

**ADDRESS BY H.E. MINISTER OF STATE MEHMET AYDIN ON  
“TURKISH CONTRIBUTION TO THE DIVERSITY AND  
RICHNESS OF THE ENLARGED EUROPE”  
(Lisbon, 20 November 2003)**

Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to have this opportunity to appear before this distinguished audience. I would like to thank the Commission Representation for organizing this meeting. Lisbon is in the edge of Western Europe where many ships were launched in the past to spread new ideas and to pave the way for new discoveries. And I am, as your guest today from Turkey, situated in the other corner of the Mediterranean - a country which embraces centuries- old experiences and many layers of cultural richness. We hope to make a humble contribution with this meeting.

In the discussions of today among foreign policy makers, the implications of power and values in international politics is one of the main topics. The 21<sup>st</sup> century's new agenda has been now set to witness further discussions on the challenging system of cultural, political, economic interaction among international actors; states and organizations.

The order of values introduced with globalization and the ever growing awareness of cultural identity and the revisited concept of

nation states allow for differences in reconciling our ideas or contribute greatly to foresee the prospects of cultural diversity and richness that we can introduce to each other. I therefore take great pleasure to address you here today given the special relevance and significance of the topic that will mark, I believe, the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Ever since the Treaty of Rome, the Europe's decision-making processes and institutions are gradually keeping pace with the expansion of the European Union's borders. The collective ambition of the EU for prospective and continuous enlargement made it inevitable for the Union to reassert the common values and beliefs while welcoming its new members.

It is therefore difficult to overstate the significance of the enlargement of the EU which will complete its present phase by next year. The fall of the Berlin Wall in fact rewarded the Union with the potential of new members that are now working hard to embrace, inter alia the values of liberal democracy and free market economy. Needless to say, each new member will bring unique inputs to the Union's already existing cultural diversity, system of values and more significantly to its future vision.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish now to touch upon the position of Turkey in this context. But please allow me to start with a background information with which many of you are already familiar. In many important senses Turkey belongs both to the Muslim world, and to the West. Speaking historically,

Turkish presence in the west for centuries did not pass without leaving and taking deep cultural influences. In addition to this, the Turkish Ottoman rule embraced very large Jewish and Christian communities not only in Istanbul but in different parts of Anatolia within a functioning Pax Ottoman. These communities lived together with their Muslim neighbours for centuries. This created an extremely rich commonality which held them together at peace

Besides, Turkey is a Muslim majority country, and Islam, as we all know, belongs to the family of Abrahamic faiths. Especially with regard to moral values these faiths have similar, and even identical in many areas, visions of life and commonality which exists in the field of art and culture in general.

The 'Alla Turca' movement for example, in Europe found its reflections not only in music with such works as Mozart's 'Turkish March' and 'Abduction from Seraglio', but also in architecture, ceramics, textiles and fashion. Europe started to recognize Turkey also through the brushes of numerous western painters who visited the Empire as of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, usually upon invitation by the Ottoman court, starting with Mehmet II. Among those many celebrated masters were, Gentile Bellini, Jean Baptiste Van Mour, Jean Etienne Liotard, Antoine-Ignace Melling, Amedeo Court Preziosi, Ivan C. Ayvazowsky, Jean Leon Geromé and Fausto Zonaro. Their work contributed to and sustained Orientalism in European art. The 'turqueries' period in the 18<sup>th</sup> century represented this influence on Western painting.

Coming down to modern history, Turkish experience of modernity, both intellectual and socio-political, goes back to the seventeenth

century. We cannot fully understand the periods of “Neo-organization” (Tanzimat) “Constitutionalism” and the “Republicanism” without taking account the Turkish relation to what was going on in the West. The secular Turkish Republic mainly came into being as a result of this West-oriented process.

And today Turkey is fairly intergrated with the West, for instance, at institutional level, as I will try to point out later on. Again, Turkey ratified, like the EU member countries, many international and European conventions, charters and protocols. For example, it ratified the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Protocol number 6 to the European Convention on Human Rights, so on.

I am saying all this in order to show that Turkey with these (and many others) characteristics is not just a country among others. An organic dialogical relationship between Turkey and the EU may, in fact I believe do, result in the actualization of many possibilities for both parties. For example, Turkey’s membership to the Union is closely related to the future vision of the EU and will effectively help transform the EU into a global actor. Turkey’s full-membership to the EU will contribute not only to the maintenance of stability and peace in Europe but also to the spread of the values on which EU is founded to the region and beyond. In fact, with Turkey’s entry, the Union will reach new horizons in the international relations of the EU.

Turkey has always been seen as an element of stability in a region which fraught with conflicts and potential disputes much due to its

historico-cultural experience, and now secular-democratic form of government, stable structure and military power.

The EU's greatest achievement has been to help secure an absence of war amongst its member states, and enlargement will further this achievement and reinforce the values that are fundamental to security and peace across the continent and beyond. In view of that, Turkey's EU membership will contribute to a truly dialogical relationship, thus mutual understanding peace and stability in the regions neighbouring the Union.

There is no need to emphasise that the EU has proven its value beyond doubt. It turned strife and mutual destruction into peace, stability and prosperity. It is trying to create a balance between the order of value and that of power. I am glad to say that Europe is now heading towards developing a new concept of reelpolitik with strong moral dimension. Only with such political approach can we might reduce the volume of hatred, alienation and violence, all of which have now global impact on our lives. The enlargement process will play a key role in this systematic and structural change. The values the EU members cherish and policies will have a far greater global reach and impact with the continued process of enlargement.

