

# **“TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY: OPENING NEW HORIZONS FOR TURKEY AT THE BEGINNING OF A NEW MILLENNIUM”**

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## Abstract

The single biggest challenge facing the world today is the fact that threats to peace and security are becoming increasingly more sophisticated and unpredictable. In such a volatile environment, Turkey has been actively using her diplomatic, political and economic assets for the improvement of the human condition and containment of deadly conflicts. Turkey, with a multitude of opportunities, is poised to become a significant player in the coming decades. Contemporary Turkey aspires to join the European Union as a full member and to be a leading economic and political actor in Eurasia. Turkey will achieve these goals, and more, to the extent that we acknowledge the 21<sup>st</sup> century as an age of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. These will be the fundamental criteria by which success and progress are measured. To the extent that we develop rationalism, productivity and social justice as elements that complement one another and to the degree that we mobilize all the advantages that history, culture, and economics bestow upon Turkey, these goals will become more attainable.

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If foreign policy is built upon a balance of power, the nature of this balance is certainly changing: we no longer live in a world where sheer military force is the major determinant of a country's international status. The new paradigm sets the stage for a new kind of power - one that rests on economic vitality and persistence. As the world is becoming a truly global marketplace, economic factors coupled with historical, cultural and political assets shape a country's role for the new millennium.

Given these attributes of the contemporary power game, the decisive element is a country's ability to make optimal use of its comparative advantages. Turkey, with a multitude of opportunities, is poised to become a significant player in the coming decades. Contemporary Turkey aspires to join the European Union as a full member and to be a leading economic and political actor in Eurasia. We envisage an international mission that is no longer peripheral and confined to the outskirts of Europe. Our mission envisions a pivotal role in the emerging Eurasian reality.

I will elaborate on this later in the article. However, it would be useful if we first examine the current global realities and challenges that form the backdrop against which Turkey is trying to realize her vision for the future.

Perhaps the single biggest challenge facing the world today is the fact that threats to peace and security are becoming increasingly more sophisticated and unpredictable. Freedoms of the open society and technological progress can be easily exploited by stealthy crime networks with nefarious goals. Invisible, asymmetric threats are forcing the world nations to reevaluate their strategies for defending their homeland. Among the clear and present dangers we face, terrorism stands out as the most destructive and sinister evil.

The September 11 attacks painfully demonstrated that this scourge has taken on global dimensions in every way. Accordingly, dealing a decisive blow to sources of terror has become the humankind's collective priority. Turkey herself has suffered a great deal from this scourge, and is still a target. Naturally, we have always advocated strong international cooperation in combatting terrorism, in a comprehensive and non-selective manner. In the period ahead, we will, as before, remain at the forefront of the global efforts to eliminate this mortal threat. We will also continue to make vigorous efforts to ensure that terrorism is not equated with a particular religion or geography.

Unfortunately, there are also many other sources of instability and threats in our troubled world. While globalization proceeds at a brisk pace, vast areas of the world still suffer from poverty and underdevelopment. Unless we launch a conscious effort to reverse the trend, the ever-widening chasm between the richest and the poorest nations may cause further problems for world peace. While the steady expansion of democracy, rule of law and human rights around the world is a welcome development, we cannot ignore the existence of dark forces like xenophobia, racism and fundamentalism. In addition, ongoing regional conflicts and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction also pose a constant threat to international peace and stability.

In such a volatile environment, Turkey has been actively using her diplomatic, political and economic assets for the improvement of the human condition and containment of

deadly conflicts. This will be more clear when we take a look at the key issues shaping the current agenda of our foreign policy.

First, Turkey is doing her best to help preserve peace, security and stability in a triangle formed by the Balkans, the Middle East and the Caucasus. We strongly support conflict prevention and resolution efforts in a number of areas ranging from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia to Georgia, through diplomatic initiatives, troops and observers. Turkish-led initiatives like the creation of a *Multinational Peacekeeping Force for the Balkans* and a *Naval Task Force for the Black Sea* have already materialized. We are closely monitoring the unresolved conflicts in Southern Caucasus and proposed a *Stability Pact* for the region. We have also made significant contributions to the *Middle East Peace Process* as a facilitator. Our former President is a member of the Mitchell Committee which came up with a plan designed to reduce the existing tensions in the region and put the Peace Process back on track.

Secondly, we believe economic cooperation can be an effective way of enhancing regional dialogue and paving the way for long-term resolution of political problems. This is why we pioneered successful cooperative efforts like the *Black Sea Economic Cooperation Zone*. Our central position between Europe and Asia is a major asset enabling us to launch inter-regional initiatives. Despite our temporary economic difficulties, we are also doing our utmost to alleviate the difficulties of the less fortunate nations. As a percentage of GNP, Turkey is among the leading donors of humanitarian and development assistance on a global scale.

