

**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY ABDULLAH GÜL,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY, TO
THE TURKISH GRAND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE NEW LEGISLATIVE YEAR
(THE TURKISH GRAND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, OCTOBER 1, 2011)**

Mr. Speaker,

Esteemed Members of the Turkish Grand National Assembly,

I extend my warmest greetings to all of you, the esteemed Members of Parliament, on this occasion, the opening of the 2nd Legislative Year of the 24th Term of the Turkish Grand National Assembly.

I congratulate all of the esteemed Members of Parliament who were re-elected or elected for the first time in the elections on June 12, 2011 and wish our country and our people a good and productive new legislative year.

In all previous speeches before the Grand National Assembly as President of the Republic, I emphasized the significance and relevance of the Turkish Grand National Assembly.

Referring to the values that the Turkish Grand National Assembly represents will serve to support the efforts that have been expended so far in preserving the qualities of our democracy and help deal with the issues before this National Assembly with greater confidence.

Mr. Speaker,

Esteemed Members of Parliament,

The Turkish Grand National Assembly, where we are now gathered:

-is the most powerful institution that represents the absolute and unconditional sovereignty of the people.

-The Assembly gets its legitimacy from the Turkish people and in turn grants legitimacy to other institutions in the name of the nation.

-It is the headquarters of our liberation as a people and the source of our establishment as a state.

-It is the hearth of our democracy, the ultimate guarantor of our liberty and sovereignty.

-It is the supreme authority where our nation voice their demands and aspirations with respect to rights, law, freedom, justice and welfare and where these demands and aspirations are fulfilled.

-It is the house under which the collective memory and conscience of our nation is embodied.

-It manifests the will and the solid determination that will carry our country into the realm of contemporary civilization and beyond.

-It is the symbol of our nation's unity and solidarity, the institution where the ideals and aspirations of our people are manifested.

For all these reasons, the Grand National Assembly has a deep responsibility that is equally matched by the magnitude of its honorable stature.

Mr. Speaker,

Esteemed Members of Parliament,

The results of the elections of June 12, held in a festive climate of democracy, strongly reflected the choice and aspirations of our people. That the results were successfully announced in the space of a few hours, leaving no room for uncertainty, is an enormous and highly admirable achievement.

Last year, when I addressed the National Assembly from this rostrum, I had pointed out that the representative and participatory aspects of our democracy had to work hand in hand.

On June 12, the Turkish people graced the political establishment with a high voter turnout in the elections, ensuring the extensive representation in Parliament of all political opinions and inclinations. The people bestowed upon this Esteemed Assembly the strength to forge ahead bravely to tackle each one of the issues standing before it.

As the President of the Republic, my job is to call upon the Assembly to honor each and every vote of the Turkish people. In parliamentary democracies, demands and objections are voiced in Parliament. There is no doubt that each political party, each political view and each Member of Parliament present in this Esteemed Assembly shall express their own views with respect to our common future, our issues and our hopes.

Mr. Speaker,
Esteemed Members of Parliament,

As of the morning of June 13, 2011, the most important item on Turkey's agenda has been the drawing up of a new constitution.

All segments of society, without exception, have the will and support for the making of a new constitution. This is because everyone is aware that the constitution currently in force does not meet our needs; attempts to restrict Turkey's democratic maturity and diversity; and ignores the richness that Turkey represents.

It is for this reason that the Turkish people have high expectations from this National Assembly which has strong representative power and high legitimacy and bears the critical burden of this responsibility.

Our beloved nation have entrusted you, our Esteemed Members of Parliament, with the honorable duty of drafting a long-awaited constitution that is grounded on the will of the people for the first time since the Constitutions of 1921 and 1924.

In fulfilling this honorable duty, you must act in full awareness of your responsibilities and with self-confidence. This process cannot be completed in the presence of fears, anxieties, impatience and fruitless feuding.

We do have a firm foundation on which to base our self confidence with respect to the creation of a new constitution.

First and foremost, our constitutional experience goes back more than 200 years.

It begins in 1808 with the “Bill of Accord”, continues through the times of the “Imperial Edict of Reform”, the “Basic Law”, the First and Second Constitutional Eras, bringing us to the constitutions enacted in 1921, 1924, 1961 and 1982, all of which provide the Turkish people with an accumulated memory of both positive and negative experiences.

