

Harder conditions for family reunification, headscarves in the federal parliament, and the future of the Muslim Executive of Belgium



Turkey through Belgian Eyes

The Belgian debate on Turkey – first quarter of 2011

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January

19 January 2011 - MEPs demand better protection for Christian minorities

The Christian Democrats in the EU parliament have asked the EU to ensure the protection of Christian minorities in many parts of the world, including Turkey. In an article titled “Europe must protect Christian minorities,” the centre-left Flemish daily *De Morgen* reports on a request from Catherine Ashton, the EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, to treat the issue as an important element of EU foreign policy. The article quotes a Dutch member of the European Parliament, Ria Oomen-Ruijten, who cited recent attacks on Christians in Egypt, Pakistan and Iraq, arguing that “it can now be dangerous to be a Christian.” The article notes that Christians also face difficulties in countries like Turkey, which fails to ensure proper protection for minorities.¹

16 January 2011 - Refugee ships in the Ionian Sea

De Morgen reports on a Turkish cargo ship which transported refugees to Europe. As the ship got into a storm in the Ionian Sea, several refugees have been killed. The article explains that the Turkey-Greece-Italy route is often used by human traffickers.² The article implies that Turkey is not meeting its (EU) commitments regarding effective border management.

27 January 2011 - Prison sentences for Turkish members of international drug gang

The Flemish centre-left daily *De Morgen* reports on a prison sentence handed down by a criminal court in Brussels to an international drug gang formed by six Turkish men. The central figure was a fifty-year old Turk from Anderlecht (a suburb of Brussels), who was responsible for drug shipments from Turkey to Europe.³

28 January 2011 - Fine for wearing burqa declared illegal

In June and September 2009, Etterbeek police had sanctioned a Muslim woman with a fine for wearing a burqa. As the centre-left daily *Le Soir* reports, a police tribunal in Brussels has now declared the fine illegal, noting that it violates Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights. Vincent De Wolf, deputy mayor of Etterbeek and member of the Walloon liberal party Mouvement Reformateur (MR), criticises the tribunal’s decision. According to De Wolf, the sanction ensured public security, equality between men and women and normal social interaction.⁴

¹ *De Morgen*, ““Europa moet christelijke minderheden ”beschermen”, 19 January 2011, see <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/990/Buitenland/article/detail/1210269/2011/01/19/Europa-moet-christelijke-minderheden-beschermen.dhtml>

² *De Morgen*, “Zoekactie naar 22 vluchtelingen in Ionische Zee”, 16 January 2011, see <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/990/Buitenland/article/detail/1208735/2011/01/16/Zoekactie-naar-22-vluchtelingen-in-Ionische-Zee.dhtml>

³ *De Morgen*, “Tot 7,5 jaar cel voor internationale drugsbende”, 27 January 2011, see <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/989/Binnenland/article/detail/1214200/2011/01/27/Tot-7-5-jaar-cel-voor-internationale-drugsbende.dhtml>

⁴ *Le Soir*, “Justice. L’amende anti-burqa est eillegale. Un tribunal autorise la burqa en rue”, 29 January 2011, p. 12, see http://archives.lesoir.be/un-tribunal-autorise-la-burqa-en-rue_t-20110129-017Z09.html

31 January 2011 - Debates on family reunification in Belgium

In January 2011, the Committee of the Interior of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives discussed a draft law to reform procedures for family reunification among immigrants. As centre-left daily *Le Soir* reports, all parties have proposed amendments to a draft introduced by the centre-right Christian-Democrats in Flanders (CD&V) party.⁵ While strict regulations concerning integration courses (so-called “inburgering” courses) are in place in Flanders, they are not in force in Wallonia. Among the points of disagreement between both regions are integration courses as well as additional “integration conditions” such as language skills. *Le Soir* believes that the parties in the caretaker government have also failed to reach an agreement on issues like financial resources and better protection against forced marriages.⁶

In January 2011, researchers Philippe De Bruycker and Yves Pascouau of the (French-speaking) Universite Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) published a study on “the dynamics and forces that structure family reunification in European and Belgian law.”⁷ The study examines the family reunification in Belgium, the conditions that beneficiaries must meet, and the application procedure.⁸

In a 31 January article, *Le Soir* refers to the study, noting that in 2008 the Belgian Alien’s Office accepted 9,993 applications for family reunification and refused 3,860. Family reunification makes up 63 per cent of the new residence permits in Belgium. The largest numbers of immigrants that arrive in Belgium under the family reunification procedure are from Morocco and Turkey. Of the 2,021 immigrants of Turkish origin who come for family reunification, 1,661 come for marriage reasons.⁹ *Le Soir* also cites statistics according to which 80 per cent of immigrants who enter Belgium under the family reunification procedure do so to join their spouse. Of those, 49 per cent of those are unemployed and 59 per cent are women. 77 per cent are between 20 and 39 years of age. The article highlights that most do not participate in the labour market (although employment numbers among the group have been increasing since the year 2001.)¹⁰

The Flemish centre-left daily *De Morgen* emphasises two other findings: the fact that half of immigrants do not participate in the labour market within one year of their arrival in Belgium and that one out of five couples separate within five years of their marriage. The article’s co-

⁵ According to the current legislation, immigrants that are eligible for family reunification need to live in the same place as the family, need to have a rental contract and health insurance. However, there are no clear regulations on financial resources. As integration policies in Belgium are principally a regional competence, there have been significant differences between the regions.

⁶ *Le Soir*, “Mieux eintegrer, mais comment?”, 31 January 2011, p. 6.

⁷ Philippe De Bruycker and Yves Pascouau, Regroupement familial: Le regroupement familial à la croisee des droits europeen et belge, Analysis of the Roi Baudouin Fondation, January 2011, pp. 11. See

[http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/KBS-FRB/05\) Pictures, documents and external sites/09\) Publications/PUB2011_2044_RegroupementFamilialDroit.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/KBS-FRB/05) Pictures, documents and external sites/09) Publications/PUB2011_2044_RegroupementFamilialDroit.pdf)

⁸ Philippe De Bruycker and Yves Pascouau (2011), pp. 11/12.

⁹ *Le Soir*, “Dix mille eregroupes familiaux par an. L’immigration Marocaine erepresente la majeure partie des regroupements familiaux en Belgique”, 31 January 2011, p. 1.

¹⁰ While 49 per cent are not active on the labour market, 32 per cent have an income, 6 per cent are job-seekers and 5 per cent are independent. 36 per cent of the active participants in the labour market are employed in the services sector, 24 per cent in the public sector, nursing and the educational system, 13 per cent in catering and the gastronomy, 12 per cent in industries and 8 per cent in the construction sector. See *Le Soir*, “Les beneficiaries du regroupement familial sont surtout des partenaires. Migrants pour raisons conjugales”, 31 January 2011, p. 6.

author, Chris Carpenter, argues that among the Moroccan community family reunification often serves as a cover for arranged marriage.¹¹

In *Le Soir*, columnist Hugues Dorzee remarks that immigration law is a politically explosive topic and a difficult issue for the future government.¹² However, he argues, it is about time Belgians discussed it openly. Dorzee considers family reunification as particularly important for Morocco and Turkey. Immigrants from both countries, he observes, are mainly young, female and often unemployed. Noting the high divorce and separation rate among reunited spouses, he warns of a dark scenario:

“There are children to raise, a lack of language skills, social isolation, the absence of financial resources and difficulties in returning to the home country. In the worst cases, bad circumstances (forced marriages, conjugal violence) are revealed.”

It is essential to consider these factors when discussing family reunification, Dorzee argues. Turning a blind eye to the system’s shortcomings would mean running the risk that racism and xenophobia win new space to grow.¹³

31 January 2011 - Erdogan and Obama discuss Egyptian crisis

Belgian newspapers report on a meeting between US president Barack Obama and the heads of government of Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the UK. The leaders have convened to discuss the Egyptian crisis.¹⁴

¹¹ *De Morgen*, “Helpt huwelijksmigranten na een jaar nog werkloos”, 31 January 2011, see <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/989/Binnenland/article/detail/1215565/2011/01/31/Helpt-huwelijksmigranten-na-een-jaar-nog-werkloos.dhtml>

¹² Although all parties in Belgium would be interested in revising the legislation on immigration, there are completely different views on it: While some people would consider it as too lax, others would view it as too compulsory.

¹³ *Le Soir*, “Regroupement familial: Regarder la eerealite en face”, 31 January 2011, p. 2. See <http://www.lesoir.be/debats/editos/2011-01-31/regroupement-familial-regarder-la-realite-en-face-818765.php>

¹⁴ See e.g. *De Morgen*, “VS spreken voor het eerst over machtswisseling Egypte”, 31 January 2011, see <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/990/Buitenland/article/detail/1215593/2011/01/31/VS-spreken-voor-het-eerst-over-machtswisseling-Egypte.dhtml>

February

February 2011 - Debate on Turkey as a role model for Muslim states

In February 2011, several Belgian newspapers emphasise Turkey's role as a role model for Muslim states. In this respect, the role of the AKP, Turkey's ruling party, is also discussed. An article in *La Belgique Libre* asks, "The Turkish AKP, a model?" The piece quotes the Tunisian Islamist Ajmi Lourimi, who argues that Turkey exemplifies a system that reconciles modernity, democracy, and the free practice of Islam.¹⁵ However, the article closes by citing Dorothee Schmid of the French Institute for International Relations (IFRI), who argues that the reason for Erdogan's popularity in the Muslim world is not only his model of "Muslim democracy" but also his increasingly hard position towards Israel.¹⁶

In the context of the Egyptian uprising, *La Belgique Libre* points out the geostrategic opportunities for Turkey. The article refers to the AKP's reaction to the developments in Tunisia and Egypt and quotes Prime Minister Erdogan as saying that "in today's world, the aspiration of liberty can not be ignored." It also points out that the AKP took a rather low-key position on the developments in the first days but began to take a clearer stance after the demonstrations gathered force. It quotes Cengiz Aktar, a columnist for the daily *Radikal*, who argues that Erdogan is trying to sell Turkey and the AKP as a model for the rest of the Arab-Muslim world.

