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CROATIA AND TURKEY: TOWARD A DURABLE PEACE IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

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INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman, fellow panelists, ladies and gentlemen: I am pleased to be here with you today to discuss the crucial role that Turkey has to play in strengthening the foundations of regional stability and security. Before I begin, let me just outline the main elements of what I believe to be crucial in understanding the role of Turkey in the region. Firstly, I want to discuss the ways in which Croatia and Turkey have worked together to further bilateral relations in the fields of economics, politics and security. Secondly, I want to address the constructive role that Turkey has played in stabilising turbulent Southeastern Europe, in particular its role in maintaining stability and security in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Indeed, Turkey has played a vital role in forging a lasting and durable peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Croatia and Turkey have worked closely with Bosnia-Herzegovina to bring peace to that war-torn country, in particular by strengthening the Federation between Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks (Muslims). Finally, I will address the issue of the future of NATO in Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular, and in the region in general. Here I want to outline a rather novel approach to responding to the challenges that the spectre of a long-term international presence poses to Bosnia-Herzegovina's longevity. Simply stated, it is conceivable that NATO's presence in Bosnia-Herzegovina—and by extension in Croatia, because Croatia wants to join the major European economic, political and security institutions—can be transformed from an open-ended peacekeeping mission into a regular NATO deployment. All that is needed is for Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia to become regular NATO members and then NATO troops could be deployed there on the same basis as the US troops that have been deployed in Germany since the end of the Second World War.

CROATIA AND TURKEY

Historically speaking, relations between Croatia and Turkey were defined by competing visions of national interest and of what constitutes an acceptable international order. By contrast, today there is a common view that the European Union and NATO are the anchors of peace and stability on the European continent and beyond. The structure of understanding and diplomatic relations between our two countries has developed through economic and trade measures. As the Croatian President, Franjo Tudjman, said during the Turkish President, Süleyman Demirel's recent visit to Croatia, "Croatia and Turkey neighbour the tumultuous Balkans. Even though our two countries have different geographic and strategic positions, and belong to different cultural spheres, our bilateral relations are nevertheless very developed. We enjoy such a degree of mutual understanding that both Turkey and Croatia are able to contribute to resolving complex problems in the Balkans, particularly in the territory of the former Yugoslavia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina." Despite certain cultural and

historical differences, Croatia and Turkey have found a common understanding that has been based on dialogue, trade and good diplomatic relations.

Turkey is clearly anchored in Europe, and has been a constructive power in two turbulent areas of the world. Turkey's cultural affinity and sense of moral responsibility in Bosnia-Herzegovina is understandable in the light of historical experience. Relations with Croatia are also grounded historically. Take for example President Demirel's statement to a joint session of the Croatian Parliament in 1994: "Historically our people share heritage and geography. History is born through mutual ties and cultural influences. It is therefore natural that our countries nurture the feeling of respect, love and friendship for each other. If to this already favourable climate we add modern possibilities and joint will, I believe that we shall promote Turkish-Croatian friendship and cooperation very soon."

In addition to the common Turkish and Croatian European orientation and values, Croatia's interests in developing closer ties with Turkey is also prompted by Croatia's concern about certain regional approaches, ill-thought out, such as the proposals to form a Balkan association or 'Euroslavia' on the ashes of former Yugoslavia. Policy makers have to understand that the predictable, irreversible and not deplorable—except in terms of the avoidable violence—dissolution of former Yugoslavia has created the opportunity for laying the foundations of a stable and durable international order in Central and Southeastern Europe. Countries like Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina have made a conscious decision to become part of Western institutions, namely NATO and the European Union. This is not the case with other countries from the former Yugoslavia. Croatia believes that European stability and security can only be fully achieved if NATO and the European Union expand eastward. Revitalising the transatlantic community and extending the ideas, values and institutions that underpin Western civilisation are the formidable challenges that Europe and the United States face. Turkey has a clear understanding of this historic opportunity and has itself made a similar transition following the end of the First World War.

JOINT EFFORTS IN PROMOTING PEACE: BEYOND TRADITIONAL GEOPOLITICS

Turkey's role in Southeastern Europe has become more important since the collapse of communism and the dissolution of former Yugoslavia. Turkey responded to the crisis and conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina with a constructive approach that helped to heal the wounds between Bosnian Croats and Muslims. Turkey supported Croatia's efforts to bring Bosnian Croats and Muslims closer together, through the establishment of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina within the framework of the Washington Agreements. In addition, Croatia, Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina developed a system of tri-lateralism to further their relations. This helped to steer Bosnia-Herzegovina closer to peace as well as closer to Europe.

