

■ ■ ■ ■ **Washington Institute for Near East Policy**
■ ■ ■ ■ **Tarafından Düzenlenen Toplantıda**
■ ■ ■ ■ **Yapılan Konuşma**

∴ **Washington, 25 Temmuz 2003** Ladies and Gentlemen,

35 ∴

I am pleased to be here to meet and address the distinguished members and guests of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

I would like to thank the Turkish Program of the Institute for this kind invitation to share my thoughts with you on a number of developments in Turkey and in our region.

As both a politician and as a private citizen, I always had a keen interest in the issues of our region, their focal place in world affairs and their prospects. Therefore, I have benefited a great deal from the valuable work of the Washington Institute. I know that many other Turkish politicians, diplomats, scholars and journalists have also had fruitful and useful exchanges with the members of the Institute.

And Turkey, for its part, has reciprocated in this exchange. I am sure the dynamism of Turkey's political life and foreign policy provided the Institute with a wealth of good material to study and analyze.

And I am also certain that the unique vision and achievements of my Government and our political movement will only enrich such material.

We have been in Government for a relatively short period: Almost eight months now.

Our political movement, The Justice and Development Party, came to power with a big majority. We formed the government with fresh ideas. We

had the potential to deliver possibilities to achieve economic and political stability and progress in Turkey.

However, the period immediately following our election to power held many challenges for the implementation of our sweeping program:

We were faced with a major international conflict followed by a war just across our border.

We were obliged to continue to pursue an economic recovery program that was designed to remedy the economic crises of recent years.

At the same time, we had to fulfill the requirements of our integration process with the European Union in the form of political and economic reforms.

And our people had high expectations on all these fronts.

Salvaging the reform process from the effects of the tough international financial, economic, political and military circumstances, while contributing to the Coalition efforts for stability in the region, was an enormous challenge.

:: 36

I think we have passed through this period of challenges successfully and with the dignity of democracy:

The war in Iraq ended with minimum possible casualties and losses.

Thus, the war's negative repercussions on the neighborhood were less than expected.

The speculations about the possible negative impact and consequences of the war on our relations with the USA did not prove to be correct. The content and the context of my current visit to Washington confirm the strength and ever evolving nature of our partnership with the USA.

We did not have to sacrifice or interrupt the reform process.

That is why I am delighted to observe now that the international press has begun to refer to my Government as "the reformist Government in Turkey".

It is gratifying to see that our efforts for a better and more prosperous future for Turkey and for the region are recognized and appreciated.

To many, initially it seemed like a paradox: A government that was formed by a party known to be based on moral and traditional values, wrongly branded by some as "Islamist" Party, was implementing a most spectacular economic and political reform campaign in Turkey; reforms that even astonished the liberals and the skeptics at home; causing surprise in some of them and admiration by others.

However, there was nothing to be surprised about. From our stand point, this was a well thought political philosophy based on our sincere sense of mission and duty. We had put in front of us a mission to accomplish: We were to prove that a Muslim society is capable of changing and renovating itself, attaining contemporary standards, while preserving its values, traditions and identity.

We acted on the premise that highest contemporary standards of democracy-fundamental freedoms, gender equality, free markets, civil society, transparency, good governance, rule of law and rational use of resources were universal expectations. It was our belief that our people and other Muslim nations fully deserved to have these expectations met.

Our societies can only benefit from the realization of these standards. And indeed, our societies have the necessary historical background and moral and spiritual strength to adapt themselves to modernity when guided with successful and determined leadership.

Our strength came from being eye to eye with our people. The massive support we received during and after the elections was an indication of our strong bonds with our grassroots. Our experience has differed from the others by not relying only on the elites. Something has changed in Turkey.

Ours is an experience that deserves notice. The messages we receive from intellectuals, politicians and individuals— particularly in the Middle East, as well as in Washington and Europe show that this attention is already being paid.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We began our reform from the very day we formed the government: We decreased the number of ministries from 35 to 23, thus making the administration more streamlined and efficient.

This was followed by a Public Administration Reform project aimed at the decentralization of most public services. This would give the Central Government more time and space to tackle the global issues while at the same time speeding up the delivery of the services. The Penal Code, the Civil Code and the Press Law are all being further modernized.

