

Turkey's Vision for the Transatlantic Partnership

Abdullah Gül*

Membership to EU and a genuine partnership with the United States are not alternative policies. On the contrary, we see it in the framework of our ties with the western world and will pursue both. As part of the Euro-Atlantic world, we in Turkey have been following the transatlantic tensions with concern. Yet a strong Europe including in foreign and security affairs and a robust NATO and transatlantic link should be able to coexist. The fact of the matter remains that the Europeans and Americans continue to need each other. Unilateralism or narrow coalitions would end up duplicating efforts and wasting our resources for defense and security. Now that Europe finally has been successfully overcoming the division of the continent and virtually "ending European history," time has come for another major project that would end the recent history in the Middle East. Lifting up the greater Middle East is an ambitious project. Neither the countries of the region, nor Turkey, nor the U.S. or Europe can tackle it alone. There needs to be a synergy in which Turkey too should be actively engaged.

* The author is the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs. *This article is based on his speech on 9 June to the Council on Foreign Relations Atlantic Partnership Program in Ankara.*

For those who are interested in international affairs, security, strategy, geopolitics and diplomacy, Turkey offers unique perspectives.

In this context, I recall a recent Washington Post article that reports a toast given by the German Ambassador in Washington to the incoming American Ambassador to Turkey. He reportedly urged professional diplomats on both sides of the Atlantic to help restore amicable relations and "stop the name-calling." In his words: "the North Atlantic Treaty alliance and the European Union are pillars of the same construction. There is no better place than Ankara to demonstrate that great vision."

Turkey is part of the western world. We share the same value system. My country is a member of almost every European and Euro-Atlantic institution. It is an accession candidate to the European Union. We have aimed at the highest standards for our democracy in accordance with the demands of our people. Political reform process in this direction is ongoing.

Turkey's EU membership is not only a technical step, neither for EU, nor for Turkey. In fact, Turkey's mission is greater than itself. My Government is eager to prove that a Muslim society can be democratic, open, transparent, pluralistic and modern, while preserving its identity. In turn, Europe will have to prove that it is ready to admit a democratic Muslim society and that it will not fall to cultural introversion. And together we will prove that a clash of civilizations is not inevitable.

Turkey has also firmly established its free market economy. The Turkish economy is bound with the EU through the Customs Union. The economic reform program that we run in cooperation and coordination with the IMF and the World Bank are already giving positive results. Our government is resolved to implement the program fully. Although not a precondition to open accession talks in 2004 we are determined to emphasize Copenhagen economic criteria as well. And we will continue to welcome investments in Turkey. In fact, the Parliament recently passed a law to further encourage foreign direct investments in Turkey.

Turkey aims to tap into the vast potential left unfulfilled in her region, and promote peace through economic interdependence and prosperity. We champion free market economy, trade liberalization and regional economic cooperation. Our advanced information, telecommunication and transportation networks can bind different regions to each other.

One concrete example as to how that could be done is seen in the energy field. Some 70 percent of world's mineral energy resources lie in Turkey's close vicinity. Turkey is not only a major consumer, but also, an increasingly vital terminal for the distribution of this energy wealth for Iraq, Iran, Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline will be the bloodline of Azerbaijan and Georgia, tying them to each other and to Turkey, and all of us to the European markets.

Concerning transatlantic relations, I should state our principal vantage point at the outset. Membership to EU and a genuine partnership with the United States are not alternative policies. On the contrary, we see it in the framework of our ties with the western world and will pursue both.

Turkey is sincerely committed to a healthy, robust and forward looking full partnership with the United States. From Central Europe all the way to the Far East, we see eye to eye on almost all strategic issues. The fight against terrorism and non-proliferation stand tall as foundation stones of our joint strategic vision. I have no doubt that, Turkey and the U.S. will take steps in the coming weeks and months to move their cooperation even further.

As part of the Euro-Atlantic world, we in Turkey have been following the transatlantic tensions with concern. The whole debate seemed relatively distant until very recently when the world seemed divided over the question of what to do in Iraq. However, having participated at the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting in Madrid, I was largely relieved to see that member states have been quick in addressing these tensions.