This memory and our experience are the essence of the insight for a new constitution that will lead our people into the next century.

In light of this vast experience, we as a nation are in strong accord as to what our basic common denominators and fundamental values are.

Mr. Speaker,

Esteemed Members of Parliament,

Even under the most strenuous conditions of our War for Independence, our Esteemed Parliament demonstrated the capability of constructing a civil constitution.

After the 1921 and 1924 Constitutions, which were initiated under the personal leadership of Gazi Mustafa Kemal, the subsequent constitutions were unfortunately the product of interim periods in which democracy and consequently the people’s will were suspended.

The 1982 Constitution currently in force is thus the product of such an era and despite comprehensive reforms implemented in recent years, it has lost its internal systematic, becoming too narrow to accommodate the level of democratic and economic sophistication our nation has reached.

As a nation, our dynamic population has surpassed the 70 million mark and in about 10 years, we will be celebrating the Centennial Anniversary of our Republic. In almost a half-century from today, we will commemorate our presence in these lands for a millennium.

It is natural then that as a country and a nation, we look with hope towards a brighter and better future. This is why, we must conduct the process for a new constitution with composure, self-confidence and determination and without sacrificing the process to mistakes in method and discourse.

Mr. Speaker,

Esteemed Members of Parliament,

Our vision for a new constitution and its language are the two main points as we embark upon this process with self confidence.

Up until now, our constitutions have been skeptical and rigid on the subject of freedoms, but expansive and flexible in language concerning restrictions. Every kind of freedom has been subject to limitations within a vague framework, potentially capable of being interpreted in any direction. What must be done today is the exact opposite.

Our new constitution must be of a flexible character based on freedoms. The basic principle should be to refrain using the constitution as a means for controlling different political views and to avoid the creation of tensions between the state and the people.

At the same time, however, flexibility does not imply the absence of rules. I speak to you today of a flexibility that corresponds to contemporary developments, encompassing and open to new social dynamics. Flexibility does not mean the erosion of fundamental principles and sensitivities. On the contrary, it is a prerequisite to make fundamental principles and sensitivities resilient over time..

The basic problem with the Constitution of 1982 is that it lags behind society and its dynamics and, in fact, regards these social dynamics as a problem.

Diametrically opposite to this, the new constitution should benefit from the dynamics of society and be designed based on freedoms.

With this understanding:

-The constitution should be drawn up without going into too much detail, but should strongly set out the fundamental principles, leaving details to the laws, allowing for flexibility and progress. Our most important yardstick in this process should be universal standards.

-The constitution should strengthen and guarantee the concept of equal citizenship in every aspect on the basis of fundamental rights and freedoms for everyone. It should preserve the right of every segment of the population to live “as itself”, meticulously providing constitutional guarantees in this context. The road to ensuring this outcome is a freedom-based approach, acting under the precepts of a vision of trust in each and every individual in our nation, regardless of political view, orientation or background.

-This constitution should consolidate our achievements from the last 200 years and should not compromise the fundamental principles of our Republic as a democratic, secular, social state respecting the rule of law shared by us all.

-While taking every measure to perpetuate the state, the constitution should be based on the fact that the state serves the people. In this context, instead of implicitly providing for tutelage through other bodies of authority, the constitution should clearly deliver custody in the hands of the people as in contemporary democracies.

-It should reflect the concept of a state that not only asks for accountability but is itself accountable. In short, the spirit and the letter of the constitution should incorporate the important qualities of contemporary democracies such as transparency and accountability.

-It should accommodate the progress of democracy with all its institutions and traditions, also incorporating systems of checks and balances. In this context, I would particularly like to call attention to the principles of separation of powers, judicial independence, freedom of speech and the press.

In short, our new constitution should encompass all the qualities that will serve to institutionalize Turkish democracy. When a democracy is institutionalized, it becomes independent of terms, individuals, ruling governments; a lasting, sustainable and consistent democracy.

Such an institutionalized democracy is not affected by movements and currents of the day and provides its citizens with the requirements of a democratic state of law at all times and under all circumstances.

