

## TURKEY: SETTING SAIL TO THE 21ST CENTURY

İSMAİL CEM

*His Excellency İsmail Cem is the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey.*

### INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK

The termination of the Cold War at the end of the 1980's is a turning point in the twentieth century as much as it is in the history of humankind. A transformation with vast global ramifications is taking shape. Global balances once more overturned, are being re-established. Although the "new world order" that many talk about has yet to be clearly defined, its basic components have more or less become visible; democracy, supremacy of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, adoption of liberal economic practices and peaceful settlement of disputes.

Today, while the international community is preparing itself to set sail towards new horizons, it is also faced with a series of resurfacing problems, such as ethnic nationalism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and terrorism. In other words, we are living hope and despair all in one and at the same time.

Arguably, there exist currently two opposing major trends in the world. One is the integrationist efforts represented best by the European Union, the other, "ethnic nationalism" which challenges the unity of the "nation-state" that left its mark on this century. I believe that the modality of interaction between these two opposing trends will in broad lines characterise the 21st century.

In the new international landscape, although developments of gigantic proportions are in the making in Asia, in the Pacific basin and in the American continent, which will be instrumental in shaping up the next century, European politics and security still remain to be at the heart of global balances.

Europe is putting on a new appearance. A new security architecture is emerging in Europe with the aim to forge stronger transatlantic ties which will also embrace the interests and the obligations of major international actors like Russia. With the new expansions of NATO and the European Union (EU), for the first time in history, we are inching closer to the prospects of eliminating the centuries-old divisions in Europe for good. We are closer to claiming this continent to be "whole and free." The ground is almost prepared to put into practice the concepts of "security for all" and "prosperity for all" in Europe.

### TARGET: TO BECOME A "GLOBAL STATE"

Today, endowed with the rich heritage of a glorious past, it is Turkey's duty both to itself and to humanity to complement and blend its original identity and purpose with contemporary values and ideals.

Turkey is now facing the task of rethinking its own universal purpose. It has to draw on the past, dream about the future and determine what original contribution it can bring to the grand walk of humanity.

The goal of today's generation should be to carry Turkey to the 21st century with the characteristics of a "Global State."

A "Global State... that acts as a role model with its democracy, secularism, respect for human rights and its traditional characteristic - tolerance... that truly fulfils the requisites of our great leader Atatürk's dictum; "Peace at home, peace in the world"... that competes with the best in the realms of science, technology and economy... and that becomes one of the major centres of attraction with its historical record, cultural richness, humanism, and sense of identity with all contemporary values.

Turkey, situated at the confluence of Europe, Asia and Africa, and three seas of historical significance where a blend of many cultures helped shape up our modern civilisation, has traditionally assumed a prominent role in the political equilibrium of the “Old Continent.” Its history has been shaped to a large extent by constant interaction with the outside world.

The foundation of the young Turkish Republic in 1923 was based on the masterly and realistic assessment of the international environment of the time. First, what history rendered an “attainable” goal was identified, then its strategy followed and finally the goal was reached.

Now, what is incumbent upon us is to make the syntheses that are both to the benefit of humanity and to our own; to follow the most appropriate avenues in Turkey’s best interests in global and regional balances; to bring the contribution of foreign policy for all to live in peace, security and prosperity well into the 21st century.

Turkish foreign policy represents a modern, democratic and secular state governed by the rule of law. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has traditionally assumed a noble task in the evolution of democracy and human rights. This mission, as one of the pioneers of a permanent evolution, will be carried further with renewed efforts.

#### HIGHLIGHTS OF CURRENT ISSUES

Once an outpost of a defence alliance that has made great contributions to upholding Western democratic values and freedoms against totalitarianism and tyranny, Turkey, in the aftermath of the Cold War, has assumed a far greater geo-political and strategic role at the centre of a vast land-mass stretching all the way from Europe to the centre of Asia. In this geography, to our north, Russia is still a powerful country engaged in a historic transformation and a new working relationship with the West. To our south, we live with all the tribulations of the entire Middle East region.

I do not find useful a discussion on Turkey’s “true location” in the world; whether it is European or Asian; whether it is in the Balkans, in the Caucasus or in the Middle East. Nor is there any need to choose “one or the other,” for Turkey is the embodiment of them all. That is our uniqueness, our richness and our strength.

Turkey is European for the last seven centuries. It does not feel obliged to prove to others its European identity.

If “being European” is a geographical fact, the greater part of Turkey’s history has transpired in a vast geographical area in Europe; a significant part of today’s Turkey is located in the European continent. Turkey is - at the same time - a European country.

If “being European” is a historical fact, Turkey’s history was shaped, for instance, in Bursa, in Kayseri and in Sivas just as much as it was shaped in Istanbul, in Edirne, in Manastır.

If “being European” is a cultural fact, then Turkey is a country that shares such values as democracy, pluralism, human rights and equality between man and woman, all of which constitute the basis of contemporary European culture.

