

'Turkish mozart' sentenced for blasphemy in retrial*Fazil Say gets 10 months in jail for Twitter comments on Islam*

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 20 - Ten months in jail is the 'price' to pay for publicly making light of Islam on Twitter in today's Turkey under Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who the opposition say is trying to 're-Islamicise' the country. An Istanbul court sentenced world-renowned composer Fazil Say, known as the 'Turkish Mozart' in Germany, to ten months detention on Friday. The ruling has raised fresh alarm over freedom of expression in Turkey after the crackdown on the large, peaceful anti-Erdogan Gezi Park protests in June. Fazil Say, 43, will not be going to jail - or at least not for the time being. Since the composer has never before been convicted of a crime, the Istanbul court handed down a suspended sentence: thus he will not be serving any time so long as he does not commit any further crimes over the next two years. The 'Turkish Mozart' - openly atheist, leftist and anti-Erdogan - was sentenced for "insulting religious values" after commenting jokingly on Twitter about the haste of a Istanbul mosque muezzin, whose call to prayer only lasted 22 seconds, and questioning whether he was in a rush to reunite with his lover or go to a raki (anise-flavoured alcoholic drink popular in Turkey) table. He also tweeted verses by 11th-century poet Omar Khayyam on the 'Muslim paradise': "You say rivers of wine flow in heaven, is heaven a tavern to you? You say two huris (virgins) await each believer there, is heaven a brothel to you?". Three Muslim hardliners reported him to the police, and Say was immediately charged and found guilty by the Istanbul prosecutor's office. The first time he was sentenced to ten months, though this was later annulled due to procedural flaws, and later to ten months again on blasphemy charges. Meanwhile, another well-known secular intellectual, the author of Armenian origins Sevan Nisanyan, has also been sentenced on blasphemy charges to 13 months in jail for his remarks that: "It is not (a) 'hate crime' to poke fun at some Arab leader who, many hundred years ago, claimed to have established contact with (the) Deity and made political, economic and sexual profit as a result. It is almost a kindergarten-level case of what we call freedom of expression." In a message to the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Say warned that freedom of expression is ever more at risk in Turkey. The country is going through "a difficult period", he said, "because those seeking to consolidate their power by exploiting religion are oppressing people." The musician accused Erdogan of wanting him to be sentenced. "Thousands of people are sentenced in Turkey," said the musician, "for being dissidents. Many people are oppressed and frightened. It has become a show of power for the ruling party: the situation is worrisome."

Defense: exercise Black Sea Trust 2013 launched in Turkey

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 20 - The naval war games 'Black Sea Trust 2013' have been launched yesterday in Turkey. The Navies of Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Romania have been invited as observers, the head of the information department of the Black Sea Fleet 1st Rank Captain Vyacheslav Trukhachev said, as reported by Vestnik website. The three-day exercise is being held in the naval base of Ereğli. Their objective, according to Trukhachev, is to strengthen cooperation in security on water among the Black Sea countries.

Finance: Istanbul to launch Center for Islamic Studies

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 20 - The World Bank plans to open the first Center for Islamic Financial Studies outside US territory, the president of the Istanbul Stock Exchange, Ibragim Turhan, told the fourth Istanbul Financial Summit attended by heads of central banks and financial institutions of Europe, the Gulf, South-Eastern Asia, the US and Canada. The center, as Vestnik website reports, will open in Istanbul. Turhan added that the opening will be announced in Washington in October. The official noted that the Istanbul Energy Exchange will open in late 2013. The main topic of the two-day summit in Istanbul is the financing of sustainable development.

Transport: number of THY passengers up 25% year-on-year

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 20 - The number of passengers carried by Turkish Airlines (THY) increased to 31.7 million between January and August, a 25% increase from the same period year-on-year, the company announced to the Public Disclosure Platform (KAP) as daily Hurriyet reported. The number of passengers jumped

24.2% on domestic lines and 25.1% on international routes. The passenger occupancy rate was 79.8% in the same period. The number of flight destinations also rose from 200 to 239, a 20% increase during the period. THY carried 357.3 tons of cargo and mail this year, a 17% increase on the amount last year. THY ranked sixth in terms of the number of passengers carried among Star Alliance members in 2012. The latest report of the Star Alliance network, the leading global airline network with 28 member airlines, said THY carried 39 million passengers and had revenue of USD 7.9 billion in 2012.

Turkey: blasphemy; pianist Fazil Say sentenced to 10 months

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL - World-renowned Turkish pianist Fazil Say, who was sentenced to 10 months in prison for blasphemy in April, was again sentenced to 10 months by an Istanbul court today in a retrial, Hurriyet online reports quoting Dogan News Agency. Say had received a suspended 10-month prison sentence on charges of "insulting religious beliefs held by a section of the society," for re-tweeting several lines, which are attributed to poet Omar Khayyam. Say's lawyers had demanded his suspension be canceled. His demand had been accepted by the court, and the court had paved the way for Say to be re-tried. The 19th Istanbul Peace Court sentenced Say to 10 months in prison but since Say has no criminal record, the court suspended the sentence and ordered supervised liberty. If Say does not commit another crime within two years, the case will be dropped. Say was found guilty of 'insulting religious values' under article 216 of the Turkish criminal code for a few tweets in which he joked about the hasty call to prayer of a muezzin at a mosque in Istanbul - '22 seconds ...: why such a hurry? A lover? Raki (Turkish anisette)?'. And on Islamic heaven he quoted a great Persian poet from 1100, Omar Khayyam: 'You say rivers of wine flow in Paradise: Is it a celestial pub? And that two virgins are awaiting every believer, is Paradise a celestial brothel?' Three Islamic activists reported Say who was subsequently indicted by prosecutors in Istanbul. The musician, 43, a self-proclaimed atheist and leftist, is a well-known opponent of the government of Islamist premier Recep Tayyip Erdogan and one of the most renowned Turkish intellectuals. The pianist and composer is considered a 'Turkish Mozart' in Germany. Many Turkish artists and intellectuals have supported him. In a message sent after the first sentence to the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Fay said freedom of expression is increasingly at risk in Turkey and the country is living through 'a difficult period as those who try to consolidate their power exploiting religion are oppressing people'.

