



Walking The Tight Rope: Managing Turkey's Foreign Relations

:: New York, 24 Eylül 2003

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

43 ::

It is a pleasure for me to be with you on the occasion of the Second Annual Eurasia Summit.

I would like to thank the Eurasia Group, the UNDP and the Business Council for the United Nations for the excellent organization.

Distinguished guests,

Europe and Asia are considered to be two different continents. Yet, the division of this vast area into two continents is rather imaginary and a product of social, cultural and political considerations. In fact, Europe and Asia constitute one land mass, which we call "Eurasia", stretching from Madrid to Vladivostok, from Stockholm to Singapore. For thousands of years Europe and Asia were connected through a number of land routes, fostering cultural creativity and economic growth. The Silk Road was an example of early globalisation, linking up different cultures, beliefs and centers of knowledge.

The Silk Road became dormant long ago. Later on, as a result of the Cold War, the land connection between Europe and Asia was completely cut off.

The end of the Cold War has brought about a historic opportunity to reconnect Europe and Asia through the bridge of the Eurasian land mass, transforming the term "Eurasia" into a political and economic reality.

If this transformation succeeds, Eurasia will truly become a beacon of peace and stability. It will become an engine of economic progress and a model of

harmonious co-existence of different religions and ethnic groups. On the political front, it will offer a completely new landscape. All the countries of the region will embrace democracy, good governance and human rights and freedoms; share common security perceptions; co-operate with each other in addressing global and regional problems.

The Eurasian process also offers unprecedented economic benefits for the entire region and beyond. To begin with, the region is blessed with most valuable natural resources. The opening up of newly independent states to world markets also means huge trade and investment opportunities for the entire business community, boosting global economic growth.

Distinguished guests,

Turkey is located at the very core of Eurasia. Throughout history, we have always been a part of both Europe and Asia, constituting a natural bridge between these two geographies. Therefore, the changes in the Eurasian landscape have created unprecedented opportunities for Turkey. A very peculiar role falls on us in promoting peace, stability and development in this region. In essence, Turkey has become a central actor, projecting substantial diplomatic, economic and military prowess towards a vast area.

∴ 44

Turkey has been one of the very first countries to reach out to the newly independent states. We have helped them overcome challenges of their transformation and integrate with the rest of the world. We have delivered technical and humanitarian assistance; extended political support in their quest for accession to the Euro-Atlantic structures. We have also promoted regional cooperation mechanisms, such as the Economic Cooperation Organization, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, South Eastern European Cooperation Process and the Black Sea Naval Task Force.

Distinguished guests,

Our active involvement in the Eurasian process is just one dimension of multi-faceted Turkish foreign policy. Achievement of full EU membership remains as the other priority of my Government. These two priorities do not contradict. They complement one another. A pivotal Turkey in Eurasia will be an asset for the European Union. Turkey within the European Union will be able to make a much stronger contribution to the security, stability and welfare of Eurasia. Transatlantic relations will be stronger. Turkey's membership in the EU will be a symbol of the harmonious co-existence of cultures and enrich the spiritual fabric of the EU. The EU will also acquire strategic depth extending to the doors of the Caucasus and the Middle East.

Distinguished guests,

I see a promising perspective for the future of Eurasia. However, the last decade has been a period of turmoil for the region. The challenges that the newly independent states have faced are enormous. Creating “nationhood” and “independent statehood” is an overwhelming challenge. In such a process, “extremes” are always common-place; fundamentalist currents, pent-up ethnic conflicts, extreme nationalistic sensitivities. Because of all these new problems, progress in political reforms has been slow. Many of the regional countries have given priority to the consolidation of sovereignty over political reform.

The break up of the Soviet Union also meant the loss of traditional markets for their products; the cutting off of trade and transport routes; the end of subsidies from Moscow; and the loss of secured access to energy and water sources. I need not to mention the repercussions of the transition from a centralized system to a market economy. As a result, with a few exceptions, the GDPs of the countries of the region have dropped drastically.