Among the first agenda items of the new Turkish Parliament were two major political reform packages. These were related to the process initiated by the previous government to upgrade the Turkish legislation on fundamental rights and freedoms in conformity with the European Union standards.

That was not all. Last month we passed another political reform package further harmonizing our legislation with those of Europe.

Before I left for Washington, my government proposed a last package to the Parliament. I expect it to be approved next week.

Therefore in a period of less than a year Turkey achieved the following:

- Fundamental rights and freedoms were extended to the most liberal standards. Some residual restrictions were removed.
- Additional facilities were provided for the fulfillment of cultural and religious rights.
- The principle of zero tolerance to mistreatment and torture became the basis of the relevant laws and their implementation.
- The civilian nature of the administration was consolidated in keeping with the European standards.
- We became party to European Conventions against corruption. Full transparency of public expenses was secured.
- Capital punishment was formally abolished. This decision was further consolidated by the ratification of the relevant European Conventions.

∴ 38

A parallel process took place regarding the economic reforms to achieve a strong economy. Steps were taken to further encourage and facilitate foreign direct investment. Important steps were taken regarding public finance. The results came soon. The inflation rate recently fell to historical minimum. Growth rates have increased.

My Government will now concentrate on the implementation of our reformed legislation. On the basis of our performance regarding the implementation of the European criteria, the European Union will decide at the end of the year 2004 whether Turkey has fulfilled these criteria and whether to open accession negotiations with Turkey.

It is significant that Turkey was invited to the European Intergovernmental Conference to design the future architecture of Europe. That this was done during and with the contribution of the Greek Presidency of the EU was more significant.

What is more, Turkey's prospective membership to the European Union is being welcomed by Israel as well as by many Arab countries.

Our partnership with the European Union has received full support from President Bush. He has, with a great vision and wisdom, acknowledged the assets of such a partnership for the parties, for overall Transatlantic cooperation and beyond.

Therefore it should not come as a surprise that the enlarged NATO will hold its summit meeting in Istanbul next year. The Istanbul Summit is expected

to be important for the Alliance and its relations with the EU; in terms of its functional capabilities in new geographies and new missions as well.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For Turkey, EU membership and a strategic partnership with the United States are Complementary. Our bonds with the United States are based on values. Values of democracy, freedom and market economy. Our partnership has flourished at the times of the Korean War and Cold War. It was further strengthened by joint efforts against new challenges, among others, in Afghanistan, Somalia, Bosnia and Kosovo.

During the last 12 years we protected the people of Iraq from the Saddam regime together through the Northern Watch Operation and other activities. Turkey made a serious contribution to the swift ending of the War in Iraq by granting full over-flight permission and through our close cooperation before the war.

Since the war, Secretary Powell and I have established a mechanism for providing both humanitarian supplies to the Iraqi people and for the logistic supplies to the Coalition Forces. My government also announced its full commitment to the implementation of the Security Council Resolution 1483 on Iraq. We have taken prompt steps in this direction. We offered concrete contributions to the urgent task of rehabilitation of basic and humanitarian services in Iraq. We extended our support to the newly launched political process in Baghdad. General Abizaid's visit to Turkey last week has been most useful.

39 ::

Transition process in Iraq must succeed. It must succeed on the basis of the objectives set by the American administration and the UN Security Council. Any diversion from these objectives, that is, unified, single, democratic and stable Iraq would have adverse consequences for all.

Turkey is considering take a major step that I think will contribute to the stability in Iraq. A project of law facilitating the return of members of the terrorist organization PKK/KADEK -a group on the US list of terrorist organizations- from Iraq to Turkey has been initiated. We will provide the conditions for those who have not involved in direct terrorist activities to immediately return to their homes. They will have the chance to reintegrate into the society. Those who were sought for terrorism charges will be tried, under the special provisions of a more lenient new law, if they surrender. I hope this will further contribute to the US efforts to eliminate terrorism in Iraq.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My Government is fully committed to the further development of our time tested alliance with the United States. We need to address together, old and new challenges such as terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, organized crime, illegal trafficking of narcotics, illegal human trafficking, and others.