Society: Turkey bans gay dating website, app Grindr

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 19 - Gay and bisexual male dating website Grindr has been banned by Turkey's Directorate of Telecommunication (TIB) as a "protective measure" following a ruling by an Istanbul court, as daily Hurriyet online reports today. Both the Grindr website and the mobile application have become inaccessible since the TIB implemented the decision of the 14th Criminal Court of Istanbul. The application can still be downloaded from the application store, but it is not properly accessible. Hayriye Kara, a lawyer for KAOS GL, an LGBT association based in Ankara, said the court's decision was not published online, ultimately meaning that the reason for the censorship remains unknown. The media coordinator for the association, Omer Akpinar, has slammed the government, calling the ban an "arbitrary limitation of freedom." An online petition has been launched demanding Turkey repeal the order of the court blocking Grindr. Osman Nihat Sen, deputy director of the TIB, rejected claims in a recent interview with daily Haberturk that the authority applies a blanket ban on LGBT websites while refusing to elaborate on the reasons for the censorship.

Immigration: foreign women given more work permits in Turkey

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 19 - Turkey increased the number of work permits it grants to foreign women, compared to men, in 2012, as part of an overall 86% increase in approved work permits compared to the previous year, as Anadolu Agency reports. Some 32,272 foreigners were granted work permits by the Turkish government in 2012, 19,546 of whom were female workers, thus making it the first time that the number of female workers has exceeded that of male workers. There was a 133% increase in work permits issued to foreign women workers

in comparison to the 8,379 women in 2011, while the increase in permits issued to foreign males was at 42%, with 12,726 permits issued in 2012. A total of 125,697 foreigners were issued with work permits between 2003 and 2012, demonstrating a notable increase in foreign workers in Turkey, particularly when taking into account that a total of 885 work permits were issued in 2003. Analysis of the number of work permits issued according to occupation reveals that domestic jobs topped the list with 8,863 foreigners, while jobs in the hospitality sector were in second place with 4,953 work permits. Meanwhile, inspectors of the Social Security Institution (SGK) launched a new campaign last week to track down household workers working illegally without a work permit or insurance. Foreigners without a work permit are being sent back to their home countries, and families who hire domestic without insurance are being heavily fined.

Turkey: almost 1 million landmines to be cleared by 2022

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 19 - The Turkish Ministry of Defense has announced that there are a total of 977,922 landmines currently deployed in Turkey, while stating that they have asked for an extension of the deadline to clear the landmines set by the Ottawa Treaty. The explanation by Defense Minister Ismet Yilmaz, as daily Hurriyet reports, came in response to a written motion by main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) Istanbul deputy Sezgin Tanrikulu. The motion questioned whether it was true that the government will ask for the target date to clear the fields to be extended to 2016, despite an earlier pledge to clear the landmines by 2014, as part of the commitment taken by the government undertook as party to "The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction," known as the Ottawa Treaty. The Defense Ministry stated that they had indeed asked for an extension of the deadline until 2022, instead of 2016, with "Time Extension Demand Document," during a meeting in Geneva from May 27 to 31, which was held to review the Ottawa Treaty liabilities. Tanrikulu's motion also inquired as to the total number of landmines currently deployed, and whether there were any statistics of civilian casualties conducted by the government. The final question in the motion demanded an explanation as to whether social projects existed for the civilian victims of landmines. The ministry's answer only cited the number of landmines at 977,922, leaving Tanrikulu's other two questions unanswered. The Ottawa Treaty aims to eliminate anti-personnel landmines all around the world. The Convention entered into force on March 1, 2009 with 161 states becoming party over the negotiations of the "Ottawa Process."

Turkey: Istanbul's population rises by over 1 mln in 4 years

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 19 - Istanbul's population has jumped by over 1 million in the past four years, to a level surpassing the overall population of 64 provinces in the country, Anadolu Agency reports quoting data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK). Turkey's largest metropolis welcomed around 1.16 million new people between 2008 and 2012, an increase of 9.11%. More than 13.8 million people live in Istanbul as of 2012. In every four-month period between 2008 and 2012, the city added new residents amounting to five times the overall population of the southern province of Kilis, and seven times the overall population of the Black Sea province of Artvin. The southern tourism hub of Antalya increased its population by 12.54%, expanding to over 2 million residents in 2012, from 1.8 million of 2008. Meanwhile, 13 Turkish provinces have seen their populations drop over the last four years. The Central Anatolian province of Yozgat appears to be the biggest loser, witnessing a 6.4% drop in the number of people living in the city.

Transport: Turkish Airlines quadrupled its cargo capacity

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 19 - Turkish Airlines (THY) sub-brand of Turkish Cargo launched its new cargo depot plant in Istanbul's Ataturk airport, as World Bulletin website reports. Turkish Cargo gives cargo transportation service with its 10 cargo planes and THY's 223 airliners to 47 countries across the world. While current available cargo area of the Ataturk Airport was insufficient, THY built 10,500 square meters of new storage plant. There are five chill stores in 700 square meters area of the new plant. Speaking at the opening ceremony, THY's CEO Hamdi Topcu stated that, Ataturk Airport is not only Europe's busiest airport but world's as well. "If we look to the Turkish civil aviation growth trade, you will see that a new and larger airport is necessary

for Istanbul," Topcu added. The CEO also stressed that THY enhanced its cargo transportation capacity from 120,000 tons to 450,000 tons since 2002 adding that their income from cargo services is annually 850 million USD.

Defense: Turkey, S.Arabia ratify industry cooperation deal

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 19 - Despite their differences over the July events in Egypt, Turkey and Saudi Arabia have ratified a defense industry cooperation agreement, DefenseNews website reports. According to the agreement, which took effect September 11, Turkey and Saudi Arabia "aim to increase cooperation in the defense industry by improving the industry capabilities of both countries through more effective collaboration on the development, production and procurement of goods and services in the defense industry and the related technical and logistical support fields." The agreement had been signed in May and was pending parliamentary approval. The agreement will remain in force for five years and it should be extended automatically for successive one-year periods. Last year, the Turkish parliament also approved a deal with Saudi Arabia regarding cooperation in the training of military personnel.

Turks ever less enthusiastic about EU membership process

While support among Europeans plunges

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 19 - Turks are ever less enthusiastic about the prospect of a future in the EU: 44% support the idea, compared with 48% last year and 73% in 2004. Support among EU citizens for the idea is, however, even lower: a slim 20% back a potential entrance of Ankara into the Union, according to a poll published today in Turkish media outlets. According to the public opinion poll conducted by GMF Transatlantic Trends, 34% of Turkish citizens now do not support EU membership, compared with 29% last year and 9% just before the beginning of membership talks in 2004. Only 20% of EU citizens say they would find Turkey's entrance into the bloc as a positive development, while 33% instead say it would be negative. Some 37% do not express an opinion one way or another. Membership talks between Turkey and the EU began in 2005 and since then have been moving at a snail's pace: a single negotiation chapter out of a total of 25 has been closed. The talks have basically been stalled for the past four years but are expected to resume next month with the opening of a new chapter.