Mr. Speaker,

Esteemed Members of Parliament,

In the preparation of the new constitution, the process is just as important as the norms. This is because the method is just as important as the substance. It is imperative that the process of drawing up a new constitution is well planned and with an understanding based on solving problems. In this context, I am heartened to note the efforts of the Distinguished Speaker of the Parliament who has initiated work by enlisting the contributions of academicians with the aim of bringing together all parties around a shared understanding.

The new constitution should not bear the seal of any particular idea, party, ideology or doctrine. The only seal it must carry is the seal of the Turkish nation.

From this perspective, I believe that the participation of political parties not represented in Parliament, civil society organizations, universities and professional associations to the discussions on the constitution in addition to the parties in Parliament is very beneficial.

Mr. Speaker,

Esteemed Members of Parliament,

History has shown that states and regimes that broaden fundamental rights and freedoms, establish accountable administrations and maintain the rule of law always grow stronger.

In short, the body of values which we define as democracy is the fundamental guarantee of a country's stability, prosperity and security. It is also the guarantee of regional and international peace.

The most effective road to reinforcing our internal peace is to transform our country into a first-class democracy in every way.

We can speak of true peace and order in our country only when we adopt democracy with all its institutions, established traditions and rules.

One of the most fundamental and indispensable principles of democracy is, without doubt, the rule of law. The law, however, is not a tool to achieve political superiority. It has been seen time and again that using the laws to achieve political superiority, shape society, or impose a certain pattern of behavior on people has never been possible.

The law must revere human life and dignity. Inequality and injustice should not be concealed under pretense of law. The law should uphold the principle of justice. The ultimate goal of the principle of the rule of law and the ideal of the supremacy of law in a state is to meet the demand for justice.

Meeting the demand for justice is the combined responsibility of all of the bodies of the state and its institutions as well as all people working in these institutions.

An independent and impartial judicial system which seeks to protect human dignity and ensures the administration of justice based on the principle of the supremacy of law is an indispensable condition for democracy and the rule of law.

Judicial authorities are the final place of hope for people who believe they have been treated with injustice. The loss of hope for those who take refuge in the law also destroys the trust in the state.

If there is widespread belief that the judiciary does not act fairly, this would lead to irreparable wounds in public conscience and, ultimately, to the loss of trust.

For this reason, judicial authorities are expected to act with utmost care when fulfilling their functions. Personal emotions and preferences, political and philosophical views should not influence judicial decisions or lead to unjust outcomes.

On the other hand, countless legal files are pending before the courts due to extreme workload and shortage of staff. This is one of the most important reasons that delays the deliverance of

justice and causes *de facto* punishment for detainees. This casts a shadow over the effectiveness of the judiciary. Therefore, it must be our priority to resolve this problem with everyone's cooperation.

Mr. Speaker,

Esteemed Members of Parliament,

The relationship between security and democracy is a matter which we should all analyze with utmost sensitivity. In the world of today, one cannot speak of security without democracy or true democracy without security.

Therefore, democracy is the most effective way for combating terrorism. It is also a value we must jealously guard and sacrifice for.

Recently increasing acts of terrorism are aimed not only at our security forces, innocent citizens, national unity and solidarity; but also, they are a deliberate attack on our democracy .

For this reason, the combat against terrorism is, at the same time, a struggle to protect and further our democracy.

I would like to send a clear message to our nation: The unity and indivisible integrity of the state is our fundamental political perspective and is not subject to discussion.

There can be no justification for terror. Attacks on the unity of the state and the lives of its people cannot be presented as justification of rights. No leniency can be shown to terrorism which is a scourge that must be eradicated.

Terror serves no cause. On the contrary, when a cause is contaminated by terror, the way to deal with it is evident no matter what it says. Those who try to spread a climate of terror, those who refrain from assuming a clear stance against terror create the greatest harm for themselves.

It is for this reason that our country will continue to fight terrorism without hesitation and by using the most effective means.

The recent attacks of the separatist terrorist organization on innocent people, including women and babies, are shameful murders targeting humanity itself. These attacks deeply wound human conscience and challenge the limits of patience. For this reason, it is, at the very least, a matter of honor as humans for us all no matter what our ideas, views or party affiliation to condemn loudly the terrorists who indiscriminately target innocent crowds in cities.

