



THE OPENING ADDRESS OF
MS. ÜMİT BOYNER
PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF
TÜSİAD
AT THE 43RD GENERAL ASSEMBLY

January 17th, 2013
Four Seasons Hotel, Istanbul

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Honorable President, Esteemed Members of the Council, Esteemed TÜSİAD members, and Distinguished Members of the Media, welcome to our 43rd General Assembly.

I feel excited as this is the last time I'm in front of you as the President of the Board of Directors of TÜSİAD; now that I have fulfilled my mission I feel a great sense of relief and also a little bit of sadness.

First of all, I must say that I feel the satisfaction of handing over the mission to very competent hands. The emergence of the possibility of a peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem enlivens my hopes. I am delighted to observe the signs of an end to our 30 years old national nightmare. Arriving at the conclusion of the solution to a problem corroding our social fabric warms my heart. We can always think in our own way about the methods. We may have different reasons to look for a solution. Nevertheless, almost every social segment asks for a solution now. Everybody says that now is the time of communicating by means of words, not arms. All of us – whoever we are – whatever identities we adopt – we are the children of this land. We deserve peace and solution for ourselves and for our children. I expect that we will focus on the solution of the Kurdish problem as much as on terminating the terrorism. This optimistic outlook balances my feelings about leaving and related sadness.

Parting times are always difficult. It is hard to leave the habitual and make a clean break. Maybe the most difficult is to separate from the colleagues. I feel a deep gratitude to the members of Board of Directors for the three years we worked side by side: I am proud of this work and it was my pleasure to work with them; I thank them for so many things I learned from them. With their solidarity and with the support of you, fellow TÜSİAD members, I was able to resist to the pessimism, and “I did not let the darkness reaches up to the neck” as Çetin Altan says, even in the most stringent days.

The poet Özdemir Asaf who impressed me quite a lot in my youth, says in his quatrain “*Bookkeeping*” as follows: *Whatever I won run out, whatever I lost remained / Whatever I said run out, whatever I listened remained / I arrived to the country of knowledge, to the land of dream / Whatever I taught run out, whatever I learned remained.*

I want today to present you a kind of bookkeeping. On behalf of myself and my Board of Directors.

Esteemed members of TÜSİAD,

During the three years of my presidency, I traveled to many parts of Turkey and the world. I participated to important meetings. I was able to observe how Turkey and the world are changing. Wherever I went, I took part in discussions and I explained my opinions, along the lines of the principles of our association and the goals of our Board of Directors.

In Turkey I saw the vitality created by the dynamism of the country and by the globalization; I saw the ensuing change with the speed of light. In many parts of Turkey I observed business community demonstrating its energy, creativity and efforts to build a better future. I shared with the students their demands for a better education and better universities.

Just talking with them cheered me up; however from time to time, developments such as increasing censorship tendencies in education, inability of the universities in acquiring academic autonomy, multiplying numbers of arrested students was quite depressing.

I observed admiringly women holding on to the life in spite of the widespread violence against women and struggling for a better future for themselves and their children. I witnessed the lovingness of our citizens, young and old, in every part of the country and I drew inspiration and strength from them.

Wherever we went, we explained what should be done for the future of Turkey, according to our opinions. We shared our economic vision in Anatolia; we kept away from the traps of regionalism but we shouted out loud against the unfair advantages of the unregistered economy vis-à-vis the registered one. We emphasized that we were speaking for the common good of the country and received enthusiastic support from the people who understood that the real fight is the struggle for the welfare, wellbeing and peace.

Always we defended our cause of making Turkey one of the foremost countries of the world. We shared our opinion about what should be done to make Turkey richer, freer, fairer, more democratic and more transparent. We kept the call for a new constitution always on the agenda. For any court case, whenever needed, under all conditions, we raised our voice for the supremacy of law.