Turkey's power of attraction is real, the article claims, citing a survey by TESEV, a think tank, in which 66 per cent of respondents in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Palestinian territories considered Turkey a model for the Middle East. The article quotes TESEV's Ahmet Insel, who argues that the fall of the Mubarak regime offers Turkey a new opportunity to present itself as the most stable country in the region – and as the only one integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures.¹⁷

In an article on the Arab uprisings and the strengths of Islamist movements in Northern Africa, *Le Soir* argues that Turkey is a Muslim country ruled by an Islamist party that continues to implement democratic reforms. Turkey practices representative democracy since the 1960s, the piece points out: there is no country in the region where a similar level of democratic development can be found.¹⁸

¹⁵ *La Belgique Libre*, "L'AKP turc, un emodele?", 1 February 2011, p. 20. See <http://preprod.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/639667/l-akp-turc-un-modele.html>

¹⁶ *La Belgique Libre*, "L'AKP turc, un emodele?", 1 February 2011, p. 20.

¹⁷ According to the article, the developments in Egypt have alarmed Turkey, which sells 25 per cent of its exports to the region (however, it is not clear in the article which region is meant). On the other hand, as Erdogan has often criticised the blockage of the Gaza strip that was also enforced by Egypt, the relations between Erdogan and Mubarak have not been very good in the last years. However, according to Cengiz Aktar, Egypt also stays without Mubarak the core country of the Sunnite Arab world and thus remains irreplaceable (to the West). See *La Belgique Libre*, "Turquie. eeOpportunité geostrategique?", 4 February 2011, pp. 14/15. See <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/640498/opportunité-geostrategique.html>

¹⁸ *Le Soir*, "La survie des régimes arabes s'écrit dans le sang", 19 February 2011, p. 14, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/la-survie-des-regimes-arabes-s-ecrit-dans-le-sang_t-20110219-018YH9.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=50&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=59&all=15312&nav=1

1 February 2011

Belgian parliamentarian Daniel Bacquelaire of the Walloon liberal party MR argues that a new law against wearing burqas is needed urgently and should be based on the legislation of April 2010.¹⁹ (On 29 April 2010, Belgium's House of Representatives voted in favour of a law banning women from wearing the full Islamic veil in public. However, the law was not adopted by the Senate and not implemented in Belgium.)

2 February 2011 - Erdogan demands demolition of Turkey-Armenia reconciliation monument

La Belgique Libre reports about the decision by local officials from Kars, a city in eastern Turkey, to demolish a statue near the border with Armenia. The statue was built in 2006 as a way to promote reconciliation between both countries. According to *La Belgique Libre*, the decision to tear down the monument was made by none other than Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who demanded that all structures not in conformity with the local architecture of the city should be demolished.²⁰

6 February 2011 - *La Belgique Libre* starts series of articles on integration

La Belgique Libre begins publishing a series of articles on “the real level of integration in Belgium.”²¹ In an editorial, the newspaper quotes Prime Minister Leterme, who acknowledges that German Chancellor Angela Merkel was right to conclude that integration policies have not always been as successful as expected.

The first article of the series profiles Hakim Boularbah, a child of a Moroccan mother and a Belgian father, who became a law professor at ULB. With immigration often associated with segregation, cases like Boularbah's are considered more the exception than the rule.²²

The following editions of *La Belgique Libre* profile Belgian prisons, where 42 per cent of detainees have a migration background,²³ a cultural house (maison des cultures) in a predominantly Moroccan neighbourhood of Brussels,²⁴ and Sam Touzani, a popular comedian

¹⁹ *Le Soir*, “Burqa: le MR veut une loi”, 1 February 2011, p. 11. See <http://archives.lesoir.be/burqa-le-mr-veut-une-loi-ghislenghien-la-ville-t-20110201-0182KW.html?query=bacquelaire&queryor=bacquelaire&firstHit=0&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&all=692&pos=6&all=813&nav=1>

²⁰ *La Belgique Libre*, “Turquie. La statue de l'amitié avec l'Arménie sera démolie”, 2 February 2011, p. 23. See <http://preprod.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/640071/breves.html>

²¹ *La Belgique Libre*, e“Integres?”, 6 February 2011, p. 8.

²² *La Belgique Libre*, e“L'intégration en question. Les gros erates de l'intégration scolaire”, 6 February 2011, pp. 8-10. See also <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/belgique/article/640712/les-gros-erates-de-l-integration-scolaire.html>

²³ Moroccans are with 11 per cent of all detainees the largest group. 1.8 per cent of all detainees have a Turkish background. The article argues that it is “particularly socio-economic factors” that are responsible for a relatively high number of detainees with migration background. See *La Belgique Libre*, e“L'intégration en question. Des prisons colorées come les grandes villes”, 7 February 2011, p. 4/5. See also <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/belgique/article/641113/des-prisons-colorees-comme-les-grandes-villes.html>

²⁴ There is an unemployment rate of 50 per cent in the neighbourhood and only 60 per cent of the youth have graduated from secondary school. The article (which emphasises that you can drink alcohol in the house whereas this is not possible in many cafes in the suburb) basically argues that integration works well in the culture

and TV presenter of Berber descent.

The latter article quotes Touzani as saying that the connotation of the term “integration” has become increasingly negative as it is used for Moroccan immigrants but not for groups from European countries. The article explains that many residents of Belgium who are considered immigrants have actually lived in the country for up to three generations. 40 to 50 per cent of Brussels residents are of non-Belgian origin.²⁵

11 February 2011 – Turkish government congratulates Egyptian people

De Morgen reports on the resignation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, citing comments by several government leaders. These include congratulations offered by the Turkish government to the Egyptian people, accompanied by hopes that a new system could meet the expectations of the Egyptian people.²⁶

11 February 2011 – Collapse of coal mine in Southern Turkey

De Morgen reports on a coalmine accident in Turkey’s southern province of Kahramanmaras, in which one person was killed and seven others injured. The article quotes Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz, who argued that the reason for the accident could have been a landslide or an earthquake, but not the mining activities themselves.²⁷ The article leaves it to the reader to decide if the accident was the product of a natural disaster or low safety standards.

12 February 2011 – Pro-Kurdistan demonstrations in Strasbourg

De Morgen reports on a protest by about 6,500 Kurds (some of whom had arrived from Belgium) in Strasbourg in favour of an independent Kurdistan and the release of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan. The article emphasises that Turkey, the EU and the US regard the PKK as a terrorist organisation, underlining that there are issues where the EU and Turkey share a common position.²⁸

house. See *La Belgique Libre*, “Meulenbeik Forever!”, 10 February 2011, p. 12. See also <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/belgique/article/641722/meulenbeik-forever.html>

²⁵ See *La Belgique Libre*, e“L’integration en question. L’immigration, ‘un everitable apport artistique’”, 10 February 2011, pp. 12/13. See also <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/belgique/article/641713/l-immigration-un-veritable-apport-artistique.html>

²⁶ *De Morgen*, “Reacties op het vertrek van Hosni Moebarak”, 11 February 2011, see <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/990/Buitenland/article/detail/1221358/2011/02/11/Reacties-op-het-vertrek-van-Hosni-Moebarak.dhtml>

²⁷ *De Morgen*, “Negen mijnwerkers bedolven na instorting Turkse mijn”, 11 February 2011, see <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/990/Buitenland/article/detail/1221336/2011/02/11/Negen-mijnwerkers-bedolven-na-instorting-Turkse-mijn.dhtml>

²⁸ *De Morgen*, “Duizenden Koerden op straat in Straatsburg voor vrijlating Ocalan”, 12 February 2011, see <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/990/Buitenland/article/detail/1221600/2011/02/12/Duizenden-Koerden-op-straat-in-Straatsburg-voor-vrijlating-Ocalan.dhtml>

16 February 2011 – Turkish diplomats disappointed with accession negotiations

The Walloon daily *La Libre Belgique* reports on Turkish diplomats' disappointment regarding the stagnation in negotiations with the EU. So far, only the chapter on Science and Research has been closed. As of July 2011, thirteen out of the remaining 34 chapters have been opened; due to vetoes by member states like France other chapters remain frozen. The diplomats request that the EU finally wake up and make a gesture towards Turkey.²⁹

17 February 2011 – Arrests of *Odatv.com* activists in Turkey

The Walloon daily *Le Soir* reports on the arrest of four Turkish journalists from the opposition website *Odatv.com* in connection with an investigation into a conspiracy to overthrow the government. The U.S. government criticized the arrests, considering them as an infringement on freedom of the press. The article explains that the "Turkish Islamist-conservative regime" has rejected the criticism, with Turkish Minister of the Interior Besir Atalay arguing that "press freedom is better protected in Turkey than in the U.S. There is no problem with the issue in Turkey."³⁰

22 February 2011 – Turkey's role in the Iranian nuclear programme

In an article for *Le Soir*, Pierre Goldschmidt, former Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, touches on Turkey's mediation role in the row over Iran's nuclear programme. Although Goldschmidt considers Turkey's role "without doubt a good thing," he warns that by strengthening economic relations with Iran Turkey risks undermining the international sanctions regime against Tehran.³¹

24 – 27 February 2011 – Sarkozy's visit to Turkey

Belgian newspapers report on talks between Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan and Nicolas Sarkozy during the French president's visit to Turkey.