Investments: Turkish firm buys island, hotel in Venice

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 19 - Turkey's Permak Group has acquired an area covering 62,000 square meters on San Clemente Island in Venice, as well as a five-star luxury hotel, the San Clemente Palace Resort, daily Hurriyet reports today. Permak Group, which is active in the construction, machinery, tourism, technology, chemistry and retail sectors, bought San Clemente Palace Resort, which has 205 rooms divided into four different themes, the company announced in a press release yesterday. The project, worth around 25 million euros, will restore the hotel in accordance with its originality and build new facilities such as restaurants, sports facilities, a swimming pool and a spa. Around 600 people are expected to be employed in the hotel. "We are happy to have acquired this historical island in Venice by making an important investment. We plan to open in in 2014 after completing its restoration as soon as possible. The hotel, which will be one of the Europe's most luxurious hotels, is planned to be operated by an international hotel chain," Permak Group Deputy Chairman Emir Uyar said. Venice, one of the world's most popular destinations, hosts nearly 24 million tourists a year.

Turkey: Aesop's Fable island for children to open soon

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 18 - Aesop's fables, the world-famous moral tales from ancient Greece, will soon come to life in a theme park that is under construction in the Aegean province of Kutahya, as Anadolu Agency reports. The park is the first of its kind in Turkey and will recreate 13 works by Aesop, who was born in the area, with squash- and mushroom-shaped houses from the Phrygian period, as well as castles, windmills and animal mockups. The owner of the construction company set to carry out the project, Kamil Yurtalan, said works started on May 20 in the city's Akkent neighborhood and would be finished soon. The Aesop Fable Island has been designed to include talking animals and their houses, created by Aesop, who lived around Kutahya in 500

B.C. and still draws great interest from children around the world. The houses from the period, as well as animals like the grasshopper, ant, fox, lion, mouse, and others, will take children back to a time set approximately 2,500 years ago. For the fable island, the organizers settled for building types from the Phrygian era as they constructed their park on a 17,000-square-meter area. The best known fables of Aesop, such as "The Ant and the Grasshopper," "The Fox and the Grapes," "The Fox and the Crow," "The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse" and "The Two Pots" will also be featured in the park.

Finance: global leaders to convene today at Istanbul

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 18 - Today and tomorrow the 4th Istanbul Finance Summit (IFS) will bring together leaders of global finance at Istanbul's Ceylan Intercontinental Hotel. The Summit to be held with the official media sponsorship of Anadolu Agency (AA) will include global finance leaders such as Leonid S. Vindman, known for his career with leading worldwide finance institutions like UniCredit Group, JP Morgan Chase and Bankers Trust, CEO of British MRL Corporation Cornelia Meyer, and board member of the Central Bank of the Czech Republic Professor Kamil Janacek. Under this year's theme "Financing Sustainable Growth," global finance leaders will hold discussions on issues regarding the global finance agenda and will share their countries' experiences including best practices and solutions. Turkish Deputy Prime Ministers Bulent Arinc and Ali Babacan, Economy Minister Zafer Caglayan, Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek and Development Minister Cevdet Yilmaz will deliver key note speeches at the summit while prominent representatives of Turkish and foreign finance markets will make presentations.

Transport: Atlasjet's Kurdish airline to start in October

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 17 - Zagrosjet airline, the first and only Kurdish air carrier which was established by Turkish Atlasjet and Kurdish Zagros Group in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq, will begin flight operations on October 2, as Cihan news agency reported. The airline's maiden flight will be to the Turkish capital of Ankara. Atlasjet is expanding by establishing airlines abroad and will base Zagrosjet flights from Erbil. The initial flights of the airline will be to Amman, Beirut, Stockholm, Ankara and Adana as the focus of the carrier will mostly be destinations in the Middle East, Turkey and Europe. The carrier will offer both business and economy class travel. Zagrosjet was founded by the Zagros Group as Zagros Air in 2005 with the support of the Iraqi government and received final approval for operations from both the Turkish and Iraqi governments in 2013. The airline also has plans to focus on carrying pilgrims to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia.

EU to be 'catalyst for Albanian Renaissance', says PM Rama

Italy, Greece and Turkey strategic for new foreign policy

(ANSAMed) - BRUSSELS, SEPTEMBER 16 - The European Union will be the "catalyst" for the change that the new government wants to bring to Albania. Newly-elected Prime Minister Edi Rama told MPs of the EU's External Relations Council this on his first visit to Brussels after being elected, saying Tirana would be working hard for its EU integration process. The government's main priorities will be connected with the approval of reforms on legality and anti-corruption and organised crime measures, he said, underscoring his government's strongly pro-European leanings and its pledges to employ a more inclusive approach to the opposition that shown by the previous government. "We are faced with a challenge, connected with the very positive developments in the Balkans," Rama added, beginning with the agreement between Serbia and Kosovo, "which marks the end of the era of conflict" in the region. The newly-elected prime minister promised European institutions to "make up for the time lost in the past" in the integration process and tried to quell concerns of a possible resurgence of nationalist trends. "Nationalist rhetoric is considered unacceptable," he said, noting that the new government's strategy is to "have no problems with its neighbours", Rama said. Thus, "we want to involve Turkey as a strategic partner along with Italy and Greece, and to fill some foreign policy gaps. We are certain that with these three strategic partners Albania will succeed," said Albania's new prime minister.

Turkey: AKP hires thousands for new social media campaign

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 16 - Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has launched a massive project to boost the party's social media presence by hiring over 6,000 new employees for its newly formed social media team, Hurriyet reports quoting daily Star. Over 900 districts will have its own AKP social media representatives, with a 1,000 staff to be located in Istanbul, 600 in Ankara, and approximately 400 in Izmir. The team will be responsible for converting AKP sentiments into trending hashtags, Star reported. The move came soon after the AKP was dealt a clear defeat in social media when Istanbul's Gezi Park protesters turned websites like Twitter and Facebook into tools for organizing protests, voicing mostly anti-government sentiments. The frequency and intensity of the Gezi Park protests on social media reached levels so high that it prompted Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to personally intervene, calling Twitter "a menace" and beginning a campaign against the website. Many protesters were detained during the protests over their social media postings, with the online giant Facebook admitting to sharing information with Turkish police forces, despite previously denying the accusations.

