turkish FM

Turkey is ready to negotiate a two-state solution to the Cyprus problem, if reunification talks between two sides fail and no agreement is reached over the establishment of a joint commission on gas resources on the island, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has said.

Davutoğlu criticized the Greek Cypriot plan to use oil and gas exploration rights around the eastern Mediterranean island as collateral for an international bailout package that it desperately needs to protect its economy from going bankrupt. "As Turkey, we want negotiations to start between both sides on the island and between Turkey and Greece, and we want a result, eventually. But Greek Cyprus unilaterally enacted a law that ignores the rights of Turkish Cypriots over the resources around Cyprus," Davutoğlu was quoted as saying.

"We have three paths ahead ... The U.N. mission should be accelerated and the sides should talk on a comprehensive solution and the resources should belong to a united Cyprus. A new state, which Turks are a part of, should be able to use them," he added.

U.N. envoy to Cyprus Alexander Downer had said earlier this month that a bid to restart stalled talks to reunify the divided island would only happen after the country concluded negotiations with prospective international creditors for a rescue loan that it needs in order not to go bankrupt.

"If this does not happen, then two sides should establish a body over the usage of resources that should jointly manage the marketing and extracting. The fund should be blocked in an account and should be used for peace process and the period after peace," Davutoğlu said, referring to reunification talks.

"If these do not happen and Greek Cyprus says 'the resources are ours' then it means tacitly that Turkish Cypriots own the resources in the north. If they behave according to this claim, we are ready to negotiate a two-state solution. Then these two states will meet in the EU," Davutoğlu said, adding that he was planning a visit to Turkish Cyprus soon. 28/3/2013

Babacan:"Global balance shifts to east"

Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan attended the Uludag Economy Summit organized in the north-western province of Bursa.

Speaking at the summit, Ali Babacan stressed that "The fact that Turkey has kept its promises has made Turkey a rising brand in the world."

Babacan referred to the words of Coca Cola CEO Muhtar Kent who had said "A brand is a promise, a good brand is a promise kept."

"In the last decade, Turkey's reform program in the scope of EU accession process, economic performance through its economic transformation program, and fulfilling promises all carried Turkey to a different point" Babacan stated.

"I can say that the golden triangle came into existence as a result: the government, business world and NGOs" Babacan underlined.

"The latest economic crisis has shifted balance of economic strengths from the West to the East. In the next several decades, Asia and Africa will be highly important regions" Babacan said.

"No doubt, Europe, Japan and the US will continue to have an important share in global trade. However, economic strength continues to shift from the West to the East," Babacan emphasised. Ali Babacan underlined that borders from the Balkans to the Gulf region, and from the Gulf region to Algeria and Morocco will begin to lose meaning.

"We insist on free trade which involves visa liberalizations, the free movement of individuals and free movement of products between countries", Babacan indicated.

"We want energy and funds to flow easily between countries" Babacan stated. "Such a case would be a 'win-win' scenario for all countries". 30/3/2013

"Turkey is now at a different point in international relations"

Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan said on March 31 that Turkey was now at a different point in international relations.

Speaking at a meeting of the ruling Justice and Development (AK) Party's Provincial Advisory Board in Ankara, Ali Babacan said that Turkey was a regional power and a global actor.

"In course of last ten years, Turkey went through an historic transformation," Babacan underlined.

"This has turned into a transformation not merely affecting the life in Turkey but the whole geography. Turkey has become a different country with its political and economic reforms compared to 10 years ago," Babacan noted.

"Turkey's policies implemented in the Middle East and the point reached with Israel has surprised many diplomatic experts," Babacan stated.

"For the past 3-4 years, certain circles tried to wear down our Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and us. They claimed that we were doing the wrong thing. Thank God, we stood firm and Israel had to apologize just as we had asked them to do on the first day of the 'Mavi Marmara' incident. We now

call on them (Israel) not to be a source and part of the problems. We tell them to be part of the solutions. There are serious problems in the region. We tell them that if they want to do anything, they should contribute to solutions and regional peace," Babacan said.

"With its democracy and strong economy, Turkey has become a natural model for the countries of the region," Babacan indicated.

"There are circles bothered by Turkey's becoming a global actor. Such circles exist in Turkey, in Europe and in the near geography. We will be aware of such circles but our people will not be affected by provokers," Babacan said.

"When I assumed the position of minister in charge of the Turkish Treasury in November 2002, our debt to the IMF was 23 billion USD. Total reserves of the Turkish Central Bank were then 28 billion USD," Babacan noted.

"As of today, our debt to the IMF dropped to 400 million USD. We will make the final payment to IMF in May and our debt will drop to zero," Babacan stated.

"One of the important reasons for many individuals looking at Europe's future pessimistically has to do with population figures. As of the next term, the number of people who would be able to work in Europe will go down significantly," Babacan said.

"When we reach the years 2030-2035, our population who could work in Turkey will get constant. This is why we encourage families to have at least three children," Babacan also said. 31/3/2013