On 24 February, *La Libre Belgique* quotes Egemen Bagis, Turkish Minister for European Affairs, as saying that the meetings would help Turkey understand Europe's position. With its economy surging ahead at a rate of 8.5 per cent in 2011, Turkey's confidence is sky-high. Turkey has proven that it can do without Europe, says Bagis. The question now is whether Europe could do without Turkey. If European intellectuals were to calculate the costs and benefits of Turkish membership in the EU, they would surely conclude that it is better to have Turkey on board, Bagis thinks.³²

²⁹ *La Libre Belgique*, "La Journée européenne", 16 February 2011, see:

<http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/643094/la-journee-europeenne.html>

³⁰ *Le Soir*, "La Turquie rejette les critiques américaines sur la liberté de la presse", 17 February 2011, see:

<http://archives.lesoir.be/la-turquie-rejette-les-critiques-americaines-sur-la-t-20110217-018W28.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=60&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=67&all=15312&nav=1>

³¹ *Le Soir*, "La carte blanche: Le nouveau pied de nez d'Ahmadinejad", 22 February 2011, p. 14, see:

<http://archives.lesoir.be/la-carte-blanche-le-nouveau-pied-de-nez-t-20110222-019277.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=50&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=54&all=15312&nav=1>

³² *La Libre Belgique*, "Erdogan sera bientôt à Bruxelles pour relancer l'adhésion de la Turquie à l'UE", 24 February 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/644952/erdogan-sera-bientot-a-bruxelles-pour-relancer-l-adhesion-de-la-turquie-a-l-ue.html>

Le Soir, meanwhile, makes note of Turkey's demands for visa liberalisation with the EU and its request to participate in European Council summits. (This way, Bagis argues, Turkey could share its observations, expectations and aspirations with its European partners.)³³

On 25 February, *Le Soir* reports on Nicolas Sarkozy's visit to Turkey. According to Delphine Nerbollier, the newspaper's correspondent in Istanbul, the French government's position on Turkey's EU membership – and its refusal to open five new negotiation chapters – has helped strain relations with Ankara. A number of issues are scheduled for discussion, including Turkey's membership in the G-20, the EU accession process, as well as the country's potential as a role model for the Arab world. A French diplomat is quoted as saying that both sides are aware that some of these issues are “potentially explosive.” The article points to issues that have damaged French-Turkish relations in the past, including the recognition of the Armenian genocide by the French Parliament in 2001. Likewise, it points to Nicolas Sarkozy's low popularity among Turks. According to a recent opinion poll, 54 per cent of Turkish respondents are not in favour of the French President.³⁴

Le Soir reports on 26 February that prior to the meeting Erdogan had accused Sarkozy of trying to “force Turkey to quit the negotiation process by itself.” In contrast to earlier declarations, however, Sarkozy's statements during the visit were not hostile. During the debate on regional changes and the situation in Libya Sarkozy emphasised Turkey's role as a model for the region and as an indispensable actor in international affairs.³⁵

On 27 February, *La Libre Belgique* reports on Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Brussels and his allegations that EU has constantly raised the criteria for entry since 2005. It also reports on Erdogan's statement that if the negotiations are to continue at the current pace Europe should make it clear that it does not want Turkey to join the EU. According to *La Libre Belgique*, France, Germany, Austria and “some other European states” oppose Turkish EU membership while the UK, Sweden, Finland, and Italy are more open on the issue. According to a European diplomat, the standstill in the negotiations is mainly Turkey's fault. Instead of complying with the EU's conditions, Turkey is trying to bargain with the EU by pointing out its geostrategic importance. The article also takes stock of Turkey's role in the Arab world and its plans to abolish visas with Qatar, Kuwait, and Yemen, and the fact that has already abolished them with Libya, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Immigration would be another challenge for relations with the EU, the article notes, as Turkey has become a major transit point for illegal immigration. Implementation of a readmission agreement between Turkey and the EU will be difficult, the article forecasts, as Turkey has indexed its cooperation on the issue to negotiations on visa liberalisation with the EU.³⁶

³³ *Le Soir*, “La Turquie veut assister aux sommets européens”, 24 February 2011, see:

http://archives.lesoir.be/la-turquie-veut-assister-aux-sommets-europeens_t-20110224-01977D.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=40&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=49&all=15312&nav=1

³⁴ *Le Soir*, “Sarkozy, 5 heures en terrain mine”, 25 February 2011, p. 12, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/turquie-le-president-franais-en-visite-eclair-mais_t-20110225-0197DF.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=40&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=41&all=15312&nav=1

³⁵ *Le Soir*, “‘Je t'aime moi non plus' en sourdine”, 26 February 2011, p. 15, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/turquie-la-visite-de-nicolas-sarkozy-per-centAB-je_t-20110226-0199H6.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=30&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=39&all=15312&nav=1

³⁶ *La Libre Belgique*, e“Adhesion: les pourparlers UE-Turquie traversent une crise majeure”, 27 February 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/645503/adhesion-les-pourparlers-ue-turquie-traversent-une-crise-majeure.html>

25 – 28 February 2011 – Turkey a role model or outsider?

In an article for *Le Soir*, journalist Baudouin Loos examines the potential role of Islamist movements in the Arab countries. In Turkey, he points out, Islamists have demonstrated their capacity to cooperate in politics with secularist forces.

“Democracies that have accepted such forms of cohabitation are more reliable than those ‘great secular allies’ (i.e. authoritarian states in the Arab world) that have been supported by the West for many years.”³⁷

On 28 February, *Le Soir* reports that relations between Turkey on the one side and France and Germany on the other side have become strained. Prime Minister Erdogan is sick of seeing Turkey treated as a nuisance. Europe’s rejection of Turkey would come as a major disappointment to those young Arabs who regard Turkey and the AKP as a role model, Erdogan has argued.³⁸

25 February 2011 – French foreign policies dismiss Turkey

In an article for *Le Soir*, journalist and essayist Jean-Francois Kahn criticises French foreign policy. It would be difficult to regain credibility in the region after having supported authoritarian regimes for decades, he argues. The Sarkozy government’s policies towards Turkey, which the author considers as the new great power in the region, will have also estranged France in the Arab world.³⁹

27 February – 1 March 2011 – Erdogan’s visit to Germany

Belgian newspapers report on Prime Minister Erdogan’s visit to Germany. The Flemish daily *De Standaard* reports that the Turkish leader has warned of growing racism and Islamophobia in Germany, calling on Turks and Germans to respect each other. Simultaneously, however, he has classified assimilation as “a crime against humanity.” According to *De Standaard*, German politicians regard Erdogan’s statements as unconstructive and liable to have a negative impact on the integration of the Turkish minority.⁴⁰

La Libre Belgique calls attention to Erdogan’s statement that Turkish citizens expect the German government to be the motor of EU integration and to support Turkish EU membership. The paper also cites Erdogan complaints that the EU is discriminating against

³⁷ *Le Soir*, “Quel islamisme face à la révolution?”, 25 February 2011, p. 15, see: <http://archives.lesoir.be/quel-islamisme-face-a-la-revolution-t-20110225-0197MD.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=40&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=43&all=15312&nav=1>

³⁸ *Le Soir*, “L’Europe tergiverse face aux révolutions arabes”, 28 February 2011, p. 2, see: <http://archives.lesoir.be/l-europe-tergiverse-face-aux-revolutions-arabes-t-20110228-019CZE.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=20&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=26&all=15312&nav=1>

³⁹ *Le Soir*, “La diplomatie tricolore en panne esèche”, 25 February 2011, p. 14, see: <http://archives.lesoir.be/alternatives-la-diplomatie-tricolore-en-panne-seche-t-20110225-0197MA.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=40&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=42&all=15312&nav=1>

⁴⁰ *De Standaard*, “Erdogan waarschuwt Duitsland voor racisme”, 28 February 2011, see: http://www.standaard.be/artikel/detail.aspx?artikelid=DMF20110228_039

Turkey by indexing its membership to criteria that have never been applied vis-à-vis other candidates.⁴¹

On 1 March, Marcel Linden, writing in *La Libre Belgique*, observes that the “irascible” Erdogan has “made waves” in Germany once again by advising the Turkish minority to reject assimilation and to prioritize Turkish language education. The article refers to reactions by Angela Merkel, Guido Westerwelle, Alexander Dobrindt, Maria Bohmer, Philipp Missfelder and Cem Ozdemir, all of whom have criticised Erdogan’s statements. Many observers have noted that Erdogan’s statements on integration are even more controversial than those made during his last (2008) visit to Germany.⁴²

27 / 28 February 2011 – Death of Necmettin Erbakan

Belgian newspapers report on the passing of former Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan. Flemish daily *De Morgen* describes Erbakan as “the historical leader of political Islam in Turkey,” the “first ‘Islamic’ government leader in the history of Turkey and former mentor of current Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.” Like Erbakan’s Refah Party, Erdogan’s AKP is accused of anti-secular activities, the article notes.⁴³

La Libre Belgique also characterises Erbakan as Erdogan’s political mentor, but notes that the current Prime Minister has broken with Islamism and vowed to defend “conservative democracy.”⁴⁴

Le Soir quotes Erdogan’s statement that Erbakan was “the master and the political leader who has provided a great example to young generations.” It makes note of the fact, however, that strains between the two leaders had persisted for years since they parted ways. In 2010 Erbakan accused Erdogan of being an advocate of Israel and the US.⁴⁵

28 February 2011 – No plans for attacks, says PKK

De Morgen reports on the end of a unilateral ceasefire declared by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in August 2010. Although the PKK continues to accuse the ruling AKP of failing to solve the problems of Kurds in Turkey, it is not planning any new attacks, the paper says. If they were to resume, the attacks would have a significant impact on the outcome of the June 2011 parliamentary elections, the article concludes.⁴⁶

⁴¹ *La Libre Belgique*, “UE/Turquie: Erdogan tance vivement l’Allemagne”, 27 February 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/645504/ueturquie-erdogan-tance-vivement-l-allemande.html>

⁴² *La Libre Belgique*, “Erdogan provoque les Allemands”, 1 March 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/645978/erdogan-provoque-les-allemands.html>

⁴³ *De Morgen*, “Turkse ex-premier Erbakan overleden”, 27 February 2011, see: <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/990/Buitenland/article/detail/1228716/2011/02/27/Turkse-ex-premier-Erbakan-overleden.dhtml>

⁴⁴ *La Libre Belgique*, ee“Deces de l’ancien Premier ministre islamiste turc Necmettin Erbakan”, 27 February 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/645505/decès-de-l-ancien-premier-ministre-islamiste-turc-necmettin-erbakan.html>

⁴⁵ *Le Soir*, “Le leader historique de l’islamisme turc tire sa reverence”, 28 February 2011, p. 7, see: <http://archives.lesoir.be/le-leader-historique-de-l-islamisme-turc-tire-sa-t-20110228-019D5R.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=30&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=30&all=15312&nav=1>

⁴⁶ *De Morgen*, “PKK zegt wapenstilstand met Turkije op”, 28 February 2011, see: <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/990/Buitenland/article/detail/1229159/2011/02/28/PKK-zegt-wapenstilstand->

28 February - 3 March 2011 – Turkey’s economic interests in Libya

Belgian newspapers report about the uprising in Libya and the evacuation of thousands of Turks from the country.⁴⁷ An article in *De Morgen* reports that most of the 30,000 Turkish citizens who had lived in Libya prior to the uprising have been evacuated. Turkey has significant economic links with Libya, including construction projects, which explains the strong Turkish presence there.⁴⁸

Turkey’s business interests in Libya, other newspapers suggest, are also behind the AKP government’s reluctance to support outside intervention. On 3 March, *Le Soir* cites Prime Minister Erdogan’s statement that a NATO intervention in Libya would be “absurd.”⁴⁹

However, *Le Soir* also mentions that the AKP represents a model for the uprisings in the Arab world.⁵⁰

[met-Turkije-op.dhtml](#)