The dramatic events that unfolded in Afghanistan over the recent months showed us all that our own security and well-being are closely dependent on improving the lot of others. With this conviction, Turkey is taking an active part in every international mechanism geared towards rebuilding Afghanistan. In addition to contributing troops to the newly formed *International Security Assistance Force*, Turkey will also be helping with the establishment of a national Afghan army and police force. This is central to the success of the effort to forge a national Afghan identity and to enable the Afghans to thwart the encroachment of foreign elements like Al Qaeda.

Last but not least, we feel one of Turkey's major functions is to show that different cultural, religious or ethnic identities can exist together in peace and harmony. Especially in the post-September 11 period, this is perhaps the most important mission Turkey has been entrusted with. By her very form of government and way of life, Turkey demonstrates that pluralist democracy, secularism, human rights and the rule of law can take root and flourish in a predominantly Muslim society.

In this connection, the *Joint Forum* recently held in Istanbul between the European Union and the Organization of Islamic Conference has been an important step towards building new interfaith and intercultural bridges of cooperation. The event, titled "*Civilization and Harmony: the Political Dimension*," brought together around seventy Foreign and other Ministers from both organizations as well as hundreds of officials, press members and prominent scholars. I believe such direct institutional contacts are the best way of strengthening the global dialogue on issues of common concern and advancing the cause of peace.

This is how Turkey is embracing the 21st century. In the aftermath of the Cold War, changing circumstances have bestowed upon Turkey a special responsibility to make active

contributions to the preservation of regional and global peace and stability. Turkey is doing her best to live up to this historic task, with a clear vision for the future.

There are two major objectives that drive our vision for the future. The first goal is to make Turkey an integral part of the European integration process. Historically, geographically and economically, Turkey is already a European country. It is therefore quite natural that she should become a full member of the European Union, sooner rather than later. The substantial progress we have made in our relations with the European Union since the Helsinki Summit, and the outcome of the latest Summit in Laeken, give us further optimism in that regard.

There is no question that Turkey needs Europe. For us, the greatest benefit of the membership will be the consolidation of our place within the European family of nations on the basis of such common values as democracy, rule of law and human rights. But with her unique historical experience, cultural wealth, young population, dynamic economy as well as strong defense capability, Turkey also has much to offer to the Union.

When Turkey becomes a member, the Union will be transformed into a truly multi-cultural and multi-religious geography. This may well herald the beginning of a new era of increased mutual understanding, respect and cooperation between different faiths and cultures. I believe such inclusive, as opposed to exclusive, attitudes is exactly what the world needs at this critical juncture.

The second, but equally important goal, is to transform Turkey into a pivotal and prosperous country at the center of the vast geography we call Eurasia. Turkey already enjoys the most diversified industrial base, has the best-trained and equipped army and is one of the few deep-rooted democracies between the Balkans and Central Asia. The political, economic and security initiatives Turkey has launched, which encompass diverse regions, will also be instrumental in attaining this target. A much stronger Turkey capable of creating a constantly growing zone of stability and welfare around her is certainly in everyone's best interest.

These two goals are not at all contradictory: in fact, they complement and reinforce one another. They are also realistic goals that Turkey can achieve by using her historical/cultural assets as an axis of her development. Let me be more specific about how we see the Eurasian reality evolving in the coming years and our role in this fast changing landscape.

The central stage of this millennium, many observers agree, will be Eurasia, broadly defined as the geography stretching from Western Europe to Western China. Given the trends in production, communication and information technologies, Europe and Asia will form an integrated whole, interlinked and interdependent. Both will gain substantially by being part of the same entity. Furthermore, much of this millennium's economic development will take place in Asia. The advent of new energy resources and communication corridors bears witness to this emerging reality.

The post Cold-War political framework witnessed the re-appearance or re-confirmation of many new independent states. Almost all these 'new' states - in the Balkans, in the Caucasus or in Central Asia - are those with whom Turkey shares a mutual history, religion or language. This provides Turkey with a new international environment of historic and cultural dimensions. Furthermore, these new nation-states quickly embarked upon the task of rebuilding their economies as well as opening them to foreign investment and competition. Turkey, as a long-standing actor in these geographies, has become a vital partner in their

economic restructuring.

