

# The economic development of Turkey is the key to peace

by Joseph Brewda

The Turkish government lost no time after arresting Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan in Nairobi, Kenya on Feb. 15, in announcing plans to speed up development of the impoverished southeastern region of Turkey where the PKK war is being waged. Speaking to the Turkish daily *Milliyet* on Feb. 21, Turkish President Suleyman Demirel said that the drive to complete the Southeastern Anatolian Project (GAP), which will vastly increase the region's agricultural and industrial production, is "one of the two most important steps that will be undertaken"—the other being the Repentance Law, granting amnesty to surrendered PKK fighters. He added that "the development drive for this region, which has been the target of terrorists, and which has suffered most from the effects of terrorism, must not be allowed to stall."

Accordingly, the Turkish National Security Council met in late February to discuss new highways and railways, and a step up of GAP irrigation plans, to hasten the resettlement of villages abandoned because of the war.

Turkey's GAP also has an important role to play as a necessary component of the Eurasian Land-Bridge, or new "Silk Road," which would link Europe to China, through Turkey and Central Asia, providing for the industrial and agricultural development along its route. As **Figure 1** shows, the proposed Eurasian Land-Bridge's main routes proceed through Turkey, including through the southeastern Anatolian war zone.

## The GAP plan

Begun in the 1970s, and planned for completion in 2010, the GAP calls for building 22 dams and 19 hydroelectric power plants on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the major sources of water for the Mideast. When finished, the project will make southeastern Anatolia, Turkey's most impoverished region, into the nation's breadbasket and major source of electrical power. Comprising the northern part of what is historically known as the "Fertile Crescent," the region could provide three harvests a year because of its climate and soil, with the provision of a reliable water supply.

According to the Turkish Foreign Ministry, "Agriculture and industrial potential created by GAP will increase the standard of living in the region by fivefold."

The origin of project dates back 1936, when the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, ordered

studies into the country's hydroelectric potential. The State Hydraulic Works was established in 1954 to plan future projects, and the Euphrates Planning Administration was formed in 1961 to study the Euphrates basin. In 1977, the government brought together numerous projects proposed, or already undertaken by the two organizations, under a new master plan, the Southeastern Anatolia Project, or GAP.

In 1983, Turkey began construction on the centerpiece of the project, the Ataturk Dam on the Euphrates. Work on the gigantic irrigation tunnels to carry water from the Ataturk reservoir to nearby arid plains, also began at that time. In 1986, the State Planning Organization was authorized to integrate the GAP with all other regional planning, to ensure its smooth coordination.

Because developing southeast Anatolia would undermine Britain's geopolitical aim to keep Turkey vulnerable and weak, Britain moved quickly to try to stop the project, including through unleashing the PKK, which has always been under its control. PKK military operations began in 1984, one year after the major GAP construction projects began; construction projects have always been a top PKK target.

The British do not hide their objective. "GAP has the agricultural development of the southeast as a major aim," a 1998 report on Turkey by the British *Economist Intelligence Unit* warned. "However, the war against the PKK has made most of the regional development plans for the southeastern provinces academic."

Britain's Lord Avebury, the PKK's top international patron, is also a prominent opponent of GAP. In March, he issued an open letter to British Prime Minister Tony Blair, claiming that the proposed Ilisu Dam on the Tigris is genocidal, because it would require relocating several Kurdish villages out of the reservoir area.

Ocalan, the founder and leader of the PKK, concurs. "Hopes are being pinned on the assumption that the economy in the southeast will develop," he told the PKK's London-based MED-TV, on July 4, 1997. But, he threatened, "I take this opportunity to warn all business circles that take an interest in the region: Our major targets will be economic. Machines and workshops are being destroyed. Let them not invest in GAP."

Addressing this issue, Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit told *Anatolia News* on Feb. 21, 1999, that "the PKK has

FIGURE 1

**Eurasian Land Bridge and the Southeastern Anatolian Project (GAP)**



tried to obstruct development in the eastern and southeastern parts of Turkey. It has claimed that it fought for Kurdish rights, but in effect it has acted as the real enemy of the Kurds.” Ecevit added that “the problems and ailments of these regions are largely due to their semi-feudal heritage. The vestiges of feudalism, which hindered development, would have eroded by now if it were not for PKK terrorism.”

**Cost of the war**

The cost of the British-run war has been immense. The standard of living in eastern and southeastern Anatolia has been steadily falling since the war began in 1984. Although 20% of Turkey’s 61 million population lives there, it only employs 3.5% of its workforce. Stockbreeding, the region’s main occupation, has collapsed 40% since 1985. The annual per-capita income in the region is only \$529, compared to \$2,888 for Turkey as a whole.

According to Prime Minister Ecevit, approximately 370,000 villagers, all ethnic Kurds, have been forced to flee to western Turkey, because of PKK attacks. At least 3,185 villages have been totally evacuated, and 134 industrial plants have been forced to shut down. Two hundred and ninety factories and civilian government buildings have been destroyed by the PKK.

