



TURKISH INDUSTRIALISTS' AND BUSINESSMEN'S ASSOCIATION

**THE SPEECH DELIVERED BY
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BOARD OF TÜSİAD AT
THE CONFERENCE WITH THE
EUROPEAN POLICY CENTER,
BRUSSELS**

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Dear Minister, Distinguished Guests, Welcome

Today is the first anniversary of the start of the accession talks between Turkey and the European Union. We are gathered here to celebrate and reflect on that momentous development and on the current state of relations between both parties. Although the picture may look bleak to you at present, the reasons that led us to Turkey and the EU starting the accession negotiation on October 3 of last year are still as viable as ever.

It is with the goal to help that process of reflection and protect these relations from the hazards of political expediency, demagoguery and ignorance that TUSIAD, the Turkish Industrialists' and Business Association undertook to organize Turkey@Europe_Week.

Turkey@Europe_Week is one of the major components of our ambitious communications programme. Between the 3rd and the 5th of October, TUSIAD will host a series of political, business and cultural events in Brussels, Paris and Berlin so as to present a side of Turkey, which is not widely recognized or appreciated in Europe. Our activities will range from press briefings to high-level political meetings and classical music concerts. In addition, the Week will feature a photography exhibition here in Brussels, a cartoon exhibition in Paris as well as a ceramics show in Berlin.

Our working hypothesis for the activities of Turkey Week is simple. Turkey's accession to the EU cannot be achieved if we fail to convince European public opinion of the benefits of Turkey's EU membership. Therefore, we see our task as building bridges between our society and European societies just as the Presidency conclusions of December 17, 2004 recommended.

Through our communications campaign, we take our messages directly to the European public. We are convinced that if we succeed in reaching the hearts and minds of wary Europeans, we can bring them to make a fair assessment of Turkey's EU membership. By the time we achieve our goal and this dialogue is opened in earnest, Turkey itself will have changed in ways hard to imagine today. Such a Turkey will then be recognized for the valuable asset that it is in more ways than one for Europe and the Europeans.

I say this with full awareness of the obstacles currently standing on the road towards Turkey's full membership, as today the mood in several member states is highly hostile towards further enlargement of the EU in general and, specifically, the EU's enlargement to Turkey. In my view, enlargement fatigue has corroded the once solid and unquestioned conviction that the Union serves everyone's interests.

The cartoon crisis, terrorist incidents and problems of integration related to Muslim communities in Europe have unleashed some old devils in Europe. Extremists have started setting the agenda and those who seek dialogue and political accommodation have increasingly steeper hills to climb.

In Turkey too, the voices of Euro-skepticism as well as Euro-vilification have become louder. Numerous court cases may give the impression that the country is regressing.

The enthusiasm of the Turks, who feel they have been treated unfairly by the Union on the matter of Cyprus, has been tempered. Support for the cause is weakening. Let us not forget that Turkish Cypriots with Turkey's support and encouragement voted "yes" to Europe, to unification and to peace. We are seriously disappointed that the Union, which prides itself for being a community of values where rule of law reigns supreme is penalizing them. The Union itself demands that Turkey take further steps on Cyprus as stipulated in the additional protocol. And, in my humble opinion, there appears to be no magic formula for breaking the gridlock on this matter.

Prominent politicians, like Nicholas Sarkozy, have publicly committed themselves to a position in which they deny Turkey's right to EU membership - even though they must know how harmful such a position is to the EU's own interests. In our country, the government's enthusiasm appears to have waned as we enter an election year. The opposition expects political returns from its scathing attacks on the requirements of the EU process.

However unpleasant the current landscape looks though, TUSIAD does not despair. We have been here before. We overcame similar difficulties. We have managed to keep Turkey on track and convince our European counterparts that they had a vested interest in this integration process. Throughout the 1990s, TUSIAD made sure that the lines of dialogue remained open.

We pushed for economic, political and administrative reform and made our case to the European elites, who were at best skeptical about Turkey's will and determination to move forward towards accession. We helped mobilize our own public and led the way in putting pressure on a reluctant political class.

We always took it upon ourselves to make sure that the accession process remained on track. We protected it from those who were aiming to derail it or worse to bring it to a halt. As Turkish business people and as TUSIAD, the foremost voluntary organization of Turkish business community, we felt it was our duty to assume this responsibility. This is in our interest and the values of the EU are our own. So, we are battle trained for the struggles ahead.

We look at the accession process from a European as well as Turkish perspective. Our positions and politics reflect our thinking about the future of Europe of which we believe Turkey to be an integral part. When we look at the EU's challenges we think of the ways Turkey can contribute to overcoming these. We believe in the EU's global vocation and we are committed to Turkey's participation in it.

The rejection of the European Constitution was a symptom of the 'political apathy' that is increasingly widespread in Europe. At a time when the Union needs to act from a global perspective, we see domestic politics in Europe acquire a more nationalist coloring. This summer's catastrophic war in Lebanon and the developments in its aftermath showed unmistakably that the Union must have a unified voice in its foreign and security policies. The EU is now a game maker in the Middle East and will have to bear further responsibilities. One of the reasons why Turkey decided to join the UN forces in Lebanon was to show its solidarity to the members of the European Union.

Strategic affairs – as important as they may be - are not the only area in which Turkey will and can contribute when it comes to determining the future of the EU. The Turkish economy, which has experienced record growth in recent years, has the potential to become the engine of growth for the Union. Turkish business, when given good direction, has proved to be imaginative, hard working and innovative. This is why Turkey has consistently featured on the list of the rising economic stars of the next quarter century. It is a hub for investment in the region surrounding it. Some countries in Turkey's vicinity may currently be in a state of turmoil but at some point they will have to be reconstructed. Also, Europe's energy security and diversification of its energy resources will increasingly depend on Turkey.

We set an example to our neighbors by our economic performance as well as by our political preferences. We still work on improving our democratic standards. Our success in European integration will give hope to many, both in terms of what can be accomplished in their countries and in terms of their own aspiration to live in peace and harmony with the rest of the world.

Turkish women are increasingly better-educated, represented in higher numbers in the labor market and excel in professional careers. Our novelists, artists, filmmakers and musicians have a voice and a place in the world's buoyant artistic and literary circles. In short, more than ever, we are contemporaries of today's world.

We are confident that Turkey will be on time for its appointment with the EU. We expect the EU to be there as well. We are monitoring closely the EU's efforts for better economic competitiveness, more efficient institutions and stronger political unity. We have the means and ability to help make the EU a true global actor, the strongest economic, political and institutional entity on the world scene. And it is only such a Union that we wish to join.

I could go on ladies and gentlemen. Instead, to conclude, I will reiterate my contention that the structural imperatives for integration are strong. Ultimately, the troubles that cloud the horizon in our relations will be cleared in due course. And, in order for this to happen, we need to act together and listen to one another with open hearts as well as open minds.

I hope that our efforts and activities during Turkey@Europe_ Week will be the start of a brighter and more fruitful future in EU-Turkey relations.

Thank you.