⁴⁷ See e.g. *De Morgen*, “Turkije wil desnoods met geweld landgenoten evacueren uit eLibie”, 25 February 2011, see: <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/9616/Onrust-in-het-Midden-Oosten/article/detail/1227823/2011/02/25/Turkije-wil-desnoods-met-geweld-landgenoten-evacueren-uit-Libie.dhtml>

⁴⁸ *De Morgen*, “Oppositie veroverde tweede grootste militaire luchthaven in eLibie”, 28 February 2011, see: <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/9616/Onrust-in-het-Midden-Oosten/article/detail/1228906/2011/02/28/Oppositie-veroverde-tweede-grootste-militaire-luchthaven-in-Libie.dhtml>

⁴⁹ *Le Soir*, “Kadhafi eprepare la bataille de Tripoli”, 3 March 2011, p. 11, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/libye-la-capitale-est-un-des-derniers-bastions-du_t-20110303-019HG5.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=20&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=22&all=15312&nav=1

⁵⁰ *Le Soir*, “L’onde de choc arabe atteint l’Europe au cœur”, 28 February 2011, p. 1, see:

http://archives.lesoir.be/l-onde-de-choc-arabe-atteint-l-europe-au_t-20110228-019CV7.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=20&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=25&all=15312&nav=1

March

3 – 4 March 2011 – Protests by Turkish Cypriots against the Turkish government

In an article for *Le Soir*, Delphine Nerbollier reports on a disagreement Turkish Cypriots and the Turkish government in Ankara.⁵¹ Ten thousand people took part in demonstrations in the northern part of Nicosia, making it clear they wished neither to be hostages of Turkey nor to be “absorbed by the Greek Cypriots.” The manifestations were triggered by a plan – announced by the Turkish government in January 2011 – to drastically reduce aid to northern Cyprus and by recent statements by Prime Minister Erdogan. (The Turkish leader had scolded northerners for complaining about excessive Turkish patronage.) The article quotes a northern official who argues that the Turkish government has traditionally used the Turkish Cypriot population as a pawn against the Greek Cypriots. It is about time for the Turkish Cypriots to take responsibility for their own affairs, the official argues.

According to political analyst Erol Kaymak, similar criticism of “the motherland” emerged in 2001/02, albeit only from left wing groups. As the current situation shows, Kaymak notes, the left-right cleavage has ceased to exist. As one protester tells the paper, “Turkey gives us money but it takes back a lot more. Where are our industry and our land? The Turks have eaten up everything.”

Speaking to *Le Soir*, Sener Levent, a journalist, criticises the Turkish government for its “colonial” attitude. An official at the Turkish chamber of commerce argues that the Turkish Cypriots have a “love and hate” relationship with Turkey. On the one hand, they feel vulnerable due to the bad economic situation. On the other, they fear losing their identity. They are also disappointed because of the failure of peace negotiations in 2004 and the standstill in the new round of talks, which started in 2008. Some of them have therefore called for an immediate peace with the South.

The next day, *Le Soir* reports that Ban Ki-moon has criticised Greek and Turkish Cypriot politicians for using “negative public rhetoric” with respect to the reunification talks. The UN Secretary-General has also expressed concern that the coming elections in Turkey and Cyprus could have a negative impact on the process.⁵²

3 – 5 March 2011 – Press Freedom in Turkey

Le Soir reports on the arrest of a Turkish journalist Nedim Sener on suspicion of involvement in the Ergenekon conspiracy.⁵³ Sener was declared a World Press Freedom Hero in by the International Press Institute (IPI) in 2010.⁵⁴ On 5 March 2011, another piece in *Le Soir*

⁵¹ *Le Soir*, “La révolution des Chypriotes turcs”, 3 March 2011, p. 10, see:

<http://archives.lesoir.be/chypre-des-dizaines-de-milliers-de-manifestants-dans-la-t-20110303-019HFV.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=20&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=21&all=15312&nav=1>

⁵² *Le Soir*, e“Chypre/reunification: Ban met en garde contre des discussions e‘negatives”, 4 March 2011, see: <http://archives.lesoir.be/chypre-reunification-ban-met-en-garde-contre-des-t-20110304-019L8M.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=20&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=20&all=15312&nav=1>

⁵³ *Le Soir*, “Turquie: Nouvelle rafle visant des journalistes d’opposition”, 3 March 2011, see: <http://archives.lesoir.be/turquie-nouvelle-rafle-visant-des-journalistes-t-20110303-019JN5.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=20&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=23&all=15312&nav=1>

⁵⁴ International Press Institute, “Nedim Sener: World Press Freedom Hero (Honoured in June 2010)”, see: <http://www.freemedia.at/awards/nedim-sener/>

explains that since the opening of the Ergenekon probe in 2007, 400 people have been arrested. The recent arrests have led to demonstrations of up to 2,000 persons in Istanbul. According to Turkish journalist Senay Lalehan, arrests like Sener's help spread the culture of self-censorship in the Turkish media.

In response to similar criticism by the U.S. government and the European Commission, Prime Minister Erdogan has argued that "press freedom is better respected in Turkey than in the U.S."⁵⁵

5 – 7 March 2011 – Debate on Islam in Germany

On 5 March 2011, *La Libre Belgique* reports on the debate on Islam in Germany. It refers to the positions of Hans-Peter Friedrich, Angela Merkel, Christian Wulff, Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger, Dieter Wiefelsputz, Renate Kunast and Thilo Sarrazin as well as statistics cited by the German weekly *Die Zeit*, which revealed that two in five Germans regard Islam as a danger. The article also refers to the positions of Lamya Kaddor, President of the Muslim-Liberal Federation, who argued that Merkel's position on integration is a "slap in the face of Muslims" and Ali Kizilkaya, President of the Council of the German Muslims, who demanded that Merkel make up her mind as to whether Muslims were part of German history and society or not.⁵⁶

On 7 March, *La Libre Belgique* reports on Hans-Peter Friedrich's statement that there is no indication that Islam is a part of German culture. The article refers to the polemic debate triggered by the remarks in Germany.⁵⁷

6 March 2011 – Turkey part of "Balkan drug route"

Le Soir reports about on the capture of 96kg of heroine at the Turkish-Bulgarian border. Turkey, the article points out, is considered part of the "Balkan drug route" between Asia and Europe. According to Bulgarian officials, around a ton of heroine is seized at the Bulgarian borders every year.⁵⁸

7 March 2011 – Study on young Moroccans and Turks in Belgium

Belgian newspapers report on a study by the Catholic University of Leuven which revealed that Moroccans feel more discriminated in Belgium than Turks. The authors interviewed hundreds of young people, most of them second generation immigrants in Brussels and

⁵⁵ *Le Soir*, "La Turquie n'est pas le emodele qu'on dit", 5 March 2011, p. 12, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/libye-violentes-altercations-entre-rebelles-et-forces_t-20110304-019LQK.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=10&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=19&all=15312&nav=1

⁵⁶ *La Libre Belgique*, "Le edebat sur la place de l'islam edechire à nouveau l'Allemagne", 5 March 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/647026/le-debat-sur-la-place-de-l-islam-dechire-a-nouveau-l-allemande.html>

⁵⁷ *La Libre Belgique*, "Le rôle de l'islam : la epolemique reprend", 7 March 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/647157/le-role-de-l-islam-la-polemique-reprend.html>

⁵⁸ *Le Soir*, e"Pres de 100 kg ed'heroïne saisis à la efrontiere bulgaro-turque", 6 March 2011, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/pres-de-100-kg-d-herone-saisis-a-la-frontiere_t-20110306-019NH6.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=10&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=18&all=15312&nav=1

Antwerp.⁵⁹ (The study also revealed that young immigrants feel more discriminated in Brussels than in Antwerp.) An article in *De Morgen* mentions that 46 per cent of Brussels residents are of foreign origin; 13 per cent are of Moroccan and 4 per cent of Turkish origin. The two groups, the article points out, are over-represented in blue-collar jobs.⁶⁰

An article by Raphael Meulders for *La Libre Belgique* explains that violence between young immigrants and Belgian police in the Brussels suburbs of Anderlecht and Molenbeek are on the increase. Young immigrants complain of unfair treatment by the police, the article notes. Belgian politicians and officials have gradually become involved in the debate. Charles Picque (PS), Minister-president of the Brussels Capital-Region, has called for a debate on the organisation of the Brussels police. Patrick Janssens (SP.A), the mayor of Antwerp, has argued that in comparison to Molenbeek the situation in Antwerp is not bad. According to Janssens, no part of Antwerp can qualify as a “no go zone”; likewise, there are no neighbourhoods where the police have lost control.⁶¹

7 / 8 March 2011 – Turkish journalists and professor taken into custody

Belgian newspapers report on the arrest of four Turkish journalists and a university professor accused of being involved in a plot against the AKP. 61 journalists are currently in jail in Turkey, the papers all point out. As *De Morgen* reports, the arrested include investigative journalists Nedim Sener and Ahmet Sik, “known for their criticism of the regime of Prime Minister Erdogan.” The Turkish government is regularly criticised for violating press freedom, the article points out.⁶²

La Libre Belgique reports that one of the arrested, publicist Yalcin Kucuk, had already been arrested once in 2009.⁶³ In an article that appears in the paper the following day, Veronique Leblanc quotes Turkish academic Cengiz Aktar, who criticises Sik’s arrest. (Sik, the paper points out, had investigated links between the police and the religious brotherhood of Fetullah Gulen.) According to the piece, Sik’s arrest may have little to do with any criminal activity and more with his criticism of the Gulen network. If this proves true, the Ergenekon case will have lost credibility.⁶⁴

Another article in *La Libre Belgique* points out that according to Turkish prosecutors the journalists were not arrested because of their work but on the strength of evidence that has yet to be released. While Prime Minister Erdogan has rejected criticism from the EU and the US

⁵⁹ eVeronique Vandezande, Karen Phaet, Marc Swyngedouw, *Do feelings of discrimination explain the riots in Brussels: A comparison of Moroccan and Turkish groups in Brussels and Antwerp*, March 2011, see: http://www.brusselsstudies.be/PDF/EN_134_BruS47EN.pdf

⁶⁰ *De Morgen*, “Marokkanen voelen zich meer gediscrimineerd dan Turken”, 7 March 2011, see: <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/989/Binnenland/article/detail/1232232/2011/03/07/Marokkanen-voelen-zich-meer-gediscrimineerd-dan-Turken.dhtml>