I believe a strong Europe including in foreign and security affairs and a robust NATO and transatlantic link should be able to coexist. Some on either sides of the Atlantic say that NATO is no longer relevant. But, if NATO has no enemy to fight and thus has become unnecessary, then with the same logic the EU and its ESDP is also redundant. However, I am convinced instead that we need both.

Perhaps NATO's new agenda would increasingly focus on issues outside Europe. The role that NATO is assuming in Afghanistan and in Iraq is telling. However, the bottom line is that NATO remains to be a valuable instrument to maintain the essential transatlantic dialogue and cooperation. The fact of the matter remains that the Europeans and Americans continue to need each other. Unilateralism or narrow coalitions would end up duplicating efforts and wasting our resources for defense and security.

Europe and the US need to move on. There is a brave new world of challenges and opportunities that await our joint efforts. For example, important roles and responsibilities fall on our shoulders to help Iraq regain its full sovereignty and build a peaceful and prosperous future at peace with itself and with its neighbors.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1483 of 22 May has vindicated the basic parameters of our policy towards Iraq. My government is in close contact with the United States and United Kingdom to contribute to this effort. We are also ready to facilitate the polish mission in Iraq. We aim to promote close relationship across the board with Iraq, with all segments of its people.

Now that Europe finally has been successfully overcoming the division of the continent and virtually "ending European history," time has come for another major project that would end the recent history in the Middle East.

The need for a better use of its natural and human resources was and is obvious. In fact, the call for reform in the Middle East is louder now more than ever. I myself have contributed to this call recently during the foreign ministerial meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Countries.

I expressed my view that countries in the Islamic world "must act with a refreshed vision in which good governance, transparency and accountability will reign, the fundamental rights and freedoms as well as gender equality are upheld, and there would be no place for blunting rhetoric and slogans." I cautioned that "we should first put our house in order. Rationalism should be our driving force, as we draw our strength from our spiritual values. Creating a

synergy from these values inherent in our being will be our test in, as well as our contribution to, our modern age.”

I challenge the view that modernity and democracy based on the rule of law, political and economic participation, and gender equality cannot exist in the Muslim world. The Turkish experience proves otherwise.

We have aimed at the highest democratic standards and are working relentlessly to achieve them. We have chosen integration with the world rather than isolation and reclusion; cooperation in place of confrontation; reform instead of inertia. We have fostered a vibrant civil society. Our women have been voting since 1934.

We were first criticized for our choices; now everyone understands. Turkey’s Middle Eastern neighbors, as well as Balkan neighbors, support Turkey’s bid to join the European Union.

Turkey as part of Europe, the Euro-Atlantic and the Islamic worlds will not be merely a bridge, but a point of convergence, a point of mutual embrace. This is my vision.

We will discuss with our colleagues in the region and with our American and European partners what we could do to muster regional and international support behind progress.

We will explore ideas like a regional good neighborliness charter or a code of conduct; a regional security and cooperation process; regional trade liberalization as President George Bush proposed; an enhanced economic and cultural interrelationship as the Euro-Med has been exploring; and establishing a regional anti-terror pact.

We will support now more than ever the efforts to attain ultimate Palestinian-Israeli peace, based on Palestinian full statehood and Israel’s unqualified security. We will offer all facilities to them at our country. We will continue to benefit from our excellent relationship with both Palestinians and the Israelis to contribute to the peace between the Arabs and the Israelis.

In conclusion I should underline that lifting up the greater Middle East is an ambitious project. Neither the countries of the region, nor Turkey, nor the U.S. or Europe can tackle it alone. There needs to be a synergy in which Turkey too should be actively engaged. The real world makes any talk of “going it alone” a fantasy.

I would like to direct our fantasy instead toward a cherished goal. That would be helping Professor Bernard Lewis’s next title to read “What Went Right,” rather than an update of “What Went Wrong” in the relations between Islam and modernity in the Middle East. And, I think Turkey has much to offer in that regard in synergy with the U.S. and the rest of Europe.

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