Syria: Turkish FM Davutoglu meets Syrian opposition

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 16 - Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu on Sunday met with representatives of the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) in the Turkish capital Ankara ahead of his trip to Paris for a four-way meeting between three permanent Security Council members and Turkey on Syria's chemical weapons, diplomatic sources said. As Anadolu Agency reports, Davutoglu received SNC head Ahmad al-Jarba, SNC interim government leader Ahmad Tuma and Free Syrian Army chief Salim Idris to discuss the US-Russia deal agreed to on Saturday after three-day talks in Geneva, as well as the opposition group's views on the future of Syria. The Turkish Foreign Minister congratulated Ahmad Tuma on his recent election into the leadership of the interim government, while welcoming the SNC's efforts to increase its representative power within the Syrian opposition. Davutoglu noted it would be a positive step for Syrian Kurds to participate in the coalition. Davutoglu will depart for Paris on Monday for a meeting dubbed "P3+1" between the US, UK, France, and Turkey.

Islam: Turkey; 1,200-year-old Quran discovered in Bodrum

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 16 - A 1,200 year-old handwritten Quran has been found in the basement of a mosque in the Aegean resort town of Bodrum as Cihan news agency reported. The imam Yuksel Kilicaslan found the holy Quran and some tafsir (the interpretation of the Quran) books which was being kept in a prayer rug and immediately reported Bodrum's Mufti Emin Arik. After a series of examinations by historians, it has been confirmed that the Quran dated back more than a thousand year. The manuscripts were handed in the officials from The Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning and Underwater Archaeology Museum.

Archaeology: Turkey's largest museum complex to open soon

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 13 - A big project in the field of culture and tourism is being realized in the southeastern Turkish province of Sanliurfa, the main city of which is regarded as the world's oldest city due to the "temple center" and the remains in Gobeklitepe. When finished, the Haleplibahce Museum Complex, which will include an archaeology park and mosaic museums over an area of nearly 200,000 square meters, will be the largest such complex in Turkey as Anadolu Agency reports. The Warrior Amazon Women mosaics, which were unearthed a few years ago during the foundation excavation of a themed park project and are estimated to date back to the 5th and 6th century A.D., caused a stir in the archaeology community. The mosaics were located in the grounds of an official's palace in the Roman period and experts classified these mosaics as among the world's most valuable. The Haleplibahce project was changed after the discovery over fears that the findings could be damaged during the transportation. The new project, the Haleplibahce Museum Complex, was initiated and accelerated with an order from the Ministry of Labor and Social Security. Sanliurfa Museum Director Muslum Ercan said the Haleplibahce Museum Complex was seen as one of the most prestigious projects realized by the Culture and Tourism Ministry. He said that works were almost completed, adding that 80% of the outer faade of the complex had been finished and installments in the inner space would be finished soon. "We are now focusing

on merchandizing works," he said. Ercan said they would start carrying artworks to the museum in three months. "Visitors who want to come to this museum need to spare a lot of time. The complex is the largest one in Turkey in terms of its size. Turkey does not have any other museum covering an area of 200,000 square-meters. A 30,000 square meter area of this huge space is the closed area of the archaeology museum," he said.

Trade: Turkey's southeast exports to Syria jump

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 13 - Turkey's southeastern provinces' export volume to Syria reached USD 217 million in the first eight months of this year in a 540% increase from the same period a year earlier, as Anadolu Agency reports today. While exports to Syria reached their highest value of USD 220 million in 2010, they contracted to USD 60 million last year due to civil unrest and violence in the country. However, the exports to Syria increased to USD 217.7 million between the January to August period, according to recent figures revealed by the Southeast Anatolia Exporter Unions (GAIB). The exports of cereal-pulse made up USD 125.3 million of the total export value to Syria, while textile exports were worth USD 41.2 million. Abdulkadir Cikmaz, chairman of the GAIB, said if military intervention in Syria did not take place, export value was expected to surpass USD 224 million by the end of this month.

Turkey: first ever openly gay mayor candidate announces bid

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 13 - A Turkish man who studied in the United States is aiming to become the first open member of Turkey's LGBT community to hold public office when he runs to become mayor of a small town on Turkey's Black Sea coast, as daily Hurriyet reports. Can Cavusoglu has said he will run in Giresun's district of Bulancak in the March 2014 local elections in a bid to become the first-ever openly homosexual mayor in the country, while declaring himself a "gay, activist, writer, thinker, painter, humanist and women rights activist." The 43-year-old, who was born in Istanbul, has looked to win votes by saying only he can bring American investment to the town thanks to his connections with the U.S., according to a written campaign bid released yesterday. "The international values I possess, the representation skills and governmental accounting can be found only in a few people," said Cavusoglu, an independent who is publicizing his campaign on a discussion website and on his Twitter account. Cavusoglu also said his financial situation was "quite good" - a factor that will allow him to end corruption and embezzlement in Bulancak if elected as mayor.

Turkey: fresh clashes overnight after protester's death

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 13 - Clashes between thousands of demonstrators and police were registered once again last night in Istanbul, Ankara and Antioch, where a 22-year-old demonstrator died on Monday night. Protesters took to the streets for the third consecutive night to denounce the death of Ahmed Atakan, a young man killed by a tear gas grenade which, according to several eye witnesses, hit him on the head. Police said he fell from a roof during a demonstration. Anti-riot police intervened with tear gas and water cannons to disperse demonstrators on the Asian side of the Bosphorus in Kadikoy and Sarigazi and in the Alawite Gazi district on the European side. Incidents were also reported in downtown Ankara, in Tuzlucayir and in Antioch near the Syrian border - one of the cities at the centre of protests since last June - where the young demonstrator died on Monday night. He is the sixth demonstrator to die since the start of anti-government protests which kicked off at the end of May. About 8,000 people have been injured in the police crackdown on protests in June and July. Premier Recep Tayyip Erdogan has accused the main opposition party, the Chp of Kemal Kilicdaroglu, of encouraging new protests ahead of local elections in the spring. Reporters without Borders accused police of violence against journalists, saying that 12 professionals were attacked or wounded by Turkish anti-riot officers.