⁶¹ *La Libre Belgique*, “La communauté marocaine se dit plus discriminée que la turque”, 7 March 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/bruxelles/article/647248/la-communauté-marocaine-se-dit-plus-discriminée-que-la-turque.html>

⁶² *De Morgen*, “Opnieuw Turkse journalisten beschuldigd van betrokkenheid bij complot”, 7 March 2011, see: <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/990/Buitenland/article/detail/1232241/2011/03/07/Opnieuw-Turkse-journalisten-beschuldigd-van-betrokkenheid-bij-complot.dhtml>

⁶³ *La Libre Belgique*, “Affaire Ergenekon: quatre journalistes einterpelles”, 8 March 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/647445/breves.html>

⁶⁴ *La Libre Belgique*, “Des journalistes arêtes”, 9 March 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/647673/des-journalistes-arretes.html>

government over the issue, President Abdullah Gul has expressed his concern with the developments, which, he finds, have done damage to Turkey's image.⁶⁵

On 8 March, *Le Soir* reports on Erdogan's speech in front of fellow AKP members, in which he defended the arrests and rejected the accusation that his government was trying to gag the press. Such accusations were an insult to his government, Erdogan was said to have remarked.⁶⁶

9 March 2011 – European Parliament calls for further democratic reforms

De Morgen reports on a European Parliament (EP) resolution on Turkey's pre-accession process, which calls for further democratic reforms and better protection of minorities and women. The resolution was supported by Dutch MEP Ria Oomen-Ruijten (PPE), who has argued that Turkey must step up efforts to enforce freedom of religion and speech. Oomen-Ruijten has said that without pressure from the European Parliament reforms would be placed on the backburner until the parliamentary elections in June 2011.⁶⁷

An article in *La Libre Belgique* mentions Oomen-Ruijten's request for Turkey to strengthen dialogue on the Kurdish issue. According to the piece, the Commission's 2010 progress report on Turkey was the most critical since 2005. Furthermore, it failed to clearly mention the goal of Turkish EU accession. The standstill in the accession negotiations is mainly due to Turkey's failure to ratify the Ankara Protocol, the newspaper explains.

The article also quotes French MEP Helene Flautre (Green Party), head of the delegation on EU-Turkey relations, who warns that negotiations are dying a slow death due to the EU's decision to freeze some negotiation chapters. Flautre argues that the EU's actions are counterproductive, as they prevent the Union from pushing for further reforms in Turkey. Such reforms would be particularly important at this moment in history, with Turkey having become a source of inspiration for countries in its neighbourhood. The article also cites British MEP Andrew Duff, who calls on the EU to start a real partnership with Turkey in 2011, one based on a new assessment of common interests.⁶⁸

9 / 10 March 2011 – Headscarves in Belgian federal parliament

De Standaard reports on a debate on the Muslim headscarf in the Belgian federal parliament. The debate was based on a recent incident when an assistant of MP Meryame Kitir (of the Flemish Socialist party S.P.A) wore a headscarf at a parliamentary committee meeting. Zuhail

⁶⁵ *La Libre Belgique*, "Turquie: inculpation de journalistes pour complot eepresume", 7 March 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/647282/turquie-inculpation-de-journalistes-pour-complot-presume.html>

⁶⁶ *Le Soir*, "Turquie: Erdogan se edefend de toute attaque contre la eeliberte de la presse", 8 March 2011, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/turquie-erdogan-se-defend-de-toute-attaque-contre-la_t-20110308-019TPZ.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=10&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=16&all=15312&nav=1

⁶⁷ *De Morgen*, "Turkije moet meer hervormen als het wil toetreden tot EU", 9 March 2011, see: <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/990/Buitenland/article/detail/1233563/2011/03/09/Turkije-moet-meer-hervormen-als-het-wil-toetreden-tot-EU.dhtml>

⁶⁸ *La Libre Belgique*, "Le processus ed'adhesion de la Turquie 'meurt sous nos yeux'", 9 March 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/647672/le-processus-d-adhesion-de-la-turquie-meurt-sous-nos-yeux.html>

Demir, an MP from the Flemish nationalist party N-VA, weighed in, arguing that such behaviour would be “absolutely unthinkable in Turkey.” Demir’s remarks initiated a debate on the issue in Parliament, with MPs from the Walloon liberal party MR and the Flemish nationalist Vlaams Belang, including Filip Dewinter, president of the Flemish Parliament, expressing support for Demir’s position. However, the wearing of symbols is not forbidden for MPs as it is in accordance with a ruling of the European Court an expression of beliefs. Accordingly, as *De Standaard* explains, Mahinir Ozedmir (of the Walloon Democrat party CDH), a member of the Brussels parliament, regularly wears a headscarf.⁶⁹

The daily *De Morgen* also reports on the debate and a proposal by MP Denis Ducarme (MR) to ban religious symbols in parliamentary sessions. The initiative is supported by MPs from the N-VA, Vlaams Belang and MR but opposed by former chamber chairman Herman De Croo (of the Flemish liberal party Open VLD) and Meyrem Almaci (leader of the Flemish ecologist party Groen!), who argue that freedom of belief is a fundamental right for citizens and parliamentarians alike.⁷⁰

11 March 2011 – Kurdish poet Kemal Burkay returns from exile

Le Soir reports on the return of the Kurdish poet and militant Kemal Burkay, who has returned to Turkey after 31 years of exile in Sweden. A strong defender of Kurdish minority rights Burkay spent several years in jail prior to leaving Turkey in 1980, several months before a military coup.⁷¹

15 March 2011 – Israel stops ship coming from Mersin

Le Soir reports that the Israeli navy has stopped a ship carrying arms, presumably to the Gaza Strip. The ship, sailing under a Libyan flag, departed from the Turkish port of Mersin and was heading towards Alexandria in Egypt.⁷²

15 March 2011 – Colville demands explanation on arrested journalists

Le Soir reports that Rupert Colville, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has requested the Turkish government to give a better explanation for the arrests of several journalists and to respect the freedom of expression according to international standards including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.⁷³

⁶⁹ *De Standaard*, “Nu ook rel over hoofddoek bij parlementaire medewerkers”, 10 March 2011, see: <http://www.standaard.be/artikel/detail.aspx?artikelid=CT37BCDK&word=turkije>

⁷⁰ *De Morgen*, “N-VA wil religieuze symbolen uit parlement weren”, 9 March 2011, see: http://www.standaard.be/artikel/detail.aspx?artikelid=DMF20110309_081&word=turkije

⁷¹ *Le Soir*, “Turquie: Feu vert au retour d’un intellectuel kurde exilé”, 11 March 2011, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/otan-lanterne-rouge-belge-turquie-feu-vert-au_t-20110311-019WXU.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=0&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=6&all=15312&nav=1

⁷² *Le Soir*, “Un cargo d’armes pour Gaza arraisonné”, 15 March 2011, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/un-cargo-d-armes-pour-gaza-arraisonne_t-20110315-01A43H.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=120&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=124&all=15437&nav=1

⁷³ *Le Soir*, “Journalistes arrêtés: l’ONU rappelle à l’ordre la Turquie”, 15 March 2011, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/journalistes-arretes-l-onu-rappelle-a_t-20110315-01A46E.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=120&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=123&all=15437&nav=1

20 – 29 March 2011 – Turkey as a mediator in Libya

In light of reports of civilian casualties as a result of NATO airstrikes in Libya, *Le Soir* reports on a Turkish diplomat's request to re-examine NATO's role and its actions under UN Security Council Resolution 1973, which formed the legal basis for the international no-fly zone over Libya.⁷⁴ On 25 March, *Le Soir* reports that according to Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu, NATO has taken Turkey's concerns into account.⁷⁵ Several Belgian newspaper articles make note of the Turkish government's opposition to the air campaign.⁷⁶ On 29 March, an article in *Le Soir* argues that Turkey could play a key role in Libya in a post-Gaddafi era. Prime Minister Erdogan had already offered to mediate so as to prevent Libya's transformation into a "new Iraq or Afghanistan."⁷⁷

21 March 2011 – New York Times journalists released to Turkish embassy in Libya

Le Soir reports that four *New York Times* journalists who had been detained in Libya have been released to the Turkish embassy in Tripoli. According to Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu, the U.S. government had asked for Turkey's assistance. Turkish diplomats were able to persuade the Libyan authorities to cooperate on the issue.⁷⁸

29 March 2011 – Turkey: Entry gate for EU immigration

In an interview with *Le Soir*, state secretary Melchior Wathelet (CDH) claims that 88 per cent of immigrants to Europe enter via Turkey. This, he says, is due to Turkey's liberalised visa policies towards Arab countries. He therefore asks that FRONTEX, the EU's border control agency, continues its presence at the Turkish border. However, Wathelet acknowledges, this would only be a short-term measure and would not solve the structural problem of immigration.⁷⁹

30 March 2011 – Tug of war over pipelines

In a *Le Soir* article on European gas and oil projects, Benjamin Quenelle argues that Turkey

⁷⁴ *Le Soir*, "Libye: la Turquie réclame un réexamen des plans de l'Otan", 20 March 2011, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/libye-la-turquie-reclame-un-reexamen-des-plans-de_t-20110320-01AD2E.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=110&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=115&all=15437&nav=1

⁷⁵ *Le Soir*, "L'Otan prend le contrôle du ciel libyen", 25 March 2011, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/l-otan-prend-le-contr-per-centF4le-du-ciel-libyen_t-20110324-01ALRU.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=90&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=96&all=15437&nav=1

⁷⁶ See e.g. *Le Soir*, "L'alibi ou la Libye", 25 March 2011, p. 16, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/alternatives-l-alibi-ou-la-libye_t-20110325-01AMAN.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=90&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=91&all=15437&nav=1

⁷⁷ *Le Soir*, ee "Premiere reunion pour eepreparer l'apres-Kadhafi", 29 March 2011, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/premiere-reunion-pour-preparer-l-apres-kadhafi_t-20110329-01AV9Y.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=60&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=68&all=15434&nav=1

⁷⁸ *Le Soir*, "Libye: les journalistes du New York Times remis à l'ambassade turque", 21 March 2011, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/libye-les-journalistes-du-new-york-times-remis-a_t-20110321-01AF05.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=100&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=108&all=15437&nav=1

