

Turkish perspectives towards a new environment in the European Union and the Middle East

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∴ Londra, 3 Temmuz 2003

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am particularly pleased to be addressing this distinguished international audience at Chatham House. The world is going through challenging and exciting times. The work of the Royal Institute helps us make a sense out of it all. I should like to thank Prof Victor Bulmer-Thomas for the opportunity to share my perspective toward the evolving environment in the EU and the Middle East.

In many respects, 2004 promises to be a momentous year for Turkey. Four international events of the coming year involving Turkey may seem rather technical. However, they are instead part and parcel of currents that have broad implications:

- The first is the Foreign Ministers meeting of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference in Istanbul. This will take place at a time when the winds of change are blowing in full force. At a time of new perspectives in Iraq and in Palestine.
- Secondly, the NATO Summit in May 2004 in Istanbul. It will convene just when a defining step is needed in empowering the Alliance. NATO will need the instruments to remain a bulwark of peace, security and transatlantic cooperation.

- Thirdly, Turkey will be able to contribute to the Intergovernmental Conference which will decide on the future of the enlarged Europe.
- Then, the determined and sustained Turkish reforms will culminate in the European Council's decision in December 2004 to open accession negotiations with Turkey.

Starting with the latter:

- Turkey's EU membership will mean that Europe has achieved such maturity that it can incorporate a major Muslim country into its fold.
- And that EU stands for common values and institutions rather than common religion.
- For Turkey, EU membership will mean anchoring more than a century old western vocation into highest standards of democratisation, good governance and integration.
- For the world, this would evidence that civilizations line up in terms of their democratic vocation, and not on the basis of religion.

On her part, Turkey is committed to taking this step. Membership in the EU can do for Turkey what it did for Greece, Spain and Portugal. In this regard:

- My Government has been enhancing individual rights and liberties at a time when these were restricted elsewhere due to security concerns.
- We are determined to provide for our citizens the highest standards of democracy, human rights and economic prosperity.
- By the end of 2003 we will have complied with the Copenhagen political criteria in terms of legislation.
- We are working on yet another reform package towards full compliance with the Copenhagen political criteria.
- There is also a strong emphasis on the implementation of these reforms.

Only during the last month the Turkish Parliament approved the following legislation:

- The Sixth Reform Package to conform the Copenhagen Political criteria.
- Two major UN Conventions on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.
- Two European Conventions against corruption.
- The Sixth Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms concerning the Abolition of the Death Penalty. (As you know, there has not been an execution since 20 years in Turkey and we formally abolished capital punishment last year.)

Meanwhile, the economic reform programme is in full speed. We began to reap its fruits.

Taken as a whole, these should be enough to start accession negotiations as was agreed in Copenhagen last December. In pursuing our objective of membership we will let our actions speak for themselves. We merely expect to be judged and responded to accordingly.

This goes for issues that are not considered under the Copenhagen political criteria. Such as the Cyprus issue. Concerning the Island, I believe, two points need to be stressed:

- First, it is not fair to expect resolution of the problem unilaterally by the Turkish Cypriots or Turkey.
- Secondly, both the Turkish Cypriots and Turkey have been working relentlessly to promote an environment conducive to the resolution of the problem.

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The UN plan presented to the parties was not acceptable to either of the parties in Cyprus. Nevertheless, the Turkish Cypriot side has initiated fresh confidence building measures. These measures enabled both the mutual trade and the border crossings between the two sides of the island. Within the recent weeks, more than half of the Turkish and Greek Cypriots paid a visit to the other side. This has allowed the Greek Cypriots to see their Turkish neighbours for what they really are. Not for what they are portrayed to be.

My government fully supports this process. We have also contributed to it by permitting travel of Greek Cypriots to Turkey. We urge Greece and the Greek Cypriots to reciprocate responsibly. They should adopt a more constructive and accommodating approach.

We will continue to support the efforts for a just, lasting and realistic settlement in the island. For us, the settlement in Cyprus is a viable new partnership. Such a partnership should guarantee that the Turkish Cypriots will not have to go through the sufferings of the decade before 1974.

We never lose our hopes that the two peoples of Cyprus, the Turkish Cypriots and the Greek Cypriots will, one day, be able to peacefully co-exist and share power under a new partnership.

We appreciate the support extended to Turkey in her efforts at the process of integration with Europe. On the other hand, I am aware of the various excuses that are put forward by some circles against Turkey's membership. Neither the Turkish people, nor many Europeans are convinced by these arguments. Turkey's size, scale, location, demographics, vocation, orientation, political system and her multi-regional and multi-dimensional peaceful foreign policy are all vital assets to Europe.

Take Common Foreign and Security Policy. The EU needs to play a more significant role for international peace and security. Would Turkey's geostrategic importance or her associations and relations in the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East weaken or strengthen the Common Foreign and Security Policy? The answer is in the dynamism of the multi-dimensional Turkish foreign policy, which is promising, result oriented and respected in Europe, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

A European Union that includes Turkey will be a Union that is better equipped across the board. It would be a stronger Union to address the old and new challenges to security. Challenges such as terrorism, organized transborder crime, proliferation, xenophobia and racism. It will be a Union that could more effectively project stability and prosperity as well as democratic and free market values to its periphery. A Union with Turkey would mean an opportunity for all to better manage the transatlantic partnership and alliance.

