



türkiye ekonomi politikaları araştırma vakfı

Trilateral Balkan Summit in Istanbul

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The Presidents of Turkey, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, accompanied by their respective foreign ministers, convened in Istanbul on April 24, 2010 for the Balkan Summit. The Istanbul Declaration adopted at the summit says that efforts will be made for lasting peace and stability to be secured in the region, and Bosnia and Herzegovina's territorial integrity will be respected. The tri-partite Balkan Summit in Istanbul was qualified by the Turkish media as historic.

The Balkan Summit held in Istanbul is the tangible outcome of Turkey's active initiatives with regard to the western Balkans. Contrary to the relative indifference by the western countries to the political developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey has for the months kept its attention in this Balkan country at a constantly high level and has even been the only country expending serious efforts for Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a result, Ankara has succeeded in setting up a bridge between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, receiving international credit for its political achievement. Turkey is also the major actor of the NATO Membership Action Plan having been granted to Bosnia and Herzegovina on April 22, 2010. Although not by all EU countries, these steps by Turkey regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina have also started to be perceived by Brussels as efforts meriting appreciation.

It was almost apparent that the tradition launched by Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu for a monthly meeting with his Bosnian and Serbian colleagues would eventually culminate in a summit bringing the Presidents of the three countries together. However the date of the tri-partite Balkan summit in Istanbul was still a surprise. Two major reasons may have aroused the necessity for this summit to be held as soon as possible. The first was the arrest in London of Bosnia and Herzegovina's former Vice President Eyup Ganic at the behest of Belgrade. This has caused deep reaction in Sarajevo, prompting the Bosnian member of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidential Council Haris Silajdzic to qualify Serbia, in a speech he delivered on April 13, 2010, as a country damaging relations in the region. Silajdzic also said that Serbia who can no longer embark upon ethnic cleansing is now having Bosnian citizens arrested as in the case of Ganic. The meeting in Istanbul only ten days after Silajdzic had made this statement, in which he shook hands with his Serbian colleague and gave out messages of friendship, makes one think that the summit may have been called rather hastily.

The tri-partite summit in Istanbul was probably needed for the success of the EU-Western Balkans summit due to convene in Sarajevo on June 2, 2010 with the initiatives of EU term president Spain. Given the strong intention to invite Kosovo to the summit, it is uncertain as yet if Serbian President Boris Tadic is going to attend the gathering in Sarajevo. Serbs are seriously wary of meetings of this kind for fear of coming across as giving indirect recognition to Kosovo. On the other hand, the arrest in London of Ganic which heightened tensions again between Belgrade and Sarajevo seems to have condemned in advance the scheduled EU-Western Balkans summit. Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu met on April 20, 2010 in Belgrade his Serbian and Spanish counterparts to discuss all these matters. The tri-partite summit smoothed out the problem on the Belgrade-Sarajevo axis. Now, Serbia is expecting Turkey to persuade Albanians for Kosovo to attend the EU-Western Balkans summit in Sarajevo under a name that Belgrade can give approval to.

No matter what angle one looks at it from, the tri-partite Balkan summit in Istanbul was a success. Not only favorable messages were given at the summit but also the steps to be taken

from now on were determined. Although the Bosnian Serbs bashed the Istanbul summit, it has the potential of being hailed as a turning point in Bosnia and Herzegovina-Serbia relations.

However, we should not act hurriedly in qualifying this summit as a historic one because the Serbian government and President Tadic are engaged in some sort of double-dealing by stating on the one hand that they respect Bosnia and Herzegovina's territorial integrity and supporting staunchly, on the other, the leader of Bosnian Serbs, Milorad Dodik who is aspiring to destroy Bosnia and Herzegovina. One last note, regional summits such as Trilateral Balkan Summit will fall short of triggering progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina unless the Bosnian leaders make efforts to reach agreement among them.