

Insights into Turkish Domestic and International Politics during April 2012

Key Points:

- *Turkey continues to work with Arab and Western allies to intensify pressure on Syria. After hosting the 1 April 2012, Friends of Syria group meeting, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan responds to Syrian forces firing on a Turkish refugee camp by openly considering invoking NATO's Article 5 on mutual defence.*
- *The Fethullah Gulen Movement's influence on Turkey is re-examined following a somewhat controversial expose in the 24 April edition of The New York Times.*
- *A pricing dispute between the Kurdish Autonomous Government in Northern Iraq and the national government threatens Turkish crude supplies, while the TANAP pipeline agreement between Azerbaijan and Turkey should be signed by the end of the month.*
- *NABUCCO loses a Hungarian stakeholder while Turkish gas pipelines operator, BOTAS, cuts down its own stake in Brussels' pipeline project. However, all is not lost in breaking Gazprom's dominant grip on European gas supplies, as TANAP will likely connect to the revamped NABUCCO West project.*

Syria

On 1 April, Istanbul hosted the second Friends of Syria (FoS) group meeting, with notable abstentions from China, Russia and Iran. The former two continued to hold veto threats at the Security Council over initiatives aimed at condemning the Assad regime, while Tehran's absence was due to its hostility to Ankara's approach to the crisis in Syria. While the meeting accomplishments were limited in scale as violence continued to rage in opposition strongholds in Syria, the group did reach a consensus on some outstanding issues:

- The Syrian National Council was recognized by the FoS as a legitimate, though not the sole, representative of the Syrian people.
- An agreement was reached on funding of non-lethal equipment and aid shipments for opposition members in Syria such as medical supplies and radios
- The group supported Kofi Annan's ceasefire plan, but emphasized that it needed a distinct timetable for an end to the violence

Despite these positive aspects, the Assad regime continued to violate the Annan ceasefire, while Moscow claimed opposition fighters supported by terrorists had disregarded the agreement. Despite a similar outcome from a mid-April FoS meeting in Paris, the violence continued. However, a border incident in the Kilis province where Syrian troops fired into a refugee camp inside the Turkish border has led Turkey to raise the possibility of a response via NATO.

Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan responded to the shooting saying, "NATO has a responsibility to protect the Turkish border according to Article 5," referring to the alliance's collective defense clause. While US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta denied the likelihood of such an invocation, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton said that another avenue was possible during the FoS meeting in Paris. "Turkey already has

discussed with NATO, during our ministerial meetings over the last two days, the burden of Syrian refugees on Turkey, the outrageous shelling across the border from Syria into Turkey a week ago, and that Turkey is considering formally invoking Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty," said Clinton. The article allows consultations between alliance members when their security is considered to be under threat in regard to escalating tension along Turkey's Syria border.

While Damascus ignores the Annan plan and the killings on both sides continue, Turkey, the US, Arab and European countries are coalescing a position aimed at increasing pressure on the Assad regime. Mentions of invocations of NATO clauses by Erdogan and Clinton make Syrian leaders aware that while the FoS group has yet to call for military action, such options are not off the table.

Fethullah Gulen Movement

The Gulen movement's impact on Turkey was pulled back to the forefront of Turkish domestic issues following an article covering it in the 24 April edition of The New York Times. The article garnered wide spread attention in the Turkish press, in part due to its referencing of Today's Zaman as a Gulenist sympathizing outlet. It explored the ties between the movement and the ruling AKP party, citing one of its founding members, Ayse Bohurler, saying "There is no reference point; they are kicking in the shadows. They are everywhere and nowhere."

It goes on to note a number of high profile incidents surrounding the movement such as:

- Ahmet Sik's year-long imprisonment due to his alleged ties to the Ergenekon coup conspiracy. Sik blames his prosecution on Gulenists in the police and judiciary who sought to stop a book that he wrote which explored the movement's sympathizers in the government.
- The February 2012 questioning summons of National Intelligence Agency chief and

Erdogan ally, Hakan Fidan, by a local prosecutor investigating the PKK. Fidan, who refused to turn up for questioning by the prosecutor, a supposed Gulenist, was rescued by Erdogan and the AKP's swift action to protect Turkey's security services.

