

GREECE AND TURKEY IN THE 21TH CENTURY – ACCESSION OF TURKEY TO THE EU, DIFFICULTIES AND PERSPECTIVES

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honour to address this distinguished audience today.

- Turkish People believed during the passed 45 years that Turkey would in due course become part of the European Community and we all conceptualized our future, as well as Turkey's destiny, in line with this deep conviction.
- We find ourselves today in a complicated and hardly comprehensible situation. Whether Turkey's accession is a **tangible reality** or a **mirage**. This can hardly be understood, even for those of us who have been active in this field for a number of years.
- Today in this panel, we should have been discussing **our common future** and what Europe and Turkey **can achieve together**. However, our main topics of discussion remain focused on problems accumulated over the past 40 years and the difficulties and missed opportunities therein.
- Of course, the mistakes of the past must be acknowledged as they have led us to this situation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- A number of hot topics are on the EU's agenda in particular and on the international agenda in general, such as:
 1. **Economic growth,**
 2. A much needed system of **sustainable development,**
 3. The needs of the **younger population,**
 4. The need to deal with unpredictable **climate change,**
 5. The **security of energy supply,**
 6. The need to keep a competitive edge vis-à-vis **China,**
 7. The future of common **Foreign and Security policies,**
 8. The risk of **Nuclear proliferation,**
 9. The need for a lasting and comprehensive **peace in the Middle East**
 10. A general need for **regional and global stability,**
 11. And last but not least, an **alliance among civilizations**
- We should be **devising our common perspective** on these issues in the 21st century. Instead, we are stuck between Ankara, Brussels and 26 other capital cities and bogged down in a discussion of how many chapters may or may not be opened and how the negotiations will ever progress.
- The current difficulties in Turkey's EU Accession Process may be classified under three headings:
 - i. Political Difficulties
 - ii. Technical Difficulties
 - iii. Sociological Difficulties

*First, let me underline some of the **political difficulties**:*

1. Political /Legal Dilemma

- The boundaries between **political and legal issues** have become **totally indistinct**. This has led us to a situation where **some political and some legal commitments are easily broken**. Some legal obligations have become politically manipulated.
- **According to** the Preamble and Article 28 of the **Ankara Agreement** -- the **legally binding foundation** of Turkey-EU relations, signed in 1963 -- the **aim is full EU membership for Turkey**. Still, the **Negotiation Framework** document prepared by the EU calls the accession negotiations “**open-ended**,” simply ignoring the legal context set in the preceding Ankara Agreement.
- The EU Council Decision dated 24 April 2004 have foreseen direct trade with Northern Cyprus and financial assistance for this part of the island. This proves a political and legal commitment **unanimously agreed by all Member States**. Nevertheless, this commitment has now been simply abandoned by the EU.
- The **opening of Turkish ports to Cypriot vessels**, on the other hand, is a **legal matter** with a certain technical aspect deriving from the Customs Union between the EU and Turkey. This legal / technical situation has nevertheless become a part of the political agenda.
- Furthermore, after the decision on starting the accession negotiations, new mechanisms are engineered such as the absorption capacity, benchmarks, public opinion, supposedly equal for all acceding countries and not **in fact** applied or brought into discussion in case of all accession processes. This in turn raises question marks on the intentions of the Union.

2. Size of Turkey

- Similarly, the political arguments on the basis of the **size and the population of Turkey** are puzzling to the Turkish public. Over the past 40 years, neither the size nor the population of Turkey has changed drastically enough to bring these issues to the agenda as a reason to oppose the accession of Turkey.

3. Brussels v. Capitals

- A common position taken in Brussels should remain valid, even in the face of public opinion back home. A public opinion stance **is not a decision taken by unanimity** and **cannot replace with the latter**. **A public opinion is not a given data, it is constructed and processed**.

4. Public Opinion in Turkey

- The European membership process, has been – and must be -- a very strong incentive for the reforms but it is slowly but surely turning into a major obstacle for Turkey on her way to enhance her entire standards of democracy, participation, transparency and accountability. This should not be read as Turkey has been

abandoning these principles and reversing its course. Nevertheless, only a few years ago, when the public support was high for the accession, the accession process and EU harmonization were convincing --and thus instrumental-- arguments before the public opinion to pursue reforms to consolidate participatory democracy, accountability, transparency and other high political standards in Turkey. As the process has lost momentum and the voices from the EU proved rather far from a consistent and decisive political will for Turkey's accession in the meanwhile, the credibility of the process and any argument on this basis have been negatively affected. It is no longer feasible to receive public support for reforms aiming at these highest political standards on the ground that they are imperative for EU accession. It has even become rather counterproductive as the confidence of the public to the process and the EU has been weakened. The observations and inputs coming from the EU are interpreted by the Turkish public in the light of this shaken credibility, with a consequent risk backfiring. Thus the accession process has become distracted from its final aim in terms of consolidating the highest political principles in the candidate country.