Syria: opposition meet in Istanbul to discuss US action

Meeting held under the leadership of SNC head Ahmad al-Jabr

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 12 - Syrian National Coalition's (SNC) political committee started its fourth term meeting in Istanbul on Wednesday. Committee member Fayiz Sara told Anadolu Agency that a possible US-

led punitive strike against the Syrian government would constitute the main agenda item at the meeting, held under the leadership of SNC head Ahmad al-Jabra. "Jabra has stressed that all weapons must be taken out of the hands of the regime that has been using them to kill Syrians for the past two years," Sara said. He said the meeting would also look into Russia's recent proposal to have the Syrian government place its chemical weapons arsenal under international control, the outcomes of international visits to the Middle East country, as well as other recent developments. Sara said SNC would not sit at the negotiating table with Bashar al-Assad's government until the perpetrators of long-going massacres against the Syrian people are held to account. "There can be no dialogue option to speak of as long as destruction and killings continue," he said. Sara added the meeting would also discuss incorporating the Syrian Kurdish National Council into SNC.

Turkey's trade volume to reach usd 1 trillion by 2023

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 11 - Turkish Exporters Association (TIM) has set a target for Turkey's foreign trade volume to reach USD 1.1 trillion by 2023, with progress in branding and competitiveness, as Anadolu Agency reports. TIM Chairman Mehmet Buyukeksi said yesterday during a publicity meeting of the Asia Pacific Retailers Convention and Exhibition (APRCE) that Turkey's foreign trade volume had increased by four-fold in the last decade. The APRCE is set to be held in Istanbul between September 23 and September 26. "Turkey's foreign trade volume rose from USD 117 billion to USD 400 billion in the last 10 years. Our national income rose from USD 231 billion to USD 786 billion, with a more than three-fold increase. National income per capita rose from Usd 3,500 to USD 10,504," he said. Buyukeksi said Turkey's medium-income group had improved along with a rise in national income per capita, which raised the importance of an organized national retail sector. The target was to increase national income per capita to USD 25,000 by 2023, he added. "Turkey's successful brands are emerging into foreign markets more and more. Retail networks are becoming more strategic channels. We place importance on branding in order to benefit from this channel," he said, noting that the Economy Ministry's Turquality program, which started in 2006 and offers Turkish brands both monetary funding and advertisement assistance, currently supported 103 brands of 91 firms. Buyukeksi also said Istanbul would be hosting 2,000 retail sector senior representatives from 33 countries across three continents at APRCE. Speaking at the same meeting, Economy Minister Zafer Caglayan said the current account deficit would stay below USD 60 billion this year. "I foresee that the current account deficit will be lower in the second half-yearly period than the first. My forecast is it will stay below USD 60 billion," he said. The current account deficit totaled USD 36 billion in the first half of 2013, rising USD 5.9 billion over the same period last year. The year-end expectation for current account gap in the Medium-Term Program is USD60.7 billion. Caglayan also said as the Medium-Term Program saw USD 172.3 billion in export value in 2014, they would need a downward revision between USD 165 billion and \$170 billion for the coming year.

Turkey: Ataturk's yacht to be turned into museum

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 11 - The Turkish Culture and Tourism Ministry has applied to buy the yacht that was assigned to the founder of modern Turkey Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1938 and turn it into a museum and venue to host foreign officials, ad daily Hurriyet reports today. Omer Celik, the culture and tourism minister, paid a visit to the yacht, which is anchored in Istanbul, on September 9 together with two officials from the ministry and received information about the yacht from its owner, Kahraman Sadikoglu. The Savarona, which is 136 meters long, was designed by American William Francis Gibss and built in 1931 for 4 million dollars. It was not until 1938 that the Turkish Republic bought the yacht and appointed it to the services of Ataturk, though he could only use it for six months, due to his severe illness that later caused his death. Cabinet meetings were held and foreign guests were hosted in the ship during Ataturk's time. The yacht will be converted into a museum and also a place to host foreign officials on their visits to Turkey, if the purchase is to be realized. Celik and Sadikoglu, who had rented the Savarona for 49 years in 1989, talked about the characteristics of the yacht and the details of the sale. Sadikoglu rented the yacht just before it was going to be scrapped in 1989 after having served as a training ship for the Turkish Naval Forces following World War II.

Turkey risks war with Assad, peace with Kurds

Erdogan deploys troops on the border, 72% Turks against attack

(by Francesco Cerri) (ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 10 - Turkish Premier Recep Tayyip Erdogan has just been through the negative outcome of Istanbul's competition to host the 2020 Olympics. Now two fronts are opening up and they are both risky. Ankara is deploying troops and tanks on the border with Syria and is getting ready for a possible war against the Assad regime just as the peace process in Kurdistan is at risk. The withdrawal of PKK militants towards northern Iraq has paused. Erdogan has sided, since the beginning of the crisis, with Syria's Sunni rebels and against his ex ally, President Bashar al-Assad. He is one of the main supporters of US President Barack Obama's plan for military intervention against Damascus. The Turkish Islamic premier has said he is ready to participate in 'any coalition' against Assad and has been long campaigning for international intervention, not only a 'punitive' one of limited duration, but a major strike 'like in Kosovo', to topple Assad. For a week now Ankara has concentrated its efforts along the Syrian border moving men, tanks and surface-to-air Stinger missiles. The army is building a new base on Mount Kal, which dominates the Syrian Mediterranean coast of Lattakia and the 'Alawite' country, until the Russian base of Tartus. This part of the Mediterranean is extremely crowded with Russian, US, British, French and Iranian warships. But the activism of the Islamic government on the Syrian front - the opposition has accused Erdogan of going as far as helping the al Qaeda-linked al Nusra Front - is not backed by the public opinion. According to a recent survey, 72% of Turkish nationals oppose military intervention against Damascus. And growing doubts concerning allegations that the regime used chemical weapons against civilians on August 21 risk to further strengthen the anti-war front. Statements by Belgian professor Pier Piccinin, who was held hostage for five months by Syrian rebels along with Italian veteran war correspondent Domenico Quirico, is boosting suggestions that rebels might have 'provoked' with an attack aimed at leading the international community to intervene against Damascus. Erdogan, whose image has already been marred abroad by the brutal crackdown on anti-government protests in June - which contributed to the doomed candidature of Istanbul to host the 2020 Olympics - risks paying a very high political price with a conflict in Syria whose outcome is uncertain. The 'sultan' is gearing up for three high-risk local, presidential and political elections in the next 18 months. And the situation has become even more complex in the past few hours with the PKK's decision to stop withdrawing its 3,000 militants from the Turkish territory towards northern Iraq as part of peace talks conducted with the Erdogan government by historic Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan. Kurdish rebels accuse the Islamic premier of not respecting agreements. In exchange for the truce agreed in March and the withdrawal of rebels, Ankara should have implemented political and cultural reforms to guarantee more democracy and autonomy in Turkish Kurdistan and start freeing thousands of Turkish politicians, journalists, unionists and activists who are still in jail. These measures have yet to be implemented. The PKK has now issued a warning. The truce however is still in place. At least for now.