- Former police chief Hanefi Aci's September 2010 arrest following the release of his book which detailed the network of Gulenists in the police and judiciary.

Gulen, who has lived in the US since being accused by government authorities of wanting to overthrow the secular state in 1998, is still haunted by a recording of him saying "move within the arteries of the system, without them noticing your existence, until you reach the power centers."

However, it must be noted that Gulen was cleared of these charges in 2008 following an eight-year trial. More so, the judge in the case ruled that the recording cited above was a fabrication. Gulen himself has long been an advocate for religious freedom, a secular state, and universal human rights, which goes accordingly with his support of Turkey's EU accession. Cases such as Sik's don't simply appear to be aimed at those critical of the Islamist movement, but rather a trait of Turkey's domestic issues tracing to the founding of the current Republic under Ataturk.

It is hard to comprehend the logic of the US if it had been harboring an Islamic fundamentalist who intends to overthrow one of its most trusted and reliable allies in Turkey. While there are surely zealous adherents of the movement at many levels and institutions throughout the Turkish government, the same could be said of Christians in the US or Hindus in India. Ties between the AKP and Gulenists are more likely practical in nature given the reactive stance of security services to opposition parties in the country's past. The Gulenist aligned Journalist & Writers Foundation's recent declaration on their ties likely summed the positions up best. Draftees of the

declaration told Taka Aykol of Daily Hurriyet that while their interests were largely mutual, they (the AKP and Gulenists) were not the same and viewed cooperation in light of each other's own interests.

Energy

Turkish leaders received reassurances on the stability of energy supplies from the autonomous Kurdish region of Northern Iraq despite a domestic pricing standoff between the federal and regional governments of Iraq. On 1 April, Kurdish leaders in Arbil announced they would cease oil exports due to a pricing dispute with the national government in Baghdad. Turkey receives a small amount of crude from Iraq, but a crisis between the Shia lead national government and Kurdish autonomous region could adversely affect Turkey. Turkish economic growth is in part fueled by an electricity grid powered by hydrocarbons, a possibly weak link in light of its currently touchy relations with Iran. Thus, energy ministry officials sought to immediately verify the guarantees of energy supplies as the row between Arbil and Baghdad worsened.

Azerbaijan and Turkey were expected to complete their talks on a Trans-Anatolia (TANAP) pipeline by the end of the month. The proposed pipeline will carry Azeri gas supplies to Turkey and European markets, and is worth \$5-7 billion. The pipeline was initially discussed in late 2011 when a memorandum of understanding was signed between Azerbaijan's state oil and gas group, SOCAR, BOTAS, and Turkiye Petrolleri AO. SOCAR will hold an 80 percent stake in the venture, while the latter two will hold 20 percent. The pipeline will link up with the recently reformatted NABUCCO West pipeline project. Construction is due to start later this year according to statements from SOCAR.

The forward momentum of TANAP appears to be hastening the end of the original NABUCCO pipeline project, with two more stakeholders re-evaluating their support for the project. On 28 April, Hungary's MOL openly criticized the 2012 financing for the

pipeline saying, “There are many uncertainties around the NABUCCO project that would be hard to ignore. Both the financing background and the gas source are uncertain.”

The MOL announcement left Germany’s RWE, Bulgaria’s BEH and Romania’s Transgaz and BOTAS as the remaining stakeholders in the project intended at breaking Gazprom’s monopoly on European energy dependence. But in further setback just two days later, BOTAS announced it was cutting its stake in the Brussels designed pipeline from 20 percent to 16.67 percent.

The forward momentum of TANAP and Gazprom’s South Stream may be the end for the once hopeful NABUCCO project, but the development of the joint Turkish-Azeri pipeline is a positive. While leaders in Brussels watch with concern as their pet project stutters, a less cumbersome TANAP may indeed ease Europe’s reliance on Russia’s dominance over EU gas supplies. As grand plans go, NABUCCO faced difficulties from the start, but the framework it established in creating a “southern corridor” is likely to be better served by a NABUCCO West that is supplied by TANAP, allowing it to compete with Gazprom’s South Stream.

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