



TURKISH INDUSTRIALISTS' AND BUSINESSMEN'S ASSOCIATION

SPEECH DELIVERED BY
ÖMER SABANCI
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF TÜSİAD
AT THE AWARD CEREMONY OF THE
“TÜSİAD BOSPHORUS PRIZE
FOR EUROPEAN UNDERSTANDING”

January 25, 2006
Rahmi M. Koç Museum

MEMBER OF THE UNION OF INDUSTRIAL AND EMPLOYERS' CONFEDERATIONS OF EUROPE (UNICE)

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Secretary Straw
Minister Gül
Your excellencies, distinguished guests
Dear friends and colleagues,

Good evening.

I am deeply sorry by the tragic incident that took place Monday morning when 9 employees of the Turkish Foreign Ministry were killed in a brutal traffic accident. I would like to offer our condolences to their families and to Minister Gül.

As chairman of TÜSIAD I feel privileged to present Mr. Jack Straw, Britain's Foreign Secretary TÜSIAD's Bosphorus Prize for 2005. I thank you all for sharing this evening with us. We are particularly pleased and grateful that Foreign Minister Gül could participate in this happy occasion.

The recipient of TUSIAD's Bosphorus Prize, our guest of honor tonight, Secretary Straw has become a household name in Turkey during the course of the British Presidency of the EU.

We appreciate deeply the tremendous efforts of the Secretary and his colleagues at the Foreign Office to secure the commencement of accession negotiations at the appointed time, on October 3rd. Ambassador Sir Peter Westmacott's tireless and constructive work towards the same goal should not go unmentioned either.

It was indeed to show our appreciation and to honor the Secretary's efforts that we asked Secretary Straw to accept the Bosphorus Prize. We are grateful for his acceptance of the Prize and for his kindness in taking time off from his very busy schedule to come to Istanbul. We also thank Ambassador Alptuna for his invaluable help to make this evening come true.

As you all know it was not easy to reach October 3rd. The process proved to be exceedingly difficult, full of acrimonious debates at times. At one point rupture was a real possibility. At the end common sense prevailed. The interests of both parties in continuing the process were too overwhelming and a parting of ways, was arguably not affordable.

It is no mystery that TÜSIAD has been an ardent advocate of Turkey's EU vocation. We worked hard both domestically and in Europe to make sure that Turkey remained on course. We are therefore thankful to all those who are responsible for making sure that the negotiations did indeed begin.

We supported the Turkish government's efforts and determination in pursuit of this goal. We particularly valued Minister Gül's stewardship in the diplomatic field. We will continue to support the government as it continues to take the necessary, if somewhat difficult, steps to further Turkey's progress towards the European Union. Just as we will make sure that Turkey, its challenges and its assets are better and more clearly understood by the peoples of member countries.

So far the EU accession process has benefited Turkey. The customs union was an important turning point. The dynamics of the customs union began to bear fruit only after the severe economic crisis of 2001 though. The harsh but necessary rationalization of our economic policies in the wake of the crisis helped restructure Turkish manufacturing and service industries. Our democratic credentials today are higher than they have ever been. Turkey is a freer country and despite the difficulties that we occasionally encounter in our judicial system

the rule of law has become a supreme value for Turkish society. We are looked upon by our neighbors and beyond as a remarkable example of political and economic transformation.

We are firm believers in the EU's vocation as a global actor, as a force for the betterment of the international order. Therefore we wish the EU to overcome its current difficulties, which we would like to treat as transient. We root for a new, energized, proactive Union that the world needs.

Turkey will be an essential component of such a Union. We are also convinced that without Turkey the potential of the European project will fail to materialize in full. It would serve us all therefore if the dialogue between the Union and Turkey from now on were more reflective of such realities. We all need to be more cognizant of our common interests and the benefits of cooperation.

Turkey is in the middle of the most volatile regions of the world. Whether in the Balkans, the Black Sea, the Caucuses or the Middle East, its policies and constructive engagement are of some consequence for the stability of these regions. As an energy corridor, an economic hub and a transit route to the Middle East, Central Asia and beyond we are strategically located to further the integration of Eurasia. This vast region from the British isles to Japan is the world's largest trading area. This is also the area where trade and economic integration would continue apace, to generate the world's wealth for the foreseeable future.

In some sense Turkey's choices of identity, strategic preference and political orientation will help shape the 21st century. If this axiom is correct, then a European Union that aspires to more than complacently preserving its wealth, comfort and privileges would benefit from Turkey's admission. To challenge the twisted wisdom that prevails in some elite circles as well as the popular level, I would suggest that it is far better for Europe's borders to end at the Eastern borders of Turkey than its western borders.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is no surprise that Britain emerged as Turkey's most consistent and vocal champion in the EU. This is partly a result of long standing ties of friendship and alliance between our two countries. But it was also because the British government understood the need to think more strategically about the EU's future. Many member countries alongside Britain had an eye for the long-term, beneficial consequences of Turkey's accession. It is because of their collective vision that support for Turkey materialized.

Finally, I wish to say a few words on Cyprus. As an organization we had a critical role in changing the nature of the debate on Cyprus in this country. Today we maintain that the Union committed a grave error by admitting a country that had unresolved border problems as a member. It was wrong to reward Greek Cypriots with membership when they displayed blatant disregard for promises they made to the UN and the EU prior to the referendum of April 24, 2004. It is heart wrenching that the EU proved incapable of keeping its promises to Turkish Cypriots because of obstructionism by one of its members.

Turkey's new proposed action plan that was made public by Minister Gül just yesterday is yet another step in the right direction. It shows that Turkey is eager to solve the issue and is prepared to engage in constructive dialogue with all parties. This new proposal is a call for ending the long-standing conflict, to end the division of the island and last but not least to give back to the decent people of TRNC their fundamental rights. We hope that the UN and the EU will heed this call.

In this context we appreciate Secretary Straw's principled stance to meet with President Talat at the Presidential building despite protestations on the part of Greek Cypriots.

In short, ladies and gentlemen, Turkey-EU relations and Turkish membership in the EU have a significance that go beyond their particular framework. We are sure that the British government will continue to be our friend and ally in this long and possibly arduous process. We hope that we will be able to celebrate with Jack Straw the day of Turkey's accession in the Union just as we celebrate today his acceptance of our modest Prize.

As I end my words, I thank you all for listening to me and invite you to enjoy your meal. His Excellency Abdullah Gül, the Foreign Minister of Turkey will address you right after the main course and present the Bosphorus Prize to Secretary Straw.

Bon appétit