⁷⁹ *Le Soir*, "Wathelet: 'Dresser des murs ne resoudra rien'", 29 March 2011, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/wathelet-asile-per-centAB-dresser-des-murs-ne-resoudra-rien_t-20110329-01AVHN.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=70&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=71&all=15434&nav=1

has a key role to play in plans to establish the South Stream and Nabucco pipelines. Despite pressure from Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, Turkey is reportedly delaying an agreement on the Russian-sponsored South Stream pipeline project in hopes of securing a better price for Russian gas imports.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ *Le Soir*, “Forcing russe pour South Stream”, 30 March 2011, p. 26, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/energie-les-travaux-du-gazoduc-russe-vers_t-20110330-01AVV6.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=50&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=55&all=15434&nav=1

April

31 March – 11 April 2011 – Disputes within the Muslim Executive of Belgium

On 31 March, *Le Soir* reports on the decision by Stefaan De Clerck, Belgian Minister of Justice, not to extend the mandate of the Muslim Executive of Belgium (EMB).⁸¹ The organisation has failed to reform its structures since 2008, the minister has complained.⁸²

The EMB appears divided, *Le Soir* reports. While some members defend the organisation's absolute independence, representatives of Turkish and Moroccan Muslims want the EMB to retain close relations with the diplomatic authorities of Morocco and Turkey.⁸³

On 11 April, in an article for *La Libre Belgique* Christian Laporte reports on a "war between two of Belgium's Islamic communities." A proposal for a new EMB structure by the representatives of Turkish and Moroccan communities has been harshly criticised by a smaller group, the Democratic Alternative of the Muslims of Belgium (*Alternative democratique des musulmans de Belgique* (ADMB)). The ADMB has claimed that the proposal does not sufficiently address the representation of women, independent mosques, civil society and minority groups. Under such a proposal, the ADMB alleges, decisions on "the content of sermons and the qualifications of Muslim teachers in Belgium would be taken in Rabat and Ankara." The ADMB calls for the inclusion of all segments of the Muslim community in the EMB's decision-making process and an executive that is financially and politically independent.⁸⁴

1 April 2011 – Iranian plane with weapons stopped in Turkey

De Morgen reports that an Iranian cargo plane carrying illegal weapons was seized in Turkey. Sixty Kalashnikovs, fourteen machine guns, 560 grenades and thousands of rounds of ammunition were found on board. Although the authorities assumed that the plane was heading to Syria, this was impossible to confirm.⁸⁵

2 April 2011 – Kurdish rebels killed

Le Soir reports that seven Kurdish rebels were killed and six Turkish soldiers injured during a border skirmish. The rebels were shot while trying to cross into Turkey from Syria.⁸⁶

⁸¹ The Exécutif des musulmans de Belgique (EMB) was set up in 1996 and is the official Muslim interlocutor with the Belgian federal government on issues of the Muslim community.

⁸² *Le Soir*, "Le mandat de l'Executif des Musulmans n'est pas prolongé", 31 March 2011, see: <http://archives.lesoir.be/le-mandat-de-l-executif-des-musulmans-n-est-t-20110331-01AZE.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=50&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=54&all=15434&nav=1>

⁸³ *Le Soir*, "Culte musulman: eL'Executif n'est plus reconnu", 1 April 2011, p. 7, see: <http://archives.lesoir.be/culte-musulman-l-executif-n-est-plus-t-20110401-01COPK.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=40&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=47&all=15434&nav=1>

⁸⁴ *La Libre Belgique*, "L'islam belge en panne", 11 April 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/belgique/article/654115/l-islam-belge-en-panne.html>

⁸⁵ *De Morgen*, "Turkije onderschept Iraanse wapens", 1 April 2011, see: <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/990/Buitenland/article/detail/1244366/2011/04/01/Turkije-onderschept-Iraanse-wapens.dhtml>

⁸⁶ *Le Soir*, "Tuquie: Accrochage earme", 2 April 2011, p. 15, see: <http://archives.lesoir.be/afghanistan-l-onu-attaquee-pays-bas-t-20110402-01C1XL.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=40&by=10&when=->

4 April 2011 – OSCE concerned over journalist arrests

Le Soir reports that in a recent report the OSCE has stated its concern with the rights of journalists in Turkey, where more than 50 journalists are imprisoned and hundreds face prosecution.⁸⁷

4 - 6 April 2011 – Turkey’s role as mediator in Libyan conflict

On 4 April, *La Libre Belgique* reports that Libya’s deputy Foreign Minister Abdelati Laabidi has been dispatched to Ankara to ask for Turkey’s assistance in ceasefire negotiations with the Libyan rebels. (This comes as Recep Tayyip Erdogan meets with NATO General-Secretary Anders Fogh Rasmussen in Ankara.) Despite the Turkish government’s opposition to NATO’s air strikes against Libya, Ankara has contributed five naval ships and a submarine to help enforce a UN arms embargo against Libya.⁸⁸

On 5 April, *Le Soir* reports that Laabidi has met with Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu to discuss possible solutions to the Libya conflict. The Turkish government regards the end of all hostilities as a priority and believes that it can play an important role in this respect. According to the Turkish ambassador in Tripoli, Turkey is “the only country capable of speaking to both camps” as it has representatives in both Tripoli and Benghazi.⁸⁹ *De Morgen* also reports on Turkey’s mediation efforts.⁹⁰ The Turkish government has tried to arrange a meeting between the leader of the Libyan opposition and a Gaddafi envoy in Qatar.⁹¹ In another article, *De Morgen* reports that the Libyan rebels have refused to receive a Turkish ship carrying relief supplies. The rebels are said to be upset with Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who warned against supplying them with arms a week earlier.⁹²

5 April 2011 – EU perspectives for Tunisia?

In an article for *La Libre Belgique*, Stephanie Carion reports about the debate on an EU membership perspective for Tunisia. According to the author, the idea, launched by French history professor Sylvain Kahn, could overshadow the debate on Turkey’s EU accession.⁹³

[1&sort=datedesc&pos=44&all=15434&nav=1](#)

⁸⁷ *Le Soir*, “Plus de 50 journalistes emprisonnes en Turquie”, 4 April 2011, see

[http://archives.lesoir.be/plus-de-50-journalistes-emprisonnes-en-turquie-t-20110404-](http://archives.lesoir.be/plus-de-50-journalistes-emprisonnes-en-turquie-t-20110404-01C5NR.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=40&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=40&all=15434&nav=1)

[01C5NR.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=40&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=40&all=15434&nav=1](http://archives.lesoir.be/plus-de-50-journalistes-emprisonnes-en-turquie-t-20110404-01C5NR.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=40&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=40&all=15434&nav=1)

⁸⁸ *La Libre Belgique*, “La Libye à la recherche d’une solution de sortie de conflit”, 4 April 2011, see:

<http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/652815/la-libye-a-la-recherche-d-une-solution-de-sortie-de-conflit.html>

⁸⁹ *Le Soir*, “Kadhafi sonde eAthenes et Ankara”, 5 April 2011, p. 12, see: [http://archives.lesoir.be/libye-une-offensive-diplomatique...-juste-avant-que-t-20110405-](http://archives.lesoir.be/libye-une-offensive-diplomatique...-juste-avant-que-t-20110405-01C663.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=30&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=35&all=15434&nav=1)

[01C663.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=30&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=35&all=15434&nav=1](http://archives.lesoir.be/libye-une-offensive-diplomatique...-juste-avant-que-t-20110405-01C663.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=30&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=35&all=15434&nav=1)

⁹⁰ *De Morgen*, “Turkije werkt aan wapenstilstand eLibie”, 7 April 2011, see:

<http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/9616/Onrust-in-het-Midden-Oosten/article/detail/1247786/2011/04/07/Turkije-werkt-aan-wapenstilstand-Libie.dhtml>

⁹¹ *De Morgen*, “Libische rebellen weigeren Turkse hulp”, 6 April 2011, see:

<http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/9616/Onrust-in-het-Midden-Oosten/article/detail/1246832/2011/04/06/Libische-rebellen-weigeren-Turkse-hulp.dhtml>

⁹² *De Morgen*, “Misurata hoogste prioriteit voor NATO”, 6 April 2011, see:

<http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/990/Buitenland/article/detail/1247122/2011/04/06/Misurata-hoogste-prioriteit-voor-NAVO.dhtml>

⁹³ *La Libre Belgique*, “La Tunisie, un jour européenne?”, 5 April 2011, see:

6 April 2011 – Immigration-detour to France

An article in *Le Soir* on the situation of asylum seekers in Belgium profiles an 18-year-old Iranian who fled to Turkey but saw his asylum application rejected. The young man then used a fake passport to travel to Cyprus, where he was to remain for eight years before coming to Belgium under the family reunification procedure.⁹⁴

7 April 2011 – Turkey taking part in important European armaments project

Le Soir reports that Turkey is among the countries that have ordered the A400M military aircraft carrier.⁹⁵ Turkey is thus depicted as a participant in a major European armaments project.

12 April 2011 – The AKP and the headscarf

The Flemish daily *De Morgen* reports that the AKP has designated a woman wearing the Muslim headscarf as a candidate for the June 2011 elections. The candidate, Fatma Bostan Unal, argues that 65 per cent of women in Turkey wear headscarves and thus need to be represented in Parliament.⁹⁶ Although the Turkish constitution is based on secular values, there is no law prohibiting the wearing of a headscarf in parliament. (The Constitutional Court has ruled that headscarves are not allowed in public buildings, however.) The last woman to wear a headscarf in parliament was Merve Kavakci, who was booed when she wore the veil at a meeting of the assembly in 1999. According to *De Morgen* the AKP is promoting the right of women to wear a headscarf. Having faced a lawsuit in 2008 after it proposed allowing headscarves at public universities, the party has become more cautious on the issue, however.⁹⁷

13 April 2011 – Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah suspects arrested in Istanbul

La Libre Belgique reports that anti-terror units of the Turkish police have arrested around 40 persons in Istanbul on suspicion of belonging to the Turkish branches of al-Qaeda and Hezbollah. The Turkish police regularly arrest persons suspected of Islamic extremism. In 2010, al-Qaeda's number two had threatened Turkey after it took over NATO's Kabul Regional Command mission in Afghanistan.⁹⁸

<http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/653024/la-tunisie-un-jour-europeenne.html>

⁹⁴ *Le Soir*, "Bienvenue dans le brol de l'asile en Belgique", 6 April 2011, p. 16, see:

<http://archives.lesoir.be/zoom-bienvenue-dans-le-brol-de-l-asile-en-t-20110406-01C89K.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=30&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=34&all=15434&nav=1>

⁹⁵ *Le Soir*, "Le contrat edefinitif pour l'avion militaire europeen A400M esigne", 7 April 2011, see:

<http://archives.lesoir.be/le-contrat-definitif-pour-l-avion-militaire-europeen-t-20110407-01CC0A.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=30&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=33&all=15434&nav=1>

⁹⁶ See e.g. *Hürriyet*, "Headscarf ties AKP strategy in knots", 16 March 2011, see:

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=akp-split-over-nominating-candidate-with-headscarf-2011-03-17>

⁹⁷ *De Morgen*, "Vrouw met 'verboden' hoofddoek op Turkse kieslijst", 12 April 2011, see:

<http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/990/Buitenland/article/detail/1249443/2011/04/12/Vrouw-met-verboden-hoofddoek-op-Turkse-kieslijst.dhtml>

⁹⁸ *La Libre Belgique*, "Turquie: Coup de filet contre al Qaeda", 13 April 2011, see:

<http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/654664/breves.html>

13 April 2011 – A second Mavi Marmara?

La Libre Belgique reports on a request by Israel's ambassador to Turkey for the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to prevent a new humanitarian aid flotilla from leaving for the Gaza Strip. A new flotilla organised by the IHH, a Turkish Islamist charity organisation, is planned for the end of June (so as not to interfere with the Turkish elections on 12 June 2011). In 2010 nine Turkish citizens were killed when Israeli commandoes boarded the IHH's Mavi Marmara, a Gaza-bound ship, resulting in a severe crisis in Turkish-Israeli relations.