We defended the right of all citizens to be fairly judged, whatever their names, social status, identities, or past histories are, whatever they are accused of. When we insisted that the arrangement on the separation of powers as designed by the constitutional changes of the 2010 Referendum were inadequate, or even inappropriate, we were heavily criticized. Today we are witnessing that most of our critics have approached towards our position.

In the sphere of economy we supported every measure we believed proper, but we also discussed structural problems, hidden under the current bright performance and which must be addressed if we are to join in the major league of the global arena.

Time and again we were on the podium to voice our opinions on the importance of technologic breakthrough and creativity, on what should be done in the field of energy, on the gravity of the ecological problem and on what should be the centers of attention of the business community.

Satisfactory economic indicators, general dynamism of the country, forward looking hopes and ambitions, this gratifying outlook was often shaded unfortunately with the fatal work accidents,. The work related mortality figures reflect how much (or should I say how little) we value the individual in our society. We felt in our heart the pain and the shame of the death of three workers per day on average, losing their life in work related “accidents”, but which may be better named as “sending to death with aforethought”, as shown by the last coal mine disaster in Kozlu – Zonguldak.

We will keep saying that the accountability of the administrators, the respect to the individual rights and to the supremacy of law are not abstract wandering, but true concrete requirements for the prevention of this kind of heart breaking disasters.

We were attacked as an institution numerous times. Our attackers did not flinch from distorting the history. Even after we corrected them repeatedly, they were content in their distortion. We acted with a clear conscience, knowing that there is nothing we cannot account for, within the framework of the basic principle of our association.

There were times when I was personally subjected to some verbal abuse. I was undaunted by these characterless aggressions coming from the ones who think that being a woman is a weakness in itself. I kept saying everywhere what I believed and what I thought true.

We did not think that permission was necessary to speak as citizens. We acted with a belief that the problems of the country are our responsibilities. As one of our previous presidents said in another context, TÜSİAD “is not an association of canary lovers”. We did not think to change our discourse and our attitude at the whim of the day, we never did so.

We participated countless meeting abroad. Following the global crisis, we observed the shock of the destruction of the world as we know it and the efforts of constructing a new order. In Korea, in Mexico, in the meetings of the World Bank, in the discussions within the BUSINESSEUROPE, we took our part in the quest for new approaches to the management of the world economy.

TÜSİAD contributed to these efforts considerably. What we did contributed also to the increasing international interest in our country as much as the economic performance of Turkey and its improving credit rating. European business community observed clearly the high cost of the parochialism of its politicians using a repulsive discourse and trying to exclude Turkey from the EU.

Without exaggeration, I would like to record that, to think about and understand Turkey, we are a reference point in every way; this fact became quite manifest during the last three years. Everybody understood well the weight and the significance of the economic power represented by our members. It is also better understood now, that we are not after our narrow-minded economic interest, but we are the sentinels and the defenders of common economic, social and political interests.

We benefited from our upright attitude in defending free thinking and from our belief in the discussion and the pluralism of idea as opposed to the culture of submission and obedience. I believe deep in my heart that the winner of the struggle between the culture of submission and the culture of freedom of thought and expression will determine the future of Turkey.

Esteemed members of TÜSİAD,

We are at a crucial turning point of our history. We are rebuilding the republic. We want that this building endeavor creates a more democratic, truly secular social order, where the supremacy of law and separation of powers are the established norms. The only way to achieve that is through the creation of a colorful and pluralistic discussion platform. Repeating a phrase I used when I assumed this office, the essential problem of Turkey is meeting “its democracy deficit”. Our welfare, wellbeing and future depend on meeting this deficit, as much as they depend on meeting the current account deficit.

At the end of the three years of my office as the President of the Board of Directors of TÜSİAD, I believe that we live in a country whose standing, orientation and conduct are essentially healthy. But to say the truth, I am also deeply concerned with the probability of a Turkey stepping on its own foot and falling, drifting on the booby trapped roads of arrogance.