Football: Istanbul candidate for 2020 European cup finals

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 10 - Turkish Football Federation (TFF) officially applied Monday to the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) for Istanbul's candidacy for being the venue for both semi final and final matches in 2020 European Football Championship. Head of the federation Yildirim Demiroren has signed the application form for the candidacy, TFF said in a statement and stated Turkey's file would be delivered to UEFA in April, 2014. The decision, as Anadolu Agency reports, would be made in September, 2014. UEFA had decided to let 13 countries host the tournament for the first time regarding 2020 European championship.

Turkey: clashes demonstrators-police, one dead

First victim since June protests, 'hot fall' feared

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 10 - A man died on Monday night during a demonstration in Antioch marred by violent clashes with police. The demonstration, Hurriyet online reports, was organized Monday to express support for students at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara (Odtu) who are opposed to the construction of a new highway which would lead to the destruction of a wood. The students have repeatedly clashed with police over the past few days. The victim, Ahmet Atakan, is the first demonstrator to die since a major police crackdown on anti-government protests last June which caused five victims and hundreds of injuries, many of them serious. The recent demonstrations somehow connected to the Gezi Park movement which saw

over 2 million people take to the streets in June against Islamic Premier Recep Tayyip Erdogan, are reputed by a number of observers to anticipate a 'hot fall' in Turkey. Police brutality against young demonstrators in June was harshly criticized worldwide. Many demonstrators, and several journalists, were severely injured by tear gas fired directly at the crowd by anti-riot police. According to Turkish press reports, the crackdown on peaceful demonstrations in June was one of the causes that led to the defeat of Istanbul's candidature to host the 2020 Olympics won by Tokyo.

Transport: air traffic in Turkey continues to surge

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 9 - Air traffic in Turkey grew 10.4% while the number of air passengers increased 15.2% in August compared to the same month the previous year, as Anadolu Agency reports quoting flight figures for August from the General Directorate of State Airports Authority of Turkey. While the number of passengers on domestic flights rose 17% to 66,724 in August, the number of passengers boarding international flights jumped 8.9% to 63,109. The number of air passengers in Turkey reached close to 100 million in the first eight months of the year, representing a 13.6% compared to the same period in 2012. The volume of air freight transportation also increased 18.9% on domestic flights in August to 82,071 tons; on international flights, this figure surged 12.4% to 200,816 tons. In the first eight months of the year, a total of 1.6 million tons of freight were carried by airplanes, a 14% increase compared to the same period during the previous year.

Turkey: Greek minority school set to reopen with two pupils

Hagia Todori elementary has been closed for 49 years

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 9 - An elementary school for the Greek minority on the island of Gokceada will reopen on September 16 after 49 years of being closed, but with only two students, as daily Hurriyet reports. The Hagia Todori Elementary School is reopening after Turkey's Education Ministry accepted on March 28 the demand to open a school for Greek minority on Gokceada, an island off the northwestern province of Canakkale. The school, which was opened in the island's Zeytinli village in 1951 as the Hagia Todori Elementary School, was closed in 1964. After the Education Ministry's decision, the school has been prepared to be reopened for the new semester, but with only a tiny proportion of its 72-student capacity. Three teachers and one janitor will accompany the two students as the sole crew of the school. The former head of the Gokceadalilar Foundation, a group formed to address the problems of the island, said the school should live on, however many students there are. Gokceada ('Imbros' in Greek) is Turkey's largest island and is located to the north of the entrance to the Dardanelles Strait.

Turkey: PKK halts withdrawal but vows to continue cease-fire

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 9 - The outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has halted its pullout from Turkey, as daily Hurriyet online reported. The Kurdish Communities Union (KCK), the urban wing of PKK, said in a statement that the withdrawal had been halted because the Turkish government had not taken the necessary steps to solve the Kurdish issue and implement a process of democratization. KCK also vowed to respect the ceasefire with Turkish forces. Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan, who has staked much political capital in the peace process, was quoted last month as saying the PKK had not kept its promise, with only 20% of militants leaving Turkey, mostly women and children. A senior PKK leader, Cemil Bayik, previously told BBC that the group would "continue to make efforts until September 1." To keep the process on track, the government had been expected to begin debating a package of reforms last month aimed at bolstering Kurdish rights and boosting democracy. Erdogan, under pressure from nationalists for offering concessions to militants, has said the measures will not "disturb the Turkish public". He has repeatedly ruled out any general amnesty for PKK militants.

Turkey: restrictions on alcohol sales go into effect today

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 9 - The controversial law placing limits on the sale and advertising of alcoholic beverages in Turkey takes effect as of today (September 9), despite ongoing criticism, as daily Hurriyet

reports. Retailers will no longer be allowed to sell alcoholic beverages between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m., and the sale of alcohol near schools and places of worship will also be forbidden, according to the bill. The new law will go into effect at midnight before switching over to the times listed above thereafter. Critics say there will inevitably be violations of the new law. The new law bans all retailers from selling alcoholic beverages at night, but not restaurants or other facilities. There are 200,000 small retailers that will be affected, according to official data.

Trade: Turkey's mining sector exports reach 3.3 billion USD

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 9 - Turkish mining sector's exports reached 3.3 billion USD in eight months of 2013, as World Bulletin website reported. Istanbul Minerals and Metals Exporters' Association (IMIB) stated that Turkish mining industry continues to provide added value into Turkish economy with success in export. The sector has succeeded a 3.3 billion USD export between January-August in 2013 and increased its export at 26.5% when compared with the same period of 2012. Mining export was made mostly to China, U.S., Iraq, Belgium and Italy respectively during the mentioned period of 2013. Turkish mining industry's export was 401 million USD in August increasing by 17.1% when compared with the same month of 2012.

Economy: Turkey may cut 2014 growth target to 4%, officials

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 9 - Turkey is likely to revise down its growth target for 2014 to 4% from 5%, due to an expected slowdown in the U.S. Federal Reserve's (Fed) stimulus program, tensions in the Middle East, and the risk of higher oil prices, daily Hurriyet reports quoting economy officials as saying on Friday. The government's expectations of growth have been 4% this year and 5% next, according to the medium-term economic program, but ministers have already talked down the outlook for 2013, saying the economy is instead likely to expand at 3% to 4%. Economy Minister Zafer Caglayan noted that revisions would be necessary to economic targets last week. "Now we have to make a revision," he was quoted as saying by Anadolu Agency. The government now expects growth of 3% to 4% in 2013, Caglayan said, adding that he believed this would constitute a good performance. Last year, the economy grew by 2.2%, far lower than the growth rates of recent years.