Education has been particularly targeted. The PKK has destroyed 225 schools and murdered 92 teachers in cold blood since 1984, forcing the government to close 2,076 schools for security reasons. Consequently, 117,000 children, all ethnic

Kurds, are unable to go to school. Cumulatively, millions of Kurdish children have been denied an education since the war began.

Moreover, Turkey has been forced to pay at least \$50 billion to fight the war — more than twice that needed to finish the GAP.

The PKK has also criminalized the area, making it the major highway for Afghan heroin reaching western Europe. According to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and European police agencies, 75% of the heroin used in Europe transits Turkey, mostly through eastern Anatolia, and primarily under PKK and allied Kurdish mafia control.

**The southeast Anatolia region**

The region defined by GAP comprises eight provinces bordering Syria and Iraq, constituting 9.7% of Turkey’s total area — a land area of 74,000 square kilometers, corresponding to half of Greece or one-third of England.

According to a 1998 report by the Turkish Foreign Ministry, the project will irrigate 1.7 million hectares of land when completed. The total planned irrigation area corresponds to 19% of the economically irrigatable area in the country. It will generate 27 billion kilowatt-hours (kwh) of electricity annually, with an installed capacity of 7,500 megawatts. The total annual electric generation planned will account for 22% of the country’s economically viable hydroelectric generation.

The total cost of the project is estimated at \$32 billion, of

## Regional disparity is the basis of PKK war

The vast discrepancy in the standard of living between western and southeastern Turkey, has provided the basis for the war. A few statistics give the picture.

While Gross National Product per capita in 1996 for Turkey as a whole stood at \$2,888, most of the southeast was well below \$1,000. GNP per capita for Turkey's poorest city, Mus, in the southeast, was \$654—less than 10% of that of Turkey's wealthiest western city of Kocaeli, at \$7,096. The per-capita income of at least four major ethnic Kurdish cities—Mus, Agri, Bitlis, and Bingol—was below many cities in Africa. And, the standard of living in the southeastern countryside is far worse than in its cities.

Because of such differences, there was a massive emigration from eastern to western Turkey even before the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) stepped up its terror war in

1991. According to the 1990 census, 30% of eastern Anatolia's population, that is, 3.6 million people, had already moved to the west by that time. Since then, many more people have fled. For such reasons, 15% of the population of Istanbul, Turkey's largest city, is from the east.

Southeastern Turkey's population is overwhelmingly agrarian—71% of its working population is employed as farmers or shepherds, and only 5% employed is in industry. Here, the greatest oppressor of the Kurds is the traditional Kurdish landlord. Whereas 5% of the region's families own 65% of the land, 70% of the region's families own only 10% of the land, and almost entirely in plots of five hectares or less. Many villages are owned by a single person or family. No less than 38% of the peasant families in the region as a whole are landless. In numbers of places, the percentage of the population that is landless is far greater. By providing newly irrigated, formerly barren lands to Kurdish peasants, and through accompanying land reform, the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) would eliminate that feudal relationship—one of the reasons that many of the top landlords financially support the PKK.

which \$12.5 billion has already been invested. About 41% of the project has been completed. Current plans are to spend \$19.4 billion to complete the project in the next 12 years.

The Ataturk Dam spans the Euphrates River downstream from the ancient town of Samsat. Begun in 1983 and fully completed in 1993, the dam is the ninth-largest rock-filled dam in the world, standing more than 600 feet high and more than 6,000 feet long. It is designed to produce one-third of the GAP's projected energy output, and provide water for more than half the land to be irrigated. Now in the process of being filled, the Ataturk Reservoir could potentially hold as much as 50 billion cubic meters of water. Compare this to the average amount of 30 billion cubic meters carried by the Euphrates into Syria in a whole year.

The Karakaya Dam over the Euphrates has also been completed. It is expected to supply one-quarter of the GAP's electrical output. In 1997, the Ataturk and Karakaya dams together supplied 18.8% of the country's electrical power. When all the dams are completed, the GAP's annual electrical production will reach 27 billion kwh, corresponding to 70% of Turkey's total hydroelectrical production in 1997.

The first phase of the GAP's irrigation plan was completed in 1995, when Turkey finished the twin Sanliurfa Tunnels, the longest irrigation tunnels in the world, which carry water from the Ataturk Dam onto the Sanliurfa-Harran plains 16 miles away. As of 1998, the tunnels irrigate 100,000 hectares. The plan is to increase the land irrigated to 380,000 hectares by 2002.

Since 1995, a significant increase in agricultural produc-

tion has already been observed. For example, cotton production in the Harran plains now stands at 800,000 tons, 25% of Turkey's total production, and it is expected to rise to 1.2 million tons once the project is completed. Total regional agricultural production, which was valued at \$65.4 million in 1995, rose to \$85.1 million in 1997.

Related projects include a transregional highway already under construction, rail lines, an international airport, and a major new university in the city of Sanliurfa.

And while the GAP is designed to revolutionize Turkey's economy, it is also needed to revive Syria's economy and rebuild war-shattered Iraq as well. The long-planned Badush Dam on the Tigris, near Mosul, Iraq, which Iraq was forced to postpone because of the Anglo-American embargo, is exemplary of what must be done. A series of dams, irrigation systems, and water and sewage treatment facilities, complementing the GAP in Syria and Iraq, would vastly boost food output and living standards in both countries.