All of the organizations of the state and political groups must act jointly with a shared sensitivity in this process. The task that falls upon the state is to take the necessary steps to combat terrorism and use all methods within the rule of law in line with its own principles to this end.

It is the duty of each and every one of us to stand up for our state and work to eliminate those forces and conspiracies that seek to undermine and incapacitate the state.

On this occasion, I would like to take this opportunity to remember, with gratitude and respect, the memory of all our martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the sake of the nation and our people. I also extend my heartfelt feelings of gratitude to our brave veterans.

Mr. Speaker,

Esteemed Members of Parliament,

It is of grave importance in the fight against terrorism to distinguish our citizens who strive to make their demands known within the democratic system without resorting to violence from those who support and glorify terror.

Those who interpret the compassionate actions of our state carried out within the framework of law to combat terrorism without harming innocent people and the prudence and courage of our people as signs of weakness are sadly mistaken. For as long as this remains the way in which terrorists perceive our policies, our fight against terrorism will continue with determination and they will have to suffer the consequences.

Those who seek to obtain their rights with blood and violence, those who believe that the democratic steps that have been taken were realized as a result of terrorist acts are making a historic mistake. It must be well understood that had there been no acts of terror, democratic standards and the level of economic development in Turkey would have been much more advanced.

On the other hand, the Kurdish issue, a product of long years of negligence of democratic deficiencies in our country, can be solved in our democracy based on shared values and by standing together behind our state.

The solution lies in taking the steps of democratic progress without diverging into a political language that focuses on ideology and ethnicity.

From this aspect too, I consider it my duty on this opening day of Parliament, to recommend mutual understanding, compromise and moderation to all of our political parties.

Mr. Speaker,

Esteemed Members of Parliament,

The most important sign of stability, success and happiness for the people of a country is its economic performance. In light of this understanding, I would like to share with you my views on the Turkish economy as well as the global economy.

Since the Turkish economy is part of the Customs Union for 15 years and integrated with the world economy, it is positively or adversely affected by the developments in international markets.

As we all know, the world is facing a new crisis today even before the global crisis that began back in August 2007 is over.

The recovery that began in 2009 and continued in 2010 has unfortunately stagnated as of May 2011 which led to further contraction in countries.

The problems of public finances facing the US and the Euro zone due to high debt burden and large budget deficits as well as the lack of political decision making in order to solve these problems further aggravate the problems in those countries.

In this process, private debt became public debt and the debt burden of states became unsustainable. In previous crises, the public sector would save the companies in the private sector. Now, states find that they are in need of saving themselves.

As a result, the expectation of a new global crisis negatively affects the decisions of the consumers, producers and investors.

In order to ensure that the existing “balance of economic terror” does not all of a sudden lend itself to a new global crisis, it is of utmost importance to render the G 20 platform more effective as it is the best mechanism available to the international community.

My observation about our economy in the context of global economic developments is as follows:

First of all, the ongoing global crisis and a second wave of economic contraction that everyone is trying to prevent are not crises of the emerging economies such as our country. These crises are caused by developed countries.

Despite these global risks, the Turkish economy rests on sound macro foundations. Today, we have an economy with strong public finances, sustainable debt dynamics, a sound banking system, functional credit markets and functioning monetary transmission mechanisms.

Although the household indebtedness ratio increased somewhat in recent years, it is still low compared to other countries. On the other hand, lower rate of savings constitutes a weakness for us.

Nonetheless, the Turkish economy grew by 9 per cent in 2010 and 10.2 per cent in the first half of 2011 in a global environment where many countries registered either little or no growth. Our growth has been an employment generating growth.

At a time when the ratings of many developed market economies are downgraded, it is commendable that Turkey's credit rating has been upgraded three times since 2009. I wholeheartedly congratulate all officials and our hard-working people who contributed to this result.

However, for reasons I have cited above, it is necessary to be careful in an open market economy and follow the changes in global economic trends without resorting to complacency.

In this context, I welcome the fact that the Government and the team managing the economy continue to take timely decisions on monetary and fiscal matters. I also commend the coordination and cooperation of all economic units in this critical process.