5. Timing

- Everybody is talking about the need of time. However, time is the most valuable asset in a changing world. Our necessities change, and, in parallel, our vision needs to evolve to be more acute in order to design a peaceful future. We are in dire need of time and Turkish – EU relations are bowing down as if we had another couple of centuries to wrap up our integration.

6. Turkey

- Some of the political arguments have indeed become irrelevant, since Turkey is a big and important country in this part of the world. Her stability reflects upon neighbouring countries. Her achievements as regards economic growth, creation of wealth, enhanced democratic way of living are of prime importance for the entire region.
- A new era has indeed began in Turkey together with “zero problem with neighbouring countries” principle and the openings towards Northern Iraq, Syria, Armenia and towards the whole Kurdish problem, although, admittedly, there are a number of subsequent problems and internal policy issues outbursts. Still, only very few leaders and opinion makers are really aware of these important changes in Turkey's policies and their impacts, which will drastically contribute to the significance of the role of Turkey in the region and across the world.

7. Battleground

- Basically, European integration should act as a catalyst to establish sound and peaceful relations. Oddly enough, the framework of our integration has turned into a battleground where all remaining problems are used as weapons to take hostage any membership prospects for Turkey.
- Now there is an immense opportunity in our hands to turn this complicated situation into a success story. An initiative taken together by Turkey and Greece, would decisively contribute to this prospect.

On the **technical front**:

- 12 negotiation chapters are open
 - 8 chapters are suspended
 - 4 chapters are blocked by France
 - And 5+1 chapters are said to be vetoed at the Council level by Cyprus.
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- Turkey has been negotiating for the past five years. Besides the accession negotiations, Turkey has a long history of legal harmonization with the Acquis due to the **Customs Union**, the final phase of which was launched in 1996.
 - Turkey has been **90% in compliance** with the Acquis related to the Customs Union, which is the backbone of the EU-Turkey relations. Turkey already **complies with 60% of the entire Acquis Communautaire**.
 - Numerous laws are enacted even only in 2009.
 - Average USD 16 billion FDI flows to Turkey per year. Turkey is the 6th biggest economy in Europe and 16th biggest worldwide.
 - The business community and economy require stability and predictability.
 - Still, several **screening report** have not been submitted to Turkey by the EU.
 - On the other hand, **28 chapters are opened** (by 21.12.2009) with Croatia and the **negotiations are expected to be concluded by the end of 2010**. However, there is **no time schedule** for **Turkey's** accession. Negotiations progress revolves around opening of 5 chapters.
 - We are talking about energy security, Italy-Greece-Turkey gas interconnection (ITGI), Nabucco Project, BTC and BTE gas pipeline, Blue Stream. Still, we cannot open the energy chapter.

In terms of the **sociological aspect**:

- The average age of Turkish population is 28. Young population in Europe sees very little difference, if any, between their way of life, music, entertainment, food and others and these of Turkish youth. They have already been in close contact with each other through internet and other social environments; including the student exchanges and tourism. They do indeed know and welcome each other into their own lives.
- Nevertheless, so-called **cultural differences** are continuously brought to the agenda.
- The question is very simple: **Do we want a mono-type Europe or a Europe of unity in diversity, enriched by different cultures?**

Dear friends;

- Turkey is a bridge between the civilizations, cultures and mentalities. Does the EU want to disseminate these universal values or not!
- Turkey has achieved considerable progress in terms of political reforms, legal harmonization, economic environment. Investments boomed and businesses anchored to the prospect of accession. The political bodies have shown commitment to the EU process and have acted accordingly; the public has duly grown in expectation. It is very difficult to reverse course when a country with all of its strata has been oriented on a certain path.
- But we now need to ask ourselves what kind of future we may construct for Turkey and Europe from where we are.

With regards to the perspectives:

1. Time wise:

- **In the short term;** the prospect should be the goal should be the healthy / normal continuation of negotiations, with a date to accede.
- **In the medium term;** the prospect should be the successful conclusion of the negotiations and the accession, as soon as possible.

2. Result wise

- In a **best-case scenario**, negotiations will soon be concluded with Turkey's accession to the EU. The **worst-case scenario** is that negotiations will be extended to a frustratingly long period of time and the accession dilutes.
- Our "to do list" for achieving a successful accession may be long.
- However, we can start with being **solution-oriented**. In that, both Turkey and Greece may have significant contributions in the formulation of constructive approaches and solutions.
- The **integrity of the negotiations** must be protected. The **determination** to successfully conclude the negotiations should never be shaken. The negotiations must be pursued with ever increasing resolution.
- And Turkey's accession must never be allowed to be used for **short-sighted moves in domestic politics** or as **cover for other issues**.
- There is no doubt that our common future will be brighter if we maintain the necessary will, and stay on the path of progress.