Syria: Turkish army builds new base opposite Latakia city

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 9 - The Turkish armed forces have begun to establish a new base on the top of Kel Mountain, adjacent to the Syrian coastal city of Latakia, as daily Hurriyet reported. Military equipment, which was carried by trucks for two days from the Yayladagi district of the southern Hatay province, is being assembled on the top of the mountain. The base is close to where a Turkish plane was shot down by regime forces in 2012. The army has beefed up its military presence along its southern border with Syria in recent days, in anticipation of strikes on the regime in Damascus. Coastguard boats have been dispatched to the coast of Samandag, a town from where bombs were previously transferred to Reyhanli, where 53 people were killed in a bombing in May. Trucks, carrying armored vehicles and tanks, have also been dispatched to the southeastern city of Sanliurfa's Mursitpinar border post.

Islam: Turkey; halal food center stage in Istanbul

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 6 - Turkey's rising halal food sector was at the table during yesterday's Halal and Healthy Products Fair, the only such example in Turkey, as Anadolu Agency reports. The sector, based on products produced and processed with methods in compliance with Islam, has been facing a boom in past few years, and has even been creating its own sub-industries. The fair, which was attended by Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc, convened prominent producer players in the sector as well as several purchasing groups from the U.S., Europe, the Far East and the Middle East. During his speech at the opening ceremony, Arinc said the halal sector would continue producing and exporting as long as it satisfied people's needs. "Production might be shaped according to that, a new capacity may emerge. This would also mean employment," he said. Halal food has been an increasingly popular choice among conservatives in the country, who were struggling to maintain an

Islamic lifestyle. In addition to halal foods, Turkey's standardization institution also began last February to provide halal service certificates to food production and serving facilities that comply with Islamic rules, which opened the way for the formation of a wider tourism and entertainment market.

Turkey: 'Erdogan not a man of his word', PKK halts retreat

Turkish government did not respect September 1 deadline

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 5 - Accusing Turkish Premier Recep Tayyip Erdogan of not honoring his agreements, Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Cemil Bayik announced Thursday that Kurdish rebels have suspended their retreat from Turkey to northern Iraq, local media reported. Kurdish rebels began retreating in April as part of a negotiated deal with Turkey, which had agreed to enact far-reaching political, cultural and constitutional reforms in their favor by September 1. "The Turkish government has still not acted. This proves they are not looking for a solution. We are interrupting the retreat," Bayik said, adding he has been "tricked". Such reforms were to be a first step in ending the conflict, which has killed 30,000 people in 30 years, most of them Kurdish. Jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, held in the Imrali island prison, has been negotiating for a political solution to the conflict with the Turkish government since the end of 2012.

Trade: transatlantic deal to cost Turkey USD 20 bln, study

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 5 - A transatlantic free deal trade currently being negotiated between the European Union and the United States could cause the Turkish economy to lose USD 20 billion if Turkey is left out of a final agreement, daily Hurriyet reported quoting an analysis prepared by the U.S. Brookings Institute and the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TUSIAD). The EU and the U.S. kicked off the talks to initiate a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) in July. Since the potential partnership would force Turkey to open up its market to export goods from the U.S without being granted reciprocal preferential access for Turkish goods, the Turkish government and business leaders have been advocating that Ankara be included as well. Turkey, which will be one of the main losers in the U.S.-EU trade alliance, should engage in a parallel deal with the U.S., Kemal Kirisci, the author of the study, said in research published by the Brookings Institute and the TUSIAD. The research demonstrates that Turkey's potential income loss would be 2.5%, which would amount roughly to a USD 20 billion loss based on Turkey's GDP last year. "One immediate consequence that would be expected is that the current USD 8.5 billion deficit that Turkey had in its trade with the U.S. in 2012 would most probably grow," the study said.

Religion: Turkey; Hagia Sophia mosque conversion under fire

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 5 - The Order of St. Andrew the Apostle Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (which is part of the wider Orthodox Church), released a statement criticizing the possible reconversion of the Hagia Sophia Museum in Istanbul into a mosque. The statement, as daily Hurriyet reports today, said that there was a possibility of the "church-turned-mosque-turned-museum" in Istanbul being reconverted into a mosque, as two previous cases of Hagia Sophia churches that were recently in Iznik and Trabzon. "There are now indications that certain factions are endeavoring to cultivate in popular opinion the notion that Hagia Sophia of Istanbul, the symbol of Christian faith, should be turned into a mosque," said the statement released by the Order of St. Andrew the Apostle that was written by Nikolaos Manginas. The statement recalled that a Turkish citizen had submitted an application a few months ago to the National Assembly for the conversion of the Hagia Sophia into a mosque. The Ecumenical Patriarchate also criticized an article published in the official magazine of Turkish Airlines, Skylife, in August 2013, which was titled, "Hagia Sophia: The Sultans' Mosque," and which mentioned the return of the museum into its former "spiritual aura," referring to its days of serving as a mosque. The statement further said that the article presented the history from a one-sided point of view and that it was not acceptable.

Syria: Turkey sends military reinforcements to the border

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 5 - The Turkish military dispatched additional troops and weapons to the Syrian border on Wednesday as international powers are set to gather at the G-20 summit over the weekend to discuss a possible Syria intervention. Reinforcement units were sent from a military command in the southern province of Gaziantep to Kilis province, bordering Syria as Cihan news agency reported. The military convoy, which was escorted by the police, arrived in Kilis on Wednesday afternoon. The decision to send additional troops to the border is believed to be related to a consignment of live ammunition that exploded as it was being smuggled into Turkey on Tuesday, killing six people along the border with Syria. The Prime Ministry's Disaster and Emergency Management Directorate (AFAD) has built a field hospital and decontamination unit near the Oncupinar border gate on Syrian border in the southern province of Kilis to handle with possible chemical threats from Syria, which is known to have a large arsenal of chemical weapons. A group of Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) specialists, who work within AFAD, have been deployed in the region with necessary technical equipment.