We certainly feel proud that the Turkish economy ranks as the 16th largest economy in the world and the 6th largest economy in Europe.

On the other hand, we must work very hard not only to raise our per capita income level to match that of developed countries, but also to remove regional differences and to ensure equitable income distribution.

Econometric analyses show that per capita income will reach only 80 per cent of the current European Union average if we achieve 10 per cent growth every year until the centennial of our Republic in 2023.

The high levels of growth needed to achieve these goals are, unfortunately, accompanied by chronic current account deficits and risks.

To date, we mostly tried to cure the problems arising from current deficit by way of the exchange rate. The exchange rate is, no doubt, an important macro variable in determining the economic competitiveness of an economy. Therefore, it must be considered by policy makers.

However, the discussion about the exchange rate should not be reason for the postponement of structural problems and their solutions. Most recent growth and current account deficit figures indicate that most of the current account deficit problem in Turkey is structural.

Our country has been very successful in recent years with respect to the production of finished products. The performance in machinery and equipment, consumer durables and some industrial sectors is a testament to this fact. Yet, we do not produce sufficient quality intermediate goods and raw materials to produce these high quality goods that are in high demand in international markets.

Mr. Speaker,

Esteemed Members of Parliament,

At this point, I would like to draw your attention to the following: According to a study carried out by the Ministry of Economy in 2009, the manufacturing sector is about 82 per cent dependent on imports. The dependence of our exports on imports is just as high. In other words, we must have import activity worth 82 cents in order to carry out exports worth one dollar. This is a serious structural problem we must all be concerned about.

Therefore, we must seek ways of achieving rapid growth without creating a high current accounts deficit. The last nine to ten years have been important in repairing the flawed macroeconomic foundations of the economy.

Based on the ground work and confidence achieved through this positive economic performance, we must now concentrate our efforts on reforms that will enhance total factor productivity in order to realize high level growth.

While keeping in mind our obligations arising from international agreements such as the Customs Union and the World Trade Organization, we must definitely enable domestic production of raw materials and intermediate goods for products that we consume significantly and for which we have either partial or no production of raw materials and intermediate goods.

We must belatedly match countries with similar development trajectories which created their brands in the 60s, 70s and finally 90s when we were otherwise occupied with political and social instability.

In this framework, we must conduct a rational review of our incentive system and reduce our dependence on outside markets for energy, raw materials, intermediate goods and advanced technology products.

Let us not forget that as a country with a dynamic population, a strategic geography and long history, we must have a sustainable economy built on sound foundations in order to protect our national interests while acting as an element of stability and peace in the region.

With the economy free of high inflation, broken public finances and spiraling interest rates as a result of developments in the last decade, I firmly believe that our economy will achieve high growth rates with lower current accounts deficit through the structural changes that will be implemented.

On the other hand, as I have stated in previous speeches to draw the attention of the public opinion, our country must lose no time in transforming itself to a knowledge based economy. For this purpose, increasing cooperation between the state, universities and the private sector in science, technology, education, research, development and innovation will play a key role.

Mr. Speaker,

Esteemed Members of Parliament,

We have no choice other than to transform our country into a knowledge based society and economy in order to compete within the balance of power in the 21st century. This is possible through education and teachers are at the heart of education. We also know that a well-educated, selfless and visionary teacher may change the prospects of all his/her students. Therefore, the best investment for a nation is to primarily focus on training highly qualified teachers while also devoting necessary energy and resources to the solution of problems in education.

Furthermore, it is clear that a healthy society and economy may only be realized if women participate actively in all walks of social life including politics.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to say that I am very happy to see a significant increase in the number of women in parliament at the June 12 elections. I hope that problems such as

violence against women and education of girls will cease to be on our agenda in the new Legislative Year with the great help of the women who are members of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker,
Esteemed Members of Parliament,

We are in an historic and dynamic period in foreign policy. Since last year, an historic process of change and transformation that will deeply impact the Middle East and North Africa for decades to come has been taking place.

As I have mentioned on many other occasions, this wave of democracy that is reminiscent of the revolutions of 1848 and 1989 in Europe has now gained an irreversible character.