This brings me to the NATO Summit in Istanbul next year. For Turkey, EU membership and a genuine partnership with the United States are complementary. For Turkey, transatlantic cooperation is the bedrock of peace and security in Europe and beyond. Turkey is sincerely committed to a healthy, robust and forward looking full partnership with the United States from the Atlantic all the way to the Far East.

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We have been concerned by the recent transatlantic tensions. However, we are relieved to see that the process to mend fences is already underway. The NATO Spring Ministerial in Madrid this year was a good beginning. In turn, the Istanbul Summit could be a culmination point for the Alliance and its relations with the EU. Including in terms of its functions and capabilities in new geographies and missions, and the deal of the transatlantic partnership.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The situation in the Middle East will be of crucial significance for the evolution of the international environment. The stakes are high. There is a need to think through and cooperate fully to upgrade the region to a level it deserves. This can be done.

Throughout the history, the Middle East has made fundamental contributions to the advancement of the human civilization through science, literature and arts, as well as spiritual and moral values. The peoples of this region could live together in peace and harmony also during the Ottoman centuries.

This is in contrast to the recent history of the Middle East. The countries of the Middle East have been living in a cycle of violence and desperation for a long time. This is not their destiny. There is an urgent need for a fresh start in the region. Challenges should be turned into opportunities. The case of Iraq has shown that for advancement, resources will have to be utilized rationally. They should be controlled by and to the benefit of the people.

The reconstruction of Iraq and the Middle East peace process are at the core of the efforts to bring stability to the region.

Let me first dwell on the situation in Iraq. Turkey has enjoyed friendly relations with the Iraqi people throughout history. In this respect, we did not spare any effort within our capacity for a peaceful resolution of the recent crisis there. Now, there is a new phase in Iraq. The challenge now is that the political restructuring process should go hand in hand with the reconstruction of the country.

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At this critical stage, meeting the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people and restoring the basic services is of utmost importance. Turkey is already playing an essential role in that regard. Resolution 1483 of the UN Security Council has confirmed and vindicated our policy toward Iraq. We are committed to extending a full embrace to all segments of the Iraqi population. We are determined to help Iraq back on its feet as a peaceful neighbour.

The Middle East peace process has also taken a critical turn in the aftermath of the endorsement of the “Road Map” by both Israel and the Palestinian National Authority. I warmly welcome this development. Turkey will actively support the efforts to achieve ultimate Palestinian-Israeli peace. A peace based on Palestinian full statehood and Israel’s unqualified security. We will continue to benefit from our strong and excellent relationship with both Palestinians and the Israelis to contribute to the peace between them. We have already proposed to host any meeting that will bring the parties together in Turkey whenever needed.

I believe that it is Turkey’s responsibility to work towards the goal of a good future for the Middle East. This is not only based on economic and political interests. There is also a humanitarian and moral imperative rooted in history.

There is a growing awareness and call for reform in the Muslim world. There are also positive steps in this direction. I have contributed to this call recently on various occasions. I have been able to speak as a representative of the government of a Muslim country that is successfully undertaking major political, social and economic reforms to attain highest

standards of democracy and modernity while preserving its identity. For my Party, it is a mission to prove that democracy, civil rights and liberties, respect for the rule of law, civil society, accountability, market economy, transparency, and gender equality can also be basics of a Muslim society. Our experience proves that traditional and spiritual values can be in perfect harmony with the contemporary standards of life and modernity. They can even be enriching for modern societies.

I am also pleased to see that there is a re-emergence of interest in the region for multilateral cooperation. Turkey can also bring direct contributions to the Middle East through her experience in the fields of regional and international cooperation. Turkey's experience in arrangements like the OSCE, South East Europe Cooperation Process and the Stability Pact, OECD, WTO, Council of Europe, as well as in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization has been extensive. Along with this, our partnership at the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, Economic Cooperation Organisation and our Chairmanship of the Permanent Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation among Islamic countries provide us with a unique place.

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We believe that time has come to start exploring multilateral regional cooperation projects in the Middle East. Regional cooperation would improve the functioning of free market economies, joint investments and initiatives. Removing obstacles to communication and transportation would help generate more trade and production for firms of all sizes.

In the political and security fields, multilateral initiatives could help establish codes of conduct and confidence building measures and develop conflict resolution methods. Recently at the World Economic Forum meeting in Jordan I had proposed a number of guiding principles in this regard. These include respect for national unity and territorial integrity, peaceful resolution of regional conflicts, fight against terrorism, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and transparency in military affairs.

While the region is poised perhaps for a historic transformation, the need for cooperation and support from the western world is crucial.

However, this will not be a simple affair. The Muslim world suffers not only from its own shortcomings, but also from the prejudices in the western world. Many in the West seemed to be readily misled by those who claim to act in the name of Islam and resort to violence. Terrorism cannot be associated with any religion, culture or geography, but is a crime against humanity and must be treated as such. We applaud the efforts by the UK in trying to put the record straight and present a more informed picture.

Excellencies,
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Perhaps like the successful cosmopolitan individuals of the globalised world, we need cosmopolitan states in international politics to act as agents of good-will.

Misunderstandings and prejudices can be minimised by individuals and states that cultivate cross-cultural skills.

Turkey and the UK, with their unique historical, political and social experience, are two such states. We both understand this complex world and together have the potential to make a difference.

Therefore, and in conclusion, I should express my conviction that as Allies in NATO and soon to be joint shareholders in the European Union, the Turkish-UK partnership is destined to make an imprint in Europe, Middle East, the Caucasus and beyond.

Thank you.