Turkey's role in stabilising Southeastern Europe can be characterised as responsible and conducive to strengthening the foundations of a new international order in the region. During the worst days of the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, there were clear signs that the war could have become broader, drawing in not only neighbouring countries, but also the major powers. I am reminded here of Samuel P. Huntington's clash of civilisations thesis. Huntington's argument, of course, is that one of the central sources of conflict in the world in the conceivable future are the tensions arising out of the competing civilisations that clash at key points across the globe. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, we witnessed the clash of three civilisations: Eastern Orthodoxy, Islam and Western Christianity. Yet, Turkey played an instrumental role in mitigating the tensions between these three civilisations

because of its historical experience in the region and its understanding that international affairs should be based on universally recognised standards and values. Turkey has been an example of a responsible, secular democracy in a turbulent region. It has pursued policies that have strengthened European stability and the stability of the Middle East. Although conflict is endemic in international affairs, particular wars or conflicts are avoidable. Returning to the potential clash of civilisations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Turkey understood that the future of Bosnia-Herzegovina lies in close relations with Croatia and Europe. Turkey's own role and experience with European institutions, values and standards were crucial in bringing Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks together.

CROATIA AND BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA IN NATO

The collapse of Communism and the end of the Cold War fundamentally changed the economic, political and strategic framework of international affairs on the European continent. Although there is no generally accepted characterisation of the new international order other than the fact that it has gone beyond the Cold War, a consensus has emerged supporting the logic of NATO expansion. The first wave of NATO enlargement (to include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic) is proceeding according to schedule. The decision to keep the 'door open' to the second wave of members is a crucial decision that prevents Europe from being divided into the 'haves' and 'have nots.' As commentators have recently stated, the second phase, sometime at the end of 1999, will usher the entry of Croatia, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria, among others, into the fold of NATO. And of course, there will also be a third round.

NATO expansion is based on sound logic because enlargement is a response not only to the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War, but also to the existence of enduring security challenges that exist in the international community. NATO is the most successful alliance in history, and the end of the Cold War has not undermined or lessened its purpose in promoting stability and security in Europe. Extending that zone of peace and stability is the new challenge for NATO. NATO enlargement is part of a broader process of strengthening the new transatlantic partnership and the Partnership for Peace Programme. Enlarging NATO also means strengthening the emerging democracies and market economics of Central and Eastern Europe. Applying these principles to the Bosnian problem, I believe a NATO membership for Bosnia and Croatia offers the best long-term prospect for the full implementation of the Dayton Accords and even more crucially, for the lasting anchoring of Bosnia within the Western community of nations. Here, it is important to grasp that NATO membership has always meant to serve a strategic purpose, it is not a token to be extended for good behaviour or to be bestowed only when no risks or challenges exist. If NATO were to take a faint-hearted approach, the Alliance would not have been nearly as successful and the history of the Cold War might have been written differently.

Today, we have to be at least as bold as the architects of the most successful defence alliance in history were fifty years ago, so as to confront the challenges of European stability and security.

CONCLUSION

If we pause to reflect on recent history, today Europe and the United States face many challenges that they faced only a decade ago. What lessons have we learned from history? I would submit that the European Union and the United States have the ability and resources to confront directly the challenges that international problems pose. However, if we look at the response to the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the international community clearly lacked the will and the ability

to stop aggression. As Lady Thatcher wrote to President Tudjman on the occasion of the successful and peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia earlier this year: “Had the international community moved resolutely to prevent that aggression, thousands of Croats would not have lost their lives, their limbs, their dear ones or their homes. And had the Serbian aggression not been allowed to succeed against Vukovar and elsewhere, the authors of that aggression in Belgrade would not have been encouraged to move against Bosnia, and so that terrible, continuing tragedy would have been averted.”

In addition to the lack of will and the indecisive action by the international community, it is clear that Europe could not have acted as a united and cohesive actor without the direct engagement and leadership of the United States. This is one of the reasons why it is so important that the transatlantic community be revitalised. The New Atlantic Initiative has a crucial role to play in extending and revitalising the values, principles and institutions that underpin the transatlantic community.

The engagement of NATO in Bosnia-Herzegovina to implement the Dayton Accords demonstrates that only a credible and willing institution can be a catalyst for peace, stability and security. NATO is clearly the only institution that has both the resources and the will, as well as the ability to draw on both European and American diplomatic, political and economic strength to confront the challenges of a turbulent world.

Turkey, by virtue of its history, geography and power, is located in a pivotal part of the world. Turkey has made an enormous contribution to ensuring that NATO is the most successful defence alliance in history. As a secular democracy, and with its unique cultural traditions, Turkey played a vital role in bringing peace to war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Turning back to what lessons we have learned from recent history, we confront a problem that is very similar in terms of time, geography and patterns to the war against Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The crisis in Kosovo today presents to Europe and to the United States a challenge that requires the same decisiveness, foresight and determination that NATO demonstrated in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The crucial question is whether we will see history repeat itself with all the destruction, human suffering and turmoil that we experienced in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, or whether Europe and the United States will act in concert to avert another catastrophe.