I had drawn attention to the need for change in the region in my remarks at the Foreign Ministers Meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Tehran in 2003.

On that day, I had expressed to my colleagues that the governments in the region fell short of meeting the legitimate demands of their people and pointed out to the need for sincere reforms under these circumstances in order to prevent a reaction from the people or external intervention.

The peoples of the region who for years suffered under pressure, fear, occupation, poverty and corruption have finally decided to take their own future in their hands and catch up with history. This is a struggle to regain national honor and dignity as much as for freedom and justice.

The peoples of the region follow Turkey closely and see it as a source of inspiration for the success of this historic process of transformation.

I would like to once again state from this rostrum that the Turkish people stand by the friendly and brotherly peoples of the region in their historic and honorable struggle.

The economic, political and military contributions made by our country with this understanding in mind are commendable.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to praise all civilian and military authorities for their excellent achievements and selfless efforts in Libya, first in the evacuation of 25.000 Turkish citizens and many foreigners, and later during the NATO operations.

The Libyan people have taken a major step forward towards democratic change through great sacrifice, and now, we sincerely hope that they will form national unity and integration by leaving behind ideological and tribal conflicts.

On the other hand, I regret to say that our neighbor Syria where we have politically and diplomatically invested greatly in recent years is late in correctly analyzing the developments in the region. As Turkey, we always hope for the well-being of the Syrian people and a strong state in Syria and have always pursued our policies in this direction.

However, despite all of our efforts in public and behind closed doors, the blood of our brothers is still spilt in this country. We have lost confidence in the Syrian regime which continues to use oppression and violence on its people. However, Turkey will, under all circumstances, stand by her perpetual friends, the Syrian people.

Translating this historic change in the Middle East and North Africa into peace, stability and prosperity requires active participation not only by our official authorities, but also by political parties, the business community and civil society in efforts relating to these countries. In these efforts, we must help the friendly and brotherly countries in the process of achieving stability, justice, democracy and development at all levels.

Furthermore, we must also lead the formation of a pan-regional “economic cooperation mechanism” and ”security architecture” in order to consolidate the achievements of the Arab Spring.

Mr. Speaker,

Esteemed Members of Parliament,

Lately, I observe a simmering threat in the region based on a Sunni - Shiite divide. This dangerous process which will squander the energy and the resources of the region must be prevented.

From here, I would like to call on all governments and organizations that may become an instrument to the provocations of malign powers trying to benefit from such a primitive divide in the Muslim world: Do not allow this to happen. It will catapult the Muslim World from the 21st Century into darkness in an experience similar to the European one in the Middle Ages!

Mr. Speaker,

Esteemed Members of Parliament,

These historic events should not lead us to disregard the fact that the Arab Israeli conflict is still one of the fundamental issues burning in the region. In this context, the support by Turkey to the efforts of the Palestinian people for the recognition of their state is a result of our brotherly ties with Palestine and our historical responsibility.

On the other hand, Israel should carefully follow and analyze the new political climate in the region. This is because, the democratic and demographic dynamics in the region are developing to the disadvantage of Israel. It is impossible for Israel to achieve genuine peace and security as long as it prevents the establishment of an honorable and independent Palestinian State with its capital in Jerusalem by occupation, coercion and land-grabbing; and does not withdraw from the Arab territories it occupies.

Another area where Israel does not show a strategic approach is in its relations with our country. The normalization of our relations is out of question unless Israel takes necessary steps in line with our just demands.

Mr. Speaker,

Esteemed Members of the Parliament,

2011 is the twentieth anniversary of the independence of the friendly and brotherly Turkic Republics. As a nation, we are proud of the extraordinary progress made in the last 20 years by our brotherly countries in way of reinforcing independence and economic development.

I sincerely wish for greater achievements for our brothers in the Turkic Republics, whose joy and sorrow we share in our hearts and express my hope that they become much stronger states and democratic societies in the future.

The will and growing role of our country in contributing to world peace is appreciated around the world. In this context, I am glad to see our country create a difference in the solution of many complicated issues.

The dialog and cooperation processes that Turkey participates in or leads on issues pertaining to the Caucasus, the Balkans, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon, Palestine and Somalia have become the most meaningful mechanisms contributing to efforts for peace and stability in these regions.