Turkish officials contacted by the Israeli ambassador announced that they would examine the issue.⁹⁹

13 April 2011 – Belgian imam as AKP candidate for parliament

Flemish newspapers report on Cemal Cavdarli, an imam from Ghent and a member of the Flemish right-wing party LDD, who will run for a seat in the Turkish parliament as an AKP candidate.¹⁰⁰ The Flemish daily *De Standaard* also reports on the issue.¹⁰¹

13 / 14 April 2011 – Bahar Kimyongur will not be extradited

Le Soir reports on the case of Bahar Kimyongur, a Belgian citizen who was convicted in 2009 for links to the extreme left-wing Turkish party DHKP-C. Kimyongur was arrested in the Netherlands in April 2006 after a secret meeting of 25 senior officials from the Belgian ministry of the interior, ministry of justice, the Federal Prosecution Service and the Federal Police decided to extradite him to Turkey. Given that Belgium does not extradite its own citizens, Kimyongur has decided to take the Belgian authorities to court.¹⁰² *La Libre Belgique* and *De Morgen* also report on the case.¹⁰³

14 April 2011 – Harder conditions for family reunification

Le Soir reports on a decision by the Belgian State Council to reject a new proposal on family reunification in Belgium. The initiative, which was initially proposed by the Flemish nationalist party N-VA and which was agreed by the Flemish parties and the Walloon liberal

⁹⁹ *La Libre Belgique*, "Gaza: une flottille internationale d'aide partira fin juin", 13 April 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/654728/gaza-une-flottille-internationale-d-aide-partira-fin-juin.html>

¹⁰⁰ *De Morgen*, "Gentse imam na LDD-lijst nu kandidaat voor Turks parlementsztitje", 13 April 2011, see: <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/989/Binnenland/article/detail/1250421/2011/04/13/Gentse-imam-na-LDD-lijst-nu-kandidaat-voor-Turks-parlementsztitje.dhtml>

¹⁰¹ *De Standaard*, "Turkije: LDD'er Cemal Cavdarli doet er alles aan om", 14 April 2011, see: <http://www.standaard.be/artikel/detail.aspx?artikelid=1J38SHVO&word=erdogan>

¹⁰² *Le Soir*, "Kimyongur exige des comptes", 13 April 2011, p. 6, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/affaire-dhkp-c-la-belgique-avait-organise-la-livraison_t-20110413-01CMCN.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=10&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=17&all=15434&nav=1

¹⁰³ *La Libre Belgique*, "DHKP-C : l'Etat a-t-il efaute?", 14 April 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/belgique/article/654771/dhkp-c-l-etat-a-t-il-faute.html>; *De Morgen*, "Vrijgesproken terreurverdachte dient klacht in voor arrestatie", 13 April 2011, see: <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/990/Buitenland/article/detail/1250300/2011/04/13/Vrijgesproken-terreurverdachte-dient-klacht-in-voor-arrestatie.dhtml>

party MR was to make the conditions for family reunification for Belgian citizens with Moroccan and Turkish origin more difficult.¹⁰⁴

15 April 2011 – Pro-Islamist demonstrations in Istanbul

Le Soir reports on a demonstration in Istanbul by Islamist militants decrying the crackdown against anti-regime protesters in Syria. The article also refers to the Turkish government's request for Syrian President Bashar el-Assad to launch democratic reforms.¹⁰⁵

15 April 2011 – Turkish government as mediator between Palestinian parties

An article in *La Libre Belgique* on the internal conflicts in Palestine mentions that Turkey is trying to mediate between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas.¹⁰⁶

15 April 2011 – New mosque in Liege

Le Soir reports on the planned construction of a new mosque in Liege, describing the projects as “visible without being imposing.” The mosque would have a minaret resembling a factory chimney, a kind of a tribute to the role of Turkish workers in Liege's coal and steel industry.¹⁰⁷

16 April 2011 – Erdogan's speech at the Council of Europe

La Libre Belgique reports on Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Strasbourg, where the Prime Minister spoke at a rally of 7,000 citizens of Turkish origin and at the Council of Europe. Erdogan discussed Turkey's (economic) dynamism, its potential leadership role in the Middle East, and its EU accession process. Turkey, he declared, was not interested in Libya's petrol and mineral resources but in brotherly relations. Libya should belong to Libyans as Iraq should belong to Iraqis, Afghanistan to Afghans and Bahrain to Bahrainis.

The next day, Erdogan returned to the issue during his visit to the Council of Europe. “The only acceptable motive for an external military intervention should be humanitarian,” he argued. Erdogan insisted that Turkey was well positioned to be a mediator between Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East, and that it could play an important role in regional

¹⁰⁴ *Le Soir*, “Le Conseil d'Etat recale l'accord sur le regroupement”, 14 April 2011, p. 6, see:

[http://archives.lesoir.be/le-conseil-d-etat-recale-l-accord-sur-le-t-20110414-](http://archives.lesoir.be/le-conseil-d-etat-recale-l-accord-sur-le-t-20110414-01CP5Q.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=10&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=11&all=15434&nav=1)

[01CP5Q.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=10&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=11&all=15434&nav=1](http://archives.lesoir.be/le-conseil-d-etat-recale-l-accord-sur-le-t-20110414-01CP5Q.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=10&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=11&all=15434&nav=1)

¹⁰⁵ *Le Soir*, “Turquie: Manifestation à Istanbul contre la répression en Syrie”, 15 April 2011, see:

[http://archives.lesoir.be/turquie-manifestation-a-istanbul-contre-la-repression-t-20110415-](http://archives.lesoir.be/turquie-manifestation-a-istanbul-contre-la-repression-t-20110415-01CURY.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=0&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=9&all=15434&nav=1)

[01CURY.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=0&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=9&all=15434&nav=1](http://archives.lesoir.be/turquie-manifestation-a-istanbul-contre-la-repression-t-20110415-01CURY.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=0&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=9&all=15434&nav=1)

¹⁰⁶ *La Libre Belgique*, “Abbas accuse le Hamas de bloquer la réconciliation sous influence de l'Iran”, 15 April 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/655142/abbas-accuse-le-hamas-de-bloquer-la-reconciliation-sous-influence-de-l-iran.html>, see also *La Libre Belgique*, Le Hamas et le Fatah signent un accord de réconciliation, 27 April 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/657293/le-hamas-et-le-fatah-signent-un-accord-de-reconciliation.html>

¹⁰⁷ *Le Soir*, “Une mosquée turque à Glain”, 15 April 2011, p. 24, see: <http://archives.lesoir.be/liege-la-diyamet-a-revu-son-projet-plus-integre-et-t-20110414-01CQ62.html?queryand=turquie&firstHit=0&by=10&when=-1&sort=datedesc&pos=4&all=15434&nav=1>

peace initiatives, including the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. On Turkey's relations with the EU, Erdogan explained that both parties needed each other. Leaving Turkey out of the EU, he argued, would not only be damaging for Europe's prosperity but also an injustice to Europe and its citizens. Erdogan also highlighted Turkey's recent achievements in the field of construction, including a tunnel under the Bosphorus (to be operational in 2013). His government, he said, had built 13,000 km of roads, 80 new universities and 480,000 new residential buildings.

Speaking to the Turkish community in Alsace, Erdogan recommended integration and highlighted the importance of learning French and at least another (foreign) language. At the same time, however, he warned against renouncing Turkish values.¹⁰⁸

16 April 2011 – Third border crossing to Iran opened

La Libre Belgique reports on the opening of a third border crossing between Turkey and Iran and the Erdogan government's stated goal of increasing trade with its southeastern neighbour. Two more crossing points (in Esendere and Dilucu) would be opened soon, the article noted.

According to FM Ahmet Davutoglu, Turkey aims to increase its annual trade with Iran to 30 billion dollars. (This increase would mainly consist of increased gas imports from Iran, the article noted.) *La Libre Belgique* refers to Davutoglu's statement that "Turkey and Iran will be friends eternally," explaining that the relationship between the two countries has improved significantly since Erdogan's "Islamic-conservative government" came to power in 2002.

The opening of the border crossing would take place despite UN economic sanctions against Iran, the article noted. The Turkish government noted that it would apply the UN sanctions but not additional measures adopted by the U.S. and the EU.¹⁰⁹

18 April 2011 – Turkey as transit country for European terrorists

La Libre Belgique reports on Europeans trained in terror camps in Pakistan who often transited through Turkey en route to Pakistan. In some cases, European jihadis were arrested on their way back to Europe. In 2010, several German citizens were arrested in Turkey and Egypt while returning from Pakistan.¹¹⁰

19 April 2011 – Discontent over EU accession process

La Libre Belgique covers statements made by Ahmet Davutoglu, who complained that Turkey's EU accession process was being blocked for political reasons. As Egemen Bagis, Turkey's chief negotiator, lamented, Turkey was still in the early stages of the accession

¹⁰⁸ *La Libre Belgique*, "Erdogan: 'Une autre Turquie'", 16 April 2011, see:

<http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/655251/erdogan-une-autre-turquie.html>

¹⁰⁹ *La Libre Belgique*, "La Turquie et l'Iran ouvrent un troisieme poste efrontiere", 16 April 2011

<http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/655395/la-turquie-et-l-iran-ouvrent-un-troisieme-poste-frontiere.html>

¹¹⁰ *La Libre Belgique*, "Ces eEuropeens candidats au jihad", 18 April 2011, see:

<http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/655524/ces-europeens-candidats-au-jihad.html>

process. As only 13 of the 35 pre-accession chapters had been opened, he said, it was high time for a frank discussion of EU-Turkey relations. Bagis sharply denounced the “unjust” visa regime for Turkish citizens, which made Turks feel “less European.”

