

determined to upgrade our democracy, to attain highest standards of human rights protected by consolidated transparency and accountability of the system.

We would not put any excuses in front of us for any shortcoming we had in this respect. A strong economy and a peaceful diplomacy naturally fostered our human rights practices. Growing awareness and expectations of our people on human rights issues have been an incentive in our reform process. In return, we believed that the Turkish people fully deserved benefiting from such values.

The requirements of EU harmonization have naturally played a crucial role in further accelerating our reforms. Actually, this has also been the case with all other aspirant countries. All institutions of our society, from civilian and military bureaucracy to the mass media and from the civil society to the Parliament, have been most helpful to us in our efforts. Civil society and NGO's, for which we have dedicated a chapter in our Government program have been major contributors to our efforts. We consulted frequently those NGO's focused on Human Rights issues.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Our reform policy has three main pillars:

- screening the Turkish legislation,
- becoming party to international human rights instruments and
- taking the necessary measures for full implementation.

We have been screening the Turkish legislation in view of international documents, such as the UN conventions, the OSCE documents, the European Convention on Human Rights and other Council of Europe documents, the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights, and, last but not least, the EU acquis and the Copenhagen criteria. So far, eight reform packages and two substantial set of constitutional amendments have been adopted.

Meanwhile, the adoption of the new Civil Code at the beginning of 2002 and the recent adoption of the new Penal Code are the other benchmarks of the legislative reforms.

As for the international documents, one can confidently state that recently Turkey has made impressive progress. Turkey is now party to the all principal human rights conventions of the United Nations. The ratification process of the two optional protocols to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights are also under way. Protocol No.6 to the European Convention on Human Rights, abolishing death penalty,

was ratified in November 2003. We also signed Protocol No.13 abolishing death penalty in all circumstances, which will be ratified soon.

The government has also taken important steps to ensure effective and full implementation:

- Comprehensive joint projects (in cooperation with the Council of Europe and the European Union) on human rights training for the security forces as well as the judiciary are continuing.
- Bilateral programmes with several European countries have also been initiated.
- The Reform Monitoring Group was established at political level to overview the progress in the actual implementation of the reforms. The Group which I personally chair comprises also the Minister of Justice and the Minister of the Interior. We convene regularly to address the issues related to implementation. We shall continue to do so.

The ambitious reform process ensured substantial progress, with regard to abolishment of death penalty, fight against torture and ill treatment, reforming the prison system, freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly, freedom of religion, functioning of the judiciary, civil-military relations, economic, social and cultural rights and anti-corruption measures.

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I would like to bring your attention to the fact that, Turkey has dared to speed up her reforms at very special circumstances:

- A major war has been taking place in a neighbouring country.
- International terrorism has been on rise.
- Even most liberal nations have been taking measures restricting fundamental liberties for security reasons.

Anyway, we take pride that our efforts are acknowledged by the international community. Our achievements have not only been appreciated in the West but also attracted attention from the East.

Distinguished guests,

Being encouraged by the title of this symposium, I would like to sum up our own tactics in human rights:

- First, sincere political resolve together with public support and civil society involvement;
- Second, legal and administrative measures combined with monitoring procedures.

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- Third, to see this as a process of perfection which needs constant attention and improvement.

In conclusion, I would like to convey our thanks to all who made the convening of this symposium possible. I wish you every success in your endeavours aimed at promotion and protection of human rights.

Thank you.