45 ::

However, this dark picture in the region is now steadily being replaced by promising trends. Especially regional economic cooperation schemes deserve attention: projects such as the revitalization of the ancient Silk Road and the establishment of an East-West Energy and Transportation Corridor are worth mentioning.

I am happy to report to you good progress in the East-West Energy Corridor. This corridor aims at transporting the Caucasian and Central Asian energy resources to world markets through safe and secure alternative routes. It comprises the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) crude oil pipeline, South Caucasian natural gas pipeline (Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum) and Turkmenistan-Turkey-Europe gas pipeline projects. These projects, we believe, form a “Eurasian peace corridor”, a corridor that would help bring stability and prosperity to the region. There might be new additions to these projects.

Just as the East-West linkage, the north-south cooperation is also significant. Turkey and Russia are exploring the means of further cooperation within the framework of the Eurasia Action Plan signed in 2001.

Distinguished guests,

The war in Afghanistan has turned the attention of the international community toward this part of the world. Today, everyone fully agrees that efforts to re-build Afghanistan can succeed only with a regional approach. The vision of a stable Afghanistan is not realistic unless a parallel progress is achieved in its wider region; and vice versa.

Traditionally a close friend of the Afghans, Turkey has contributed for many years to the rehabilitation of Afghanistan. We are pleased that the Bonn Process has so far been implemented successfully, despite facing numerous difficulties. The Transitional Administration needs the strong support of the international community. In this regard, the International Security Assistance Force plays an important role in ensuring security in and around Kabul. Turkey assumed the command of ISAF from June 2002 to February 2003, and carried out this mission successfully. We continue to contribute to ISAF which is now under NATO command.

Distinguished guests,

In the Middle East, recent developments leave little room for optimism.

On the one hand, the Coalition in Iraq is facing a formidable task of ensuring security and restoring life to normal in order to pave the way for political and economic transformation of the country. The international community fully agrees on the necessity for joint action, but cannot fully agree on modalities. On the other hand, efforts to revitalize the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians appear to have stalled once again. The future of the Road Map remains uncertain.

∴ 46

The progress in Iraq and the implementation of the Middle East Road Map will have direct impact on one another and the wider region. Failure of one will block progress of the other. Failing on both will be a disaster.

In post-war Iraq, my Government's policy is based on our sincere desire to see a peaceful, secure and prosperous Iraq, with its territorial integrity intact. To this end, the international community must contribute more actively to efforts for ensuring peace and stability in Iraq and assisting in the reconstruction of the country.

As for the Middle East question, there is no alternative to peace efforts when working towards the goal of two states with recognized and secure borders. In this process, it is of utmost importance to solve the serious economic and social problems of the Palestinian nation and to meet the security needs of Israel. Violence and terror must stop. My Government fully and actively supports the peace process. We have good relations with both sides. We have offered them to make any possible contribution to peace between them.

Dear guests,

When I look beyond, to the broader region, I recognize that a need towards change has been felt much before the Iraqi war. The experience of Iraq shows that possessing rich natural resources alone is not enough for advancement.

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It is becoming increasingly apparent that progress is dependent on political and social factors as well as economic ones. In a number of countries in the Middle East and Eurasia region, this necessity is being increasingly recognized. Gradual steps are being taken to establish more representative and accountable structures.

Turkish experience proves that integration with the world is possible by bringing our values and traditions in harmony with modernity.

We are also committed to fully sharing our valuable know-how on regional cooperation with the fellow countries in the region. As a founding member of the OSCE and the OIC, a long standing NATO ally, a future member of the EU, as well as a country with deep historical and cultural ties to states and peoples of this vast region, Turkey is ready to act as a pivotal country in Eurasia.

By acting together, we can and we will help ensure lasting peace, stability and prosperity in Eurasia.

Thank you for your attention.