Such shared projects are necessary, because Syria and Iraq have repeatedly expressed grave concerns that large water projects in Turkey could greatly reduce the flow of the Turkish-origin rivers on which the two states depend. Without detailed, fully transparent agreements between all three states—and a Turkish commitment to aid Syria and Iraq's downstream water management if needed—it will always be possible for outside forces to exploit tensions on this issue, and even trigger a "water war." More generally, only nuclear power-driven desalination can meet the growing freshwater requirements of the arid region as a whole.

## Turkey and the Land-Bridge

As part of its development drive, Turkey is also taking part in the Eurasian Land-Bridge, and is engaged in major domestic rail, road, and port projects, to integrate Turkey into the overall plan.

Speaking at a Dec. 26, 1998 press conference summarizing developments over the previous year, President Demirel reiterated Turkey's commitment to the Land-Bridge policy. "The main transportation projects which constitute the infrastructure of the Silk Road that is re-emerging on the scene of history, and once again connects Europe with Asia, are being carried out in Turkey," Demirel said. "Turkey is the center of the transportation network which connects three continents."

The Turkish Foreign Ministry 1999 report, *Turkey and the World, 2010-2020*, emphasizes the importance of the project. In a section titled "Silk Route for the 21st Century," the ministry lists the following projects as priorities:

- Building deep sea ports and receiving terminals in the Mediterranean and in the Black Sea;
- Construction of a rail tunnel under the Bosphorus;
- Building of a bridge over the Dardanelles;
- Completion of the Kars, Turkey to Tbilisi, Georgia rail line;
- Extension of the Trans-European Motorway in an eastern and southeastern direction.

To pave the way for this role, Prime Minister Ecevit has accelerated plans to upgrade Turkey's domestic rail and road system. Under his direction, the Ankara-Istanbul and Antalya-Alanya rail projects, which were proposed and planned 20 years ago, have been taken off the shelf and put on the front burner. Tenders for feasibility studies on the lines were released in January. In mid-February, Japanese Overseas Investment and Financing Organization representatives travelled to Ankara to discuss both rail lines, as well as the Bosphorus rail tunnel.

As part of the Eurasian Land-Bridge project, Turkey has also begun construction on a \$717 million Black Sea coastal road, linking Turkey, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, Romania, and Bulgaria. It has also announced plans to increase its annual harbor capacity to 200 million tons within 15 years.

One of Turkey's main concerns in proposing such projects, is to ensure a supply of cheap and reliable energy. Ironically, although three-quarters of the world's proven oil and natural gas reserves are in its immediate vicinity, Turkey is not energy self-sufficient, with domestic energy production accounting for only 42% of its total consumption in 1995. The proposed Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, to export Caucasus and Central Asian oil via the Azerbaijan capital of Baku to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan and onto international markets, would be one way to solve this problem. The pipeline, which would be 1,730 kilometers in length, would carry 45 metric tons of oil per year.

## Turkey pushed toward new 'Afghanistan'

by Joseph Brewda

Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit told Russia's NTV on March 28 that "there is a danger of a world war" because of the U.S.-led NATO assaults on Yugoslavia, in which Turkey is taking part. "I wish [U.S. President Bill] Clinton and [Russian President Boris] Yeltsin would meet as soon as possible," he said, "and search for a common policy." Ecevit welcomed the March 25 Russian initiative for a negotiated settlement, saying that "if Russia can throw its weight behind an effort to persuade Serbia to take a reasonable course, it will do humanity a great service." That same day, Prime Minister Ecevit told Turkish TV, "If this spreads to Albania, Macedonia, or Bosnia-Herzegovina, it will lead to disaster."

That the NATO adventure might boomerang against Turkey was referenced by Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov, during a March 22 stopover in Ireland, shortly before his meetings in Washington were cancelled. Denouncing the airstrikes as an act which "could destabilize the world situation," Primakov warned: "Maybe some will feel like attacking Turkey because the Kurdish issue is not solved."

However, the fallout from the British-American-Commonwealth faction's geopolitical games in the Balkans is not the only threat Turkey faces. Another, is that some British and American policy circles, represented by British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, want to bust up Iraq along ethnic and regional lines—a policy which is an immediate threat to every nation in the region except Israel.

Because of such concerns, Prime Minister Ecevit told the press after meeting U.S. Ambassador Mark Parris on Jan. 26, that he is "deeply concerned" that if Iraq continues to collapse, it may lead to a Kurdish state in northern Iraq, which would also threaten Turkey. Similarly, Turkish President Suleyman Demirel has condemned U.S. plans to help the Iraqi opposition overthrow Saddam Hussein, telling the press on Jan. 30 that such efforts have "disastrous implications," and that U.S. plans against Iraq today should be compared to the failed U.S. intervention in Vietnam.

### The push for a Turkish invasion

Despite Turkish opposition to such geopolitical games in the Balkans and the Mideast, media outlets in Europe and the Arab world, as well as some in Turkey itself, continue to report that the United States and Britain are pressuring Turkey to occupy northern Iraq, as part of their plans to