Turkey has as much experience in the reconstruction process of the crisis regions as it has in the prevention of regional conflicts. Turkish initiatives have taken part in every international peace-keeping operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania, the Middle East and Georgia.

Turkey took over the command of ISAF in Afghanistan from Britain and successfully carried out this difficult task. The experience and standing of Turkey in the regional conflicts will canalize the EU's negotiating power and peace creating influence over the whole region. Also, the stabilising role Turkey has been playing in these regions will also be strengthened both vertically and horizontally.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is unfortunate that certain circles are attempting to present September 11 as the harbinger of a "war of civilisations and religions" and thus playing into the hands terrorist of all kinds. I am of the opinion that it is not correct nor is it politically wise to create the impression that an inter-religious or cultural conflict is inevitable. It is more reasonable to see beyond that the causes of various conflicts are more concrete, though complex, and lurk in our failure with regard to establishment of justice, rule of law, democracy and a descent standard of living. Unfortunately, in many parts of the world millions of people seem to have nothing to lose. The rich and the powerful world actors seem to have, at least most of the time, serious hermeneutical difficulties. This is partially true with regard to the Muslim world. In this respect, the EU membership of Turkey can contribute greatly to the creation of a rich and multi- dimensional "middle space" between the West and the Islamic World and thus pave the way for a descriptive, critical and existential dialogical process resulting in experiential knowledge, creative understanding and ultimately a

sustainable peace of culture. Turkey has much to offer to further this unique process, and carry it further beyond its physical borders.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The most significant point particularly is that Turkey's full-membership will both prove that cultural differences can indeed coexist and that a salutary interpretation of religion and religious culture are compatible with, also, value-oriented modernity. Such a development will demonstrate that Christians and Muslims could indeed live together, in the same political and economic union. This will seriously challenge the philosophy and trump cards of both Islamic and Christian fanaticism.

Turkey's membership will bring an end to the criticisms that the EU is a "Christian Club" and accusations of rising racism and thus enable the Union assert its ever developing universal identity based upon universal values as stated in the draft text of the EU constitutions. Furthermore, Turkey seems to be the only country at this historically important turning-point or juncture that can impact the views in the Islamic world about Europe and about the West in general.

Turkey's membership will further strengthen the position of the country in directing the Muslim community in Europe to a broader and liberal interpretation of religious life, a reality of the whole Muslim World of Europe and Europe's more than 10 million Muslims. A clear vision of religious life coexisting with a secular political space will eradicate the radical tendencies of religious fundamentalism which will only be possible

only if Europe is confronted with a model that by and large has managed to unite Islamic culture and modernity.

Distinguished Guests,

Confining Europe's foundations to specific religious denominations will only serve to the purposes of those who argue for an inward-looking Europe and the old philosophy of "the West and the rest". Today's Europe should transcend unenlightened conservative, narrowly continental or regional mindsets so as to understand and shape international developments in the sense I tried to point out a little while ago.

As the Union reaches its age of maturity, it is all the more difficult to confine the value-oriented Europeanism to a specific geographical region, system of beliefs or customs. Some circles, however, resist such liberal views. Nevertheless, Europe is heading towards embracing a modern multicultural social structure instead of big nation-states with narrow vision of national interests under the cover of reel politik. Such an understanding will indeed facilitate to transform our ancient continent into a leading powerful guide. Breaking ideological boundaries, Europe will be better equipped to identify and implement political goals on a global level. The values and experiences of the Renaissance and Enlightenment and post-modernity should allow Europe to welcome lights and colours of other cultures and world-views as well. As the Preamble of the Draft Constitution reaffirms "unification of Europe in diversity" is the major aim here. It is high time now that we should broaden the intellectual and moral borders of this unification.

In sum, the reformed and enlarged European Union with Turkey as a member will be a role model for unification in diversity for other regions as well. This new vision will demonstrate that diversity and differences may well be accommodated on the basis of common values and interests. Europe will become more influential as it resists new dividing lines while projecting its values to other parts of the world. This will promote intercultural tolerance and understanding. It will also enhance the strategic reach of the European Union and reinforce its role as an international actor, as I have said at the beginning of my speech.

In late 19's, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey, told a visiting journalist the following:

*"We must think of the whole of mankind as being single body and of each nation as constituting a part of the body. We must not say: 'if there is an illness in a certain place in the world, what does that matter to me?' If there is such illness, we must be just as concerned with it, as though it happened right in our midst."*

This vision has paved the way for Turkey to become member to almost all the major European organizations and institutions as of the 1950's. In this context, Turkey signed an association agreement with the EEC back in 1963, applied for full membership in 1987, and completed Customs Union with the EU in 1995. Turkey's candidacy for membership was recognized at the EU Helsinki Summit of December 1999. The December 2002 Copenhagen European Council decided that *"if the European Council in December 2004, on the basis of a report and*

*a recommendation from the Commission, decides that Turkey fulfils the Copenhagen criteria, the EU will open negotiations without delay.”*

The opening of accession negotiations with Turkey as soon as possible will demonstrate that the EU is determined to unify Europe without creating dividing lines. This is a historical mission both for the EU and Turkey. This will reaffirm the common values that constitute the very basis of the European Union.

Thank you for your kind attention.