

## **AK Party Faces A New Dilemma : EU Or Iran ?**

By Ayhan Simsek

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Many observers predicted that this year was going to be a year of crisis between the European Union and Turkey over Cyprus. But international developments in the first month of the year have already made Cyprus a secondary issue. Now Iran, with the deepening of the nuclear crisis and differences between the ruling Justice and Development (AK) Party and Brussels, is dominating the EU-Turkish agenda.

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy's consecutive visits to Ankara on Wednesday and next week will mainly focus on the Iranian nuclear crisis.

European diplomats have recently started to speak about their concerns over the AK Party's shy criticism of Iran, which so far has refrained from fully joining European efforts to put pressure on Tehran to give up its nuclear enrichment program. The Erdogan government prefers to make soft calls on Iran to adopt a moderate stance in the nuclear dispute but hasn't to date warned Iran with strong words to suspend its nuclear enrichment program.

What EU diplomats are now trying to figure out whether this policy is a tactic by the AK Party to gain credibility and have more influence in convincing Iran to adopt moderate policies, or is it ideologically rooted in the "National View" past of the majority of party members, which traditionally enjoyed very close ties with Iran.

Diplomats are also trying to find an answer to another question: Will the AK Party continue with this current policy, or soon join EU efforts to put pressure on Iran in the near future?

It is difficult to give a clear cut answer to that for now, but one thing is clear: The AK Party's current perception of the Iranian nuclear crisis not only seriously differs to that of U.S. but also to that of EU members.

Two main elements seem to shape the view of the majority of AK Party members and supporters on the issue of the Iranian nuclear crisis: First there's criticism of the U.S.' unilateralism and its involvement in the region, and secondly there are feelings of Muslim solidarity and the argument that while Israel has nuclear weapons why should a Muslim country in the Middle East be deprived of that right?

Such a view totally lacks historical or strategic understanding, not to mention the basic notions of international relations. This nuclear crisis doesn't concern a tiny country in South America; it's our immediate neighbor which has long been an ideological adversary and is a political and economic rival in the region.

Iran's possible development of nuclear weapons in the near future without a doubt would pose a serious security concern for Turkey.

It's not difficult to predict that if that happens Turkey will try to counterbalance Iran with its own nuclear program and some others in the region, such as Egypt, will follow.

For Turkey, joining Western pressure against Tehran does not

necessarily mean supporting a military operation against Iran or being hostile to our neighboring country. In fact for many European countries such an operation would be nothing but madness.

The AK Party also seems to be missing another important point: The situation is very different to the period before U.S.' unilateral Iraqi operation. This time EU members, with no disagreement and in cooperation with the U.S., are supporting increasing the pressure on Iran to suspend its nuclear enrichment program. In fact this will push the AK Party to facing a more difficult dilemma, more serious than the one before Iraq war.

Those inside the AK Party talking about Muslim solidarity should remember one thing at least: It was not any other country than Iran that started trilateral cooperation with Greece and Armenia in 1999, which continues to date. What kind of solidarity is that?

International relations have nothing to do with the rhetoric of friendship and solidarity, but interests. Today it's in Turkey's interest to join Western pressure against Iran's nuclear program.

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