Another area where our country utilizes its growing means and capabilities with a global sense of responsibility is the support provided to global development.

In this framework, I was glad to host the Least Developed Countries Summit which is one of the main platforms of the United Nations about development.

Africa which makes up two thirds of the least developed countries should not be left to its own fate. In this framework, the famine in Somalia which has been ravaged by civil war for the last 20 years is a disgrace for all mankind.

Our noble nation who had occasion to show their generosity in many disasters including the Great Famine in Ireland 150 years ago extended a helping hand to Somalia. I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Turkish people who enthusiastically supported the Somalia campaign.

Recently, we have witnessed many natural and environmental disasters in Indonesia, Haiti, Pakistan and Japan. In many cases, the magnitude of the disasters is such that even the strongest countries are not able to deal with them on their own. For this reason, I made an appeal at the UN General Assembly last year for the establishment of a “Global Rapid Reaction Capability” to fight famine, drought, epidemics and natural disasters.

I am happy to say that the UN General Assembly responded to this appeal with a decision taken last June and initiated the process for the establishment of a force to be called “HOPEFOR”.

Mr. Speaker,

Esteemed Members of Parliament,

I place importance on our relations with countries with whom we have strong ties of alliance based on common values. In this framework, our relations with our ally, the United States of America, with whom we cooperate and share a similar vision on many regional and global issues, have a special place.

In the same way, our country – as part of Europe - has its deepest, most comprehensive and multi-dimensional ties with Europe. Many of the European countries are our allies and leading trade partners and we have many political, economic, military, scientific, cultural and human ties.

As we all know, the global economic crisis that began in August 2007 and the ongoing instability in the Euro zone have led Europe to retire into its own shell. The strategic short-sightedness on the part of some EU leaders has had a role to play in this development.

At a time when the global center of gravity is shifting towards Asia and democratic development is broadening to the east and south of Europe because of the Arab Spring, it is highly probable that this introverted approach will have serious strategic costs on the part of Europe.

As I have stated on other occasions with respect to our relations with the European Union, we must fulfill our responsibilities regarding accession with determination and without ever giving up on our strategic priorities. We should not forget that the accession process with the European Union has had an important contribution to our current economic stability and the democratic reforms we have implemented.

At the same time, we must demand from our counterparts that Turkey is given the possibility to successfully complete accession talks just like Norway. Let us remember that when the accession process is complete, the decision to join the European Union will be taken not just by the peoples of the EU, but also by the Turkish people.

Additionally, it must be noted by everyone that it is the Greek Cypriot Administration who lacks the will to reach a settlement for the Cyprus problem and many members of the EU hide under the skin of the Greek Cypriot Administration as an excuse.

As we all know, we put in every effort as the Turkish side in the negotiations for uniting the island. The Greek side could become a member of the European Union despite the fact that they rejected the Annan Plan which was supported by the international community. The declarations and statements by many leading EU countries saying that the Greek Cypriot Administration became a member of the EU without representing the entire island are still in the archives.

In fact, the European Union has pursued a policy which contradicts its own principles by including within its membership, for the first time, an administration that has not resolved its internal problems and which does not represent all of its country. The EU Presidency of such a “half government” in the second half of 2012 demonstrates a weakness on the part of the EU. This is something that must be questioned by the European Union itself.

More importantly, since the European Union considers all this to be normal at a time when negotiations are under way, this provides conducive ground for the Greek Cypriot Administration to not feel any obligation to work for a solution.

Obviously, this puts the European Union in a position where it ends up strongly encouraging the absence of a settlement.

Under these circumstances, I am afraid that the European Union will be the cause of the beginning of a process that will render unification of the island totally impossible.

I would like to remind everyone that the consequences of such a process will have to be accepted by all sooner or later.

Finally, no one should doubt that Turkey will take every measure to protect all of its national interests in Eastern Mediterranean.

Mr. Speaker,

Esteemed Members of Parliament,

At the end of my remarks, I would like to remember with respect first, Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and also the late members of parliament who have served our nation in this esteemed Assembly and I pray to Mighty Allah that this term will be beneficial for our nation and state.