EU Commissioner Stefan Fule rejected Bagis’ criticism, assuring that there were no differences between the accession conditions for Croatia or Turkey. However, he did admit that the problem was also a political one, as all EU member states had a stake in Turkey’s accession process. Fule had also announced his concern about the arrests of journalists in Turkey.¹¹¹

19 April 2011 - Reporters without Borders concerned about Turkey

Le Soir covers a report presented in Istanbul by “Reporters without Borders,” which describes the situation of Turkish journalists as “alarming”. Dozens of journalists have been arrested by Turkish authorities on suspicion of plotting against the government.¹¹²

20 April 2011 –Turkish family stops contact with daughter over *Playboy* photo

Belgian newspapers report on Sila Sahin, an actress of Turkish origin who was pictured nude in the German edition of *Playboy* magazine. Sahin wanted to demonstrate that it was fine for Turkish women to expose their bodies. Sahin’s parents condemned the decision, breaking all contact with their daughter.¹¹³

21 April 2011 - Guest essay argues in favour of Turkey’s “Europeanness”

In a guest essay for *La Libre Belgique*, lawyer Mehmet A. Sayginer argues that Turkey is part of Europe regardless of the EU accession process. In the debate on Turkey’s accession, Europe and Turkey are often regarded as separate entities with a dividing line, writes Sayginer. He also refers to Ottoman history, citing the good relations between the sultans and the kings of France and Portugal as well as Belgian governments. These examples, he argues, demonstrate Turkey’s historical “Europeanness” and its belonging to the “European family”. Today, he notes, views on Turkey are often coloured by the often rather negatively perceived experience of Turkish immigration to Europe. Sayginer closes by encouraging the reader to help restore the historical legacy between Turkey and Europe and avoid falling into the trap of reducing Europe to the EU.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ *La Libre Belgique*, “La Turquie lassée d'attendre à la porte de l'Union européenne”, 19 April 2011, <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/655854/la-turquie-lassee-d-attendre-a-la-porte-de-l-union-europeenne.html>

¹¹² *Le Soir*, Sombre bilan pour la presse en Turquie, 19 April 2011, see: <http://archives.lesoir.be/sombre-bilan-pour-la-presse-en-turquie-t-20110419-01D0JD.html>

¹¹³ *De Morgen*, Familie breekt met Turkse actrice na Playboyshoot, 20 April 2011, see: <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/989/Binnenland/article/detail/1253526/2011/04/20/Familie-breekt-met-Turkse-actrice-na-Playboyshoot.dhtml>

¹¹⁴ *La Libre Belgique*, La Turquie est européenne, 21 April 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/debats/opinions/article/656159/la-turquie-est-europeenne.html>

24 April 2011 – Turkish government criticises Barack Obama’s statements

Belgian newspapers report on the Turkish government’s criticism of U.S. President Barack Obama’s statement about the massacres of Armenians during the Ottoman Empire. In a press release Obama had asked the Turkish government to fully recognise the killings, albeit without calling them “genocide”. Obama was criticised by Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu for “distorting historical facts.” Davutoglu expects the U.S. to facilitate and not complicate the normalisation process between Turkey and Armenia. As *De Morgen* reports, Turkey recognises the deaths of about 300,000 to 500,000 Armenians but insists that the deaths were not organised and took place as a result of the chaos of the last years of the Ottoman Empire.¹¹⁵

27 / 28 April 2011 -- Turkey dismantles statue on friendship with Armenia

The Belgian newspapers report that Turkish authorities in Kars, near the border with Armenia, have started to dismantle a monument to Turkish-Armenian reconciliation. This reportedly came at the request of Prime Minister Erdogan, who had called the statue – which lies near the tomb of a famous Muslim scholar – a “monstrosity” in January 2011.¹¹⁶ *Le Soir* cites the creator of the statue, Mehmet Aksoy, as saying, “I am so sad for my country. It is illegal, a disgrace.” Aksoy believed Erdogan’s decision was motivated by the need to secure the nationalist vote ahead of the parliamentary elections.¹¹⁷

27 April 2011 - Canal between Black Sea and Marmara Sea

Belgian newspapers report on Recep Tayyip Erdogan announcement of plans to construct a canal connecting the Black and Marmara Seas to relieve maritime traffic on the Bosphorus. The construction of the 40 to 50 km long canal would be completed by 2023. According to Erdogan, the canal will be one of the largest projects of the millennium, dwarfing the Panama and Suez Canals. It would be an energy project, a transport project, but above all an environmental project, Erdogan insists. “It is about protecting the nature, Istanbul and its surroundings.”¹¹⁸

27 April 2011 - Turkey as a mediator in conflict between Hamas and Fatah

In an article on reconciliation talks between Hamas and Fatah, *La Libre Belgique* explains that

¹¹⁵ *De Morgen*, Ankara betreurt Obama's uittalingen over Armeense genocide, 24 April 2011, see: <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/990/Buitenland/article/detail/1255070/2011/04/24/Ankara-betreurt-Obama-s-uitlatingen-over-Armeense-genocide.dhtml>

¹¹⁶ *La Libre Belgique*, e' Amitie' avec el' Armenie: une statue eedemontee, 27 April 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/657213/breves.html>

¹¹⁷ *Le Soir*, La Turquie edecapite une statue eediediee à la paix avec el' Armenie, 28 April 2011, p. 11, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/obama-le-prouve-ne-aux-usa-la-turquie-decapite-une_t-20110428-01DCRA.html

¹¹⁸ *De Morgen*, Plannen voor gigantisch kanaal door Istanboel, 27 April 2011, see: <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/990/Buitenland/article/detail/1256273/2011/04/27/Plannen-voor-gigantisch-kanaal-door-Istanboel.dhtml>; see also *De Standaard*, Nieuw kanaal moet Bosphorus ontlasten, 28 April 2011, see: <http://www.standaard.be/artikel/detail.aspx?artikelid=TK39DSAU&word=turkije>; *Le Soir*, La Turquie va creuser son canal de Suez, 28 April 2011, p. 22, see: http://archives.lesoir.be/transports-pour-desengorger-le-bosphore-la-turquie-va_t-20110428-01DCV1.html

the Turkish and Egyptian governments have been involved in mediation efforts.¹¹⁹ Following Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' initial call for help in establishing a unity government, the Turkish government proposed a dialogue between the two groups in Istanbul.

27 / 28 April 2011 - Erdogan – Assad to “move forward on the path of reform”

La Libre Belgique reports on international pressure on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to cease all violent repression against the Syrian people. Having earlier expressed his “deep concern”, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has called on al-Assad to “move forward on the path of reform.”¹²⁰ On 28 April, *La Libre Belgique* reports that Turkey fears that the conflict in Syria may spill over into Turkish territory. Despite the government's insistence that the Syrian government step up reforms, Turkey has remained silent on the issue of possible sanctions against Syria. A Turkish delegation is scheduled to visit Damascus to convey the concerns of the Turkish government. The article mentions that Turkey had developed close ties with Arab leaders in recent years, including the Syrian President. Both countries had recently abolished visa restrictions; bilateral trade volume had tripled in ten years, reaching 2.5 billion USD in 2010.¹²¹

28 April 2011 – PKK members killed in eastern Turkey

Belgian newspapers report on the killing of two “Kurdish rebels” by the Turkish army in Pulumur in eastern Turkey. A rifle and two grenades were found on the bodies of the men, who were identified as members of the PKK.¹²²

29 April 2011 – New mosque in Glain?

La Libre Belgique reports on the planned construction of a Turkish mosque in Glain. Although plans for its construction received the green light from the Municipal Commission of Planning (CCMTA) in April 2011, municipal council representative Michel Peters (of the Walloon liberal party MR) has raised additional concerns. Plans had already been changed on account of Peters' earlier interventions: the number of minarets was reduced from two to one; its height was reduced from 30m to 20m. Peters insists on removing the minaret altogether, arguing that religion should remain a private issue. With the mosque designed to accommodate up to 1,200 visitors, Peters is also concerned that it limit the mobility in the suburb – he is supported in this by Brigitte Ernst, a Green Party representative. Michel Firket, a member of the mosque's planning committee, argues that big events would only be held twice a year and that on normal days no more than fifty worshippers would visit the

¹¹⁹ *La Libre Belgique*, Le Hamas et le Fatah signent un accord de réconciliation, 27 April 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/657293/le-hamas-et-le-fatah-signent-un-accord-de-reconciliation.html>

¹²⁰ *La Libre Belgique*, Des messages ‘forts’, 27 April 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/657208/des-messages-forts.html>

¹²¹ *La Libre Belgique*, Turquie sur le qui-vive, 28 April 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/article/657376/turquie-sur-le-qui-vive.html>

¹²² *Le Soir*, Turquie: deux rebelles kurdes tués lors de combats avec l'armée dans l'Est, 28 April 2011; see also *De Standaard*, Twee agenten gedood bij PKK-aanval Turkije, 13 May 2011, see: <http://www.standaard.be/artikel/detail.aspx?artikelid=OI3A3TK7&word=turkije>

mosque.¹²³

In another article, *La Libre Belgique* reports that an agreement has finally been found on the issue. According to Michel Peters, the Turkish community has “demonstrated an open mind.” Michel Firket is said to be extremely happy with the conduct of the debate with the Turkish partners. He regards the planned construction as part “an incredible process of integration.” However, rumours of a North African mosque – to be erected close to the Turkish one – are now raising concerns among municipal officials.¹²⁴

¹²³ *La Libre Belgique*, ‘On va étouffer le quartier’, 29 April 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/gazette-de-liege/article/657631/on-va-etouffer-le-quartier.html>

¹²⁴ *La Libre Belgique*, Un climat beaucoup plus edetendu, mais..., 29 April 2011, see: <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/gazette-de-liege/article/657547/un-climat-beaucoup-plus-detendu-mais.html>