This strategic change corresponds with a new consciousness in Turkey. The role of a shared history and of parallel cultural characteristics is highlighted and put into practice in all spheres of our foreign policy. It is worth noting that there are twenty-six countries with which we have shared a common history, a common state and a common fate for centuries. This background provides for strong economic relationships and a unique platform for political cooperation. In this vast socio-political geography, Turkey has the optimal conditions and the required assets to become a provider of peace, stability and welfare, and to enjoy the opportunities presented by the new “*Eurasian Order*.” By virtue of her historical and cultural attributes and her privileged identity, European as well as Asian, Turkey is firmly positioned to become the strategic ‘center’ of Eurasia.

Whereas in the past, Turkey was mainly recognized for her strategic contribution to NATO, she now distinguishes herself through her economic vibrancy, her entrepreneurship and foreign trade. Coupled with a new foreign policy combining economic progressivism with historical and cultural affinities, Turkey is riding the wave of a new economic momentum, transforming her former regional role into a global one.

Consequently, Turkey is embarking upon the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a new sense of her global mission. Turkey's function as a ‘bridge’ to which we historically and justifiably attached so much importance, will become a thing of the past in the 2000s: she is moving away from being simply a ‘transit corridor’ or a ‘bridge over which Asia and Europe trade with one another and move their goods.’ Instead, Turkey in the 2000s will increasingly become a ‘terminus’ and a ‘destination’ country. In other words, Turkey's basic function ceases to be that of transporting or delivering energy, raw materials, and goods after receiving them from East and West. She becomes more and more a country that consumes, processes and with her added value, exports such inputs.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century began by giving signals that a large part of the Caspian-origin energy will be processed in Turkey, consumed in Turkey, and delivered to the West through Turkey. The eastern Mediterranean coast of Turkey, with the existing *Kerkük-Yumurtalık* and the prospective *Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan* links, will provide a major energy terminal and outlet for Middle Eastern, Central Asian, and Caspian oil. These developments, coupled with peace and stability in the region, will provide Turkey with a role as a world-class state situated at strategic crossroads.

If Turkey takes proper advantage of the years ahead; if she clearly identifies her goals, sets out with policies that have philosophical and ideological depth, and makes courageous choices, then the distance she must travel will certainly be shorter than what is anticipated.

Conditions and realities are changing in Turkey and around the world. Continent-spanning new geo-strategic balances are emerging. In this new age, information and communications technologies make it possible to compress into a few years developments that it took others centuries to achieve. This is a confluence of factors, which, if properly

understood and insightfully exploited, will impart tremendous momentum to Turkey. Turkey is the representative of a historical experience that is centuries - indeed, millennia - old; of a geography that has given birth to civilizations; of a republican revolution that serves as a paradigm of modernization for developing nations. As Turkish society becomes more politically and historically aware, and as her economy develops, she will see ever-expanding horizons in front of her.

Turkey's influence already extends over a broad region. The Turkish society and foreign policy institution today have realized what an immense advantage it is to share a common history with twenty-plus independent countries and their peoples. It is becoming more and more clear how cultural and confessional affinities add impetus to every sphere of human activity from economics to the arts. Furthermore, there is a growing awareness that Turkey is uniquely poised to serve as a genuine model for modernization in societies with Islamic traditions, and that there is great benefit in discarding outmoded complexes into the trash can of history and enjoying the privilege of being both European and Asian.

We are at a juncture in time when these realities are being related, debated and their value reassessed. Through a very dynamic process of self-questioning, Turkey is renewing her democracy, economy and her foreign policy. With the redefining of her foreign policy, Turkey is now able to stand out in the international arena as a genuine and influential actor, as a player with an identity that is unique and strong. Within this promising environment, the dynamics of Turkey's aspiration to be a Eurasian power center are taking shape.

When I became Foreign Minister in 1997, I outlined our vision for Turkey in simple terms: to transform her into a 'world state.' A world state positioned among the major centers of the world and representing a unique blend of civilizational assets, historical experiences and strategic attributes. A world state that is not a sole importer of foreign science and technology but actively contributes to science and technology. One that is not a mere observer of others' success stories but has its own achievements that sometimes make them envious as well. One that consistently develops its special relations with the regions with which she shares a common history. One that, in line with Atatürk's legacy, constitutes a role model for nations with parallel cultural backgrounds.

We will achieve these goals, and more, to the extent that we acknowledge the 21<sup>st</sup> century as an age of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. These will be the fundamental criteria by which success and progress are measured. To the extent that we develop rationalism, productivity and social justice as elements that complement one another and to the degree that we mobilize all the advantages that history, culture, and economics bestow upon Turkey, these goals will become more attainable. I believe that Turkey has the will and the capacity to make this vision come true, and is, indeed, on a sound course towards becoming a truly 'world state' in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.