Turkey's giant projects to fuel Islamic finance boom

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 4 - Turkey's large infrastructure investments may boost the country's Islamic finance sector which has already been witnessing a boom, daily Hurriyet reports quoting the country's top capital markets officials as saying. "Islamic finance tools may be benefited from in (financing of) in Turkey's mega projects like bridges, airports, and Kanal Istanbul. These projects are compatible with the Islamic financing structure," Ibrahim Turhan, chairman of Turkey's stock exchange Borsa Istanbul said yesterday, speaking at the Islamic Finance News Roadshow. Vahdettin Ertas, Capital Markets Board (SPK) chairman, also said that they "believed" the private sector's sukuk, an Islamic compliant bond, export needs would increase due to the large infrastructure investments on the agenda. Currently, the Treasury's sukuk exports have outpaced USD 5 billion, while the private sector has exported more than USD 1.5 billion. During the ceremony, Bank Asya said it was planning to export at least USD 60 million of additional sukuk before the year ended, while Albaraka Turk said it was mulling exporting over USD 200 million worth of sukuk within the last quarter or at the beginning of next year. In the past 10 years, the non-interest finance sector grew around 15% and the number of countries in which financial bodies operating in compliance with Islamic finance rules could be found has surpassed 70, Ertas stressed. "It's expected to exceed USD 1.9 trillion by the end of this year," he said. Islamic finance has been sublimated as a safe haven during the financial crisis that sparked skepticism towards interest-oriented finance.

Trade: Turkey's defense exports down 19.9% this year

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 3 - Turkey's defense and aviation industry exports up to August this year totalled 91 million US dollars representing a decline of 19.9% compared to the same period last year, World Bulletin website reports quoting data from the Turkish Exporters' Assembly (TIM). Around a third of Turkey's military hardware was bought by the US, representing a total of 35 million US dollars. After the United States, Turkey's second supplier of defense and aviation equipment was United Arab Emirates, with a contract worth 14 million dollars. Italy was ranked third with 8 million US dollars.

Media: Turkey's Dogan offers USD 742m to buy 53% in Digiturk

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 3 - Turkey's Dogan Holding, the group that controls a host of the country's media assets, has made a USD 742 million non-binding offer to Cukurova Holding for a 53% stake in Digiturk, the leading Turkish pay-television operator, as jockeying for the asset intensifies, Turkish media report. Digiturk is expected to be tendered by the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF), a state agency which in May seized control of Digiturk and dozens of other companies belonging to Cukurova. Dogan Holding already controls Turkey's other major digital pay-TV operator D-Smart, while Turkey's biggest telecoms operator Turk Telekom is also interested in the Digiturk stake, analysts said. Turkey's pay-TV market had 4.1 million subscribers in the second quarter, producing revenues of USD 26.8 million, up 52% on the previous quarter, according to the latest available data from telecoms regulator BTK.

Trade: Turkish olive oil exports boom amid Spain drought

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 3 - Turkey raised its olive and olive oil exports by 172% in the first eight months of the year thanks to drought in Spain, Anadolu Agency reports quoting an agriculture sector representative. But he also warned that Turkey needed to create brands if it wanted to maintain this success. "Our olive oil sector, which has entered new markets and raised its exports by two-digit percentages to several countries, because of the drought in Spain should seek ways to remain permanent in these markets," Turkish Agricultural Chambers Union (TZOB) President Semsi Bayraktar said. Turkey, the fourth largest olive oil producer, jumped its exports to USD 333 million from USD 122.2 million with the 172% rise between January and August, according to data announced by the Turkish Exporters' Association (TIM). The olive oil season began on November 1, 2012, and Bayraktar said the nine-month results supported the prediction that the exports would surpass USD 400 million by October 31, 2013, when the season ends. Spain's olive oil production in was adversely affected by the country's struggle with poor crop yields, which dropped to around one-third, paving the way for Turkish exporters to multiply their sales to countries such as Italy, Austria, the U.S. and New Zealand. However, Bayraktar said only 30% of Turkish olive oils were branded which hampered the popularity and credibility of the Turkish goods in these new markets. "We still sell 70% of our products without brands. We have to constantly provide goods in newly entered markets. We could face the same thing that Spain is experiencing today. But countries like Spain and Italy can buy our unbranded olive oil, case it and sell like it's their own product," he said.

Media: Turkey; Anadolu Agency starts broadcasting in Kurdish

(ANSAMed) - ANKARA, SEPTEMBER 2 - Turkey's Anadolu Agency (AA), aiming to become one of the world's top five news agencies by 2020, has begun broadcasting in Kurdish on September 1st within the scope of its centennial vision. AA, opening an office in Irbil in regional administration in north of Iraq, has started Kurdish wire service in two dialects, Kurmanji and Sorani, in September. Kurdish is the sixth language used by the agency, after Turkish, English, Arabic, Bosnian and Russian. Kurdish News Desk Service will broadcast the developments in politics, economy, sports, tourism, culture and life in Turkey and the world in Kurmanji and Sorani dialects with photo and video for the region. Kurdish News Desk covers a team of 40 people based in Ankara and Irbil. The Kurdish news stream went on test broadcast after the training of Kurdish news desk personnel was completed, with the full-fledged wire-service planned to be put in operation. Within the scope of the project, AA opened a representation in Irbil while the central offices in Suleymaniyah and Kirkuk are on the way.

Turkey: 1,800-year-old Orthodox church to open for weddings

(ANSAMed) - ISTANBUL, AUGUST 30 - Project works are about to come to an end in a 1,800-year-old Orthodox church, located on Kameriye Island in the Aegean town of Marmaris and considered as the second home of the Virgin Mary in Turkey, which is set to open to tourism, Anadolu Agency reports. The Marmaris Trade Center (MTO) initiated a project in 2010 to restore the church and open it for faith and marriage tourism. The project titled "Five Pieces of Gold," was approved by the Provincial Special Administration last February. The restitution and restoration projects of the church were also approved by the Mugla Cultural and Heritage Preservation Board. MTO Chairman Mehmet Baysal said that the restoration works of the project were set to start soon. He said that a team including experts of the Provincial Culture and Tourism Directorate and Mugla Council of Monuments made observations about the history, architectural structure of Kameriye Island and gathered information about similar churches to create a database for the restoration project. The Kameriye Church, which is reached by a 20-minute boat trip from Bozburun, is being visited by lots of tourists in the summer months, particularly Orthodox tourists. Some tourists, who join daily boat tours, take a break on the island and light candles in a chapel named "Ruined Church." Also, some tourists make a wish by tying pieces of cloth to the tree in front of the church.