Those who are familiar with Turkish history, would know that Turkey’s Western vocation is not something new. It is an ongoing process for more than a century and a half, with the aim today of integrating fully with Europe in all its political, defence, economic, social and cultural institutions.

There is one remaining major European institution in which Turkey has yet to have its rightful place; that is the EU with which it has an “Association Agreement” dating back to 1963. Consequently, its status in the Western European Union also remains unsatisfactory.

Full membership in the EU is a right for Turkey emanating from international agreements. On our part, we shall exert every effort to gain that right as soon as possible. We are also conscious of our shortcomings and shall continue to make improvements to remedy them. We shall urge the EU to comply with their contractual obligations and to use the same standards and criteria as with others. In any case, Turkey does not feel doomed to wait for an ambiguous time or outcome to realise this goal. Without turning it into an obsession, Turkey will continue to do all the work necessary for accession to EU membership, while projecting its political and economic dynamism to other regions of the world.

In this context, we will continue to make effective contributions to such regional and multilateral co-operative schemes as the Black Sea Economic Co-operation, the Economic Co-operation Organisation, COMCEC, (Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organisation of the Islamic Countries) Balkan and Mediterranean cooperation fora and the D-8, most of which were initiated by Turkey.

As the Turkish economy strengthened, the scope of its operations in the world has expanded. We will improve the political infrastructure for new economic openings, not to replace the existing ones, but to complement and diversify them. In this context, closer relations will be sought with countries with large-scale economies like India, Russia and China. A concerted effort will be made to improve economic ties with the American continent. The same approach will be adopted towards the Pacific basin.

On the other hand, it is one of our primary objectives to ensure that a main pipeline to transport Caspian oil to world markets will pass through Turkey. This will provide a safe and continuous line of transportation to the West, and will also meet our environmental concerns. In this context, I should underline that safeguarding the security of the Turkish Straits is vital.

Turkey wishes to increase and diversify further its strategic ties with the United States which has a special place in its foreign policy considerations based on relations of friendship and alliance. We co-operate closely with the United States, which takes a keen interest in the trouble-spots in our periphery, for the sake of peace, security and stability in the region.

We shall further develop our co-operation as equal partners with the Central Asian Turkish Republics to which we have a close affinity. We attach great importance to the preservation of their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. We shall continue to support them in their economic and social development within democracy and in their drive towards integration with the international community.

As a cornerstone of our multi-faceted foreign policy, we wish to further relations of friendship and co-operation with the Islamic world.

Respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and co-operation based on mutual interests constitute the bedrock of our policy towards our neighbours. Non-interference in internal affairs, border security and co-operation against terrorism are among the other criteria. It is in our tradition to respond generously to those who approach us in a friendly manner. It would be but natural that unfriendly behaviour should receive the response it deserves.

Speaking of terrorism, it is one of the worst scourges of our century. International co-operation in combating terrorism will continue to be one of our priority issues. The contribution of countries to this co-operation or their refrainment therefrom will be regarded as an important yardstick in our evaluations.

To our north, Russia, is a valued partner. Economic relations with Russia have flourished recently to the benefit of both countries. Trade, contracting services and tourism are rapidly developing and opening up new horizons. It is to be hoped that the reflexes of the past are totally abandoned so that this favourable atmosphere may have repercussions on collaboration in other areas, both at regional and international levels.

Despite the fact that the existing disputes with Greece remain unresolved, the climate of goodwill created in the margin of the NATO Madrid Summit hopefully will prove to be the boost needed for positive developments in our relations. We have also pinned high hopes on the work of the “wise men.”

Heavy armament with sophisticated weapons in the Greek Cypriot part of Cyprus, creates a security problem not only for the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, but also for Turkey itself. The EU’s insistence on opening negotiations with the Greek Cypriot Administration for full membership, in total disregard of the international agreements on Cyprus, is overshadowing the continuation of the talks between the two communities conducted under the aegis of the United Nations Secretary-General. The Turkish Cypriot people shall continue to enjoy both our political and military guarantees emanating from international agreements on Cyprus.

Turkey hopes that the obstacles on the way to the eventual success of the Middle East Peace Process will soon be eliminated and to this end is ready to make further contributions. Turkey is determined to invigorate its historical relations of friendship with the Arab countries. Relations with Israel are not directed against any country and Turkey sincerely considers them to be a contribution to peace and stability in the region.

We wish to elevate to the highest level our historical and close relations of friendship and co-operation with the Balkan countries. We support the existing multilateral co-operation schemes aiming to promote peace and stability in the Balkans.

The Caucasus is in our immediate neighbourhood. It is also the bridge to Central Asia. The preservation of the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Caucasian countries and the peaceful elimination of the existing internal and external disputes are key to the peace and stability in this region.

These are some of the thoughts on current policy issues that I wanted to share briefly with our readers. The issues are by no means exhaustive.

During our Administration, as the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, I will be keen to conduct a transparent foreign policy, totally in line with our traditional peace-oriented policy characterised by realism, pragmatism, consistency and continuity.

Turkey is ready to walk hand in hand with all countries willing to make the 21st century the most peaceful and the most prosperous times ever.