Turkey has entrepreneurs with high levels of self confidence, ready to challenge the world, struggling with all their might, to overcome the adverse the global economic conditions. In

every part of the world, they grasp businesses which do not grow on trees, and doing that, they develop close social contacts in the countries they are doing business. This dynamism of working and doing business deployed with an ever increasing vitality is one of the principal sources of the strength of our country.

Another such source is our historical identity. The importance and the value of this historical identity go beyond an adulation and emulation of the past. The impact of the choices made by the rulers of this land on the current identity of Turkey cannot be overlooked.

If Turkey is in the year of 2013, a global center of attention with its economy, sociology and politics, if considering its geography, it is in a position of influencing its neighborhood, an underlying cause is its quite original history, full of radical transformations in decisive moments.

Without doubt, the current successes of Turkey are the result of the good governance, the stability, the ability of channeling the social energy we experienced during the last 10 years. Nevertheless I want to emphasize that Turkey and its current rulers owe their current status to the pursuit of reforms going back to Selim III, to the imperial edicts of Tanzimat and Islahat, to a framework defined and created by the constitutionalist periods of Meşrutiyet and the Republic.

We should not forget that this is the framework which made us in the beginning of 2000s, a source of inspiration for the region as a EU candidate country. Turkey has a global significance because of the synthesis seeking efforts which has its roots in this history and which can be further elaborated in the future. This is the reason of the global interest in Turkey. This is why the words and the attitude of its rulers are followed with due attention.

Such a position is doubtless flattering. But we must recognize that this position necessitates also acting responsibly and sensibly. The responsibilities include, the deepening and strengthening the social accord and solidarity in the sphere of domestic affairs. And in the sphere of foreign policy, the responsibility means to assess the power of Turkey correctly, to reflect on its values intensely and to produce policies deep rooted in reality.

I believe that our historical and social richness is more than enough to enable us to accomplish all these and to achieve our goals.

Esteemed members of TÜSİAD,

TÜSİAD participated to the evolution of Turkey, but it evolved as well. This association has existed for 42 years now, by means of its members. It developed using the energy of its members. It keeps being effective, voluntary and independent by virtue of its members. We are an association of broad minded business people and institutions whose thinking horizon covers both local and global vistas and inspires society.

I was talking about the new Turkey. Our efforts are to make this new Turkey a first class democracy, a major economic power, a country where every citizen feels as the citizen of a country in its glory days. To attain this goal we have primarily to invest in human capital. We must persist in carrying out what we intend, and build a suitable environment to create employment.

We must strengthen the competitiveness of Turkey not only in the context of our export goods or the diversity of the countries we are trading, but also by enabling our young population to be brought up as the best equipped, best educated, thinking, producing, creative minds of the world.

We know and we believe that we can become a developed country only by expanding the rights, opportunities, prospects, participation and liberties of our people.

Esteemed members of TÜSİAD,

As the conclusion of my office term and my address approaches, I have to make the list of some of my debts, which are also hard to repay.

As I have said at the beginning, the encouragement of my colleagues at the Board of Directors, with whom I worked in harmony, was my strongest support to resist to the numerous shocks we went through during these three years. The warnings and the suggestions coming from you, fellow TÜSİAD members, was always instructive. Your devotion in the committee works and your spirited solidarity at the critical moments always reinvigorated my enthusiasm for my mission.

And there are also our publicly unknown heroes, whom you all know well. The people who stand behind every president, supporting her on anything she needs, helping her to make all she says is factually correct, in accordance with the institutional principles, meaningful and interesting for the general public.

I want to express in your presence, my thanks to the TÜSİAD organization, first of all to the General Secretariat, and from the department heads to the freshest employee, all of them, including the secretaries without whom nothing can be done; I thank them all for standing behind me during my presidency, for encouraging me with their effort and with their love.

I want to thank you all, for keeping this institution alive, for being here, by my side, and for listening to me. I also wish the greatest successes to the new President and members of the Board of Directors; assisting them will always be my duty.

Goodbye.