We still have a lot to do for the realization of our common vision for dialogue, prosperity and peace in the Middle East; for the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan; for the stability and cooperation in the Caucasus and in the Southeast Europe. A comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Cyprus issue is necessary and more possible than ever. During my talks in Washington, we have agreed to work very closely, to go ahead together in all these goals.

My stay in Washington this week, coincides with the visit of Prime Minister of the Palestinian National Authority Mr. Mahmoud Abbas to the USA. Foreign Minister of Israel Silvan Shalom was also in town. Prime Minister of Israel Ariel Sharon is expected here next week. Head of the Authority in Iraq Ambassador Bremer is back from Baghdad for some days. Three members of the newly established Governing Council in Iraq are making their first trip abroad. The US Administration is leading this intensive activity for the success of the Road Map and the restructuring of Iraq.

These are timely and admirable efforts. They deserve the contributions and support of all of us.

My Government has already committed itself to actively contribute to this dual process. President Katzhav of Israel paid an official visit to Ankara two weeks ago consolidating the already excellent relations between our two countries. I met my Israeli counterpart three times in the last three months. While Israeli Defense Minister visited Turkey in May, the Turkish Chief of Staff visited Israel in June. Foreign Minister of the Palestinian National Authority was in Ankara last week. I will meet Prime Minister Abbas today in Washington and confirm an invitation to him to visit Turkey. Turkey is contributing to the new Palestinian Constitution with ideas.

Being the only Muslim country with historical and close ties with both of them, Turkey is in a position to play an important role to facilitate a better understanding between the two parties. We have also issued a standing invitation to host any meeting between the two sides whenever they may deemed it necessary or helpful. It is gratifying to see that both parties are giving the Turkish views due consideration.

Our joint efforts with the parties are aimed at freeing the Holy Land from violence, terror, hatred, injustice and poverty first; establishing peace and cooperation second. The Road Map is the only viable way to achieve this. It is very much necessary and desirable that the Syrian and Lebanese tracks are also revived in a similar manner.

Turkey will be hosting the Annual Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Islamic Conference next year. This is an additional reason for me personally to monitor the process vigilantly.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am not pessimistic regarding the future of the Middle East. However, I know that there is a long way to go on the road to achieving political normalization. I would also like to suggest that we should bear in mind and sight the need to restart multilateral cooperation in other fields, what is known as multilateral track. The two dimensions are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

Regional cooperation for trade in the region would foster free market economies; strengthen joint investments and initiatives; remove obstacles to communication and transportation. Thereby, creating the economic infrastructure of peace and prosperity. The Water Peace Pipeline Project that late President Ozal proposed during the Eighties is an example of such an approach.

Regional cooperation should also have security and political dimensions. We should establish codes of conduct, confidence building measures and develop conflict resolution methods.

The regional multilateral process must be given impetus. Turkey has much to offer in that regard. We are the only regional country that has a massive experience in regional and multilateral cooperation, from OSCE to QIC, including leadership at Black Sea Economic Cooperation and ECO.

Our background in regional cooperation provides us with an opportunity to contribute to transforming the Middle East into a new area of cooperation.

Turkey can also facilitate common projects with the international community and help provide a common basis in cultural, political and other fields. The first EU-OIC Foreign Ministers Meeting in Istanbul last year focused on harmony between civilizations. This has been a milestone. We should build on such examples.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The experience of Iraq showed that possessing rich natural resources alone is not enough.

YENİ YÜZYILDA TÜRK DIŞ POLİTİKASININ UFUKLARI

These resources should be used in a rational and effective way. The good of the people, the environment and neighbors and global circumstances should be observed.

It is becoming increasingly understood in our region that progress is dependent on political and social factors as well as economic ones.

Gradual steps towards more representative and accountable structures are already being taken in a number of countries. I welcome these efforts.

I am confident that the peoples of the Middle East have the capacity to attain a glorious future which will surpass their past. Their past as cultivated, tolerant, developed, good governed peoples. Peoples which have developed sophisticated legal systems, free trade networks, health institutions and schools.

I am confident that traditional and moral values, strong in our region, can be in perfect harmony with the modern standards of life.

Turkish experience has proved this.

∴ 42

Thank you.