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**“BOĞAZIÇI SEMİNERİ”**

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Dear Guests,

It's a great pleasure for me to welcome, on behalf of TÜSİAD, this distinguished audience. Today and tomorrow we will be together for the Second Annual Seminar of the Institut du Bosphore. We strongly believe that the Institute will contribute to the cultural, intellectual and economic interpenetration between France and Turkey. And I hope this Seminar will be yet again an important milestone for the generation of a healthy interaction between the two societies and the deepening of our already existing cooperation in many spheres.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Turkey's long-standing aspirations to become part of the EU have culminated in Turkey after being granted candidate status for EU membership in December 1999. Since then, our political system was reformed with the guidance of the European Union accession process. Steps to meet the requirements of the Copenhagen criteria brought about a remarkable shift of power from the military to the civilians in Turkey. Our laws became more liberal, our civil and penal codes were rewritten, minority rights were more frequently articulated and our administrative apparatus gradually adjusted itself to the EU way of doing things. Our foreign policy became more active and outward looking. Turkey took courageous steps towards resolving the Cyprus problem and assumed constructive roles in peace making in its very troubled neighborhood.

Furthermore, the current economic crisis brought to the fore the development level of Turkish economy. Prior to the 2000s, Turkish economy was vulnerable to all sorts of domestic political developments not to mention global crises. However, in the last decade Turkish economy, with financial markets being as indicator, didn't notice any political instability. That is thanks to the radical structural reforms of 2001, which rendered the Turkish financial system more transparent, efficient and resilient vis-à-vis external shocks.

In the long-term projections extending to 2050, Turkish economy will be among the top ten in the world. Its closer political cooperation with its neighbors and the gradual positioning of these neighbors as an extension of Turkish market testify this significance.

On the other hand, the financial crisis hit Europe hard and it took a long time to fully appreciate its comprehensive impact. The EU painfully learned what could not be continued, what habits ought to change and what needs to give if its model, the result of a long, conflict ridden history was to have any chance to survive.

With the change of the center of gravity of the world from Europe towards other regional power zones, particularly the low-cost but high skill Asia-Pacific zone, the exigencies of coordinated policies under the G-20 decisions to mitigate the effects of the global crisis, the necessity of strengthening the transatlantic alliance, the EU needs more than ever to strengthen its economic and political influence and adjust its institutions in order to have a remarkable weight in world affairs. This will go in tandem with the institutionalization of multilateralism at the expense of unilateral actions.

It is true that the political configuration and ideological outlook of Europe has drastically changed rightwards since 1999. But the EU's commitments vis-à-vis Turkey, or any other candidate country, can not be dependent on shifting political moods in the member states.

Under contemporary strains of globalization, the understanding of "*fortress Europe*" will be economically, geopolitically and culturally self-defeating. It would turn Europe into a parochial, ethnocentric, and peripheral peninsula of Asia, the position it had before the rise of European hegemony.

The EU can regain the capability to influence surrounding neighborhoods partially with the accession of Turkey as a new member. With this decision, Europe can reformulate its enlightenment tradition to make room for piety in a secular polity. The European Islam, liberal, tolerant and modern can become the model for Muslim populations throughout the world. This can also be a remedy to the demographic decline of the continent.

Given the fact that almost half of the chapters are blocked due to the different non-technical political reasons, there is a failure for both negotiating parties; Turkey failed to unblock the hurdles and accomplish the opening criteria for the chapters and some members of the EU failed to provide the necessary impetus for the successful conduct of the negotiations.

Dear guests,

As TÜSIAD, although the negotiation process has advanced slowly in the last years, our commitment to the EU membership remains intact. Being an important actor of the Turkish civil society, we aimed to address this issue and encourage a debate on both Turkey and EU sides regarding social, cultural, political and economic perceptions and relations.

We are of the opinion that in technical terms, the goal of full membership in 2014 can still be attained should the technical harmonization process be accelerated following the elimination of the political barriers. Both Turkish and the European public should be well aware of the negative economic and political consequences of a complete failure or a standstill of the process in coma. To this end, we have invested time and energy in keeping lines of dialogue open with our counterparts as well as public opinions in member states.

Within this context, we have planned a long-lasting project in France. As you know, the establishment of "Institut du Bosphore" in 2009 represents a long-term and sophisticated process where the objective is to bolster links between the two societies, to openly debate topics related to global politics, economy, society and culture with a view to highlighting Turkey's involvement in global society and in particular its close ties with the European Union and France. Its mission is to facilitate common reflection of French and Turkish people on Europe and current global issues. Its goal is to abate unfounded prejudices against Turkey and to build an objective platform for free discussions.

Distinguished friends,

As a Member of TUSIAD Board, presiding TUSIAD Country Communication Committee and a member of Institut du Bosphore Scientific Committee, my efforts will be concentrated on presenting French public opinion the opportunity to better understand contemporary Turkey and to evaluate the path of Turkey towards the EU membership.

The economic, social and cultural globalization raises enormous challenges for us to maintain and intensify the historical ties between France and Turkey. Young generation take it for granted, if they do not dismiss, the acquis of the past, regarding both the European Union and the bilateral historical partnerships. Consequently, we should do our best to avoid separating our societies from each other.

We have a great responsibility to explain to our people, to convince them that France and Turkey have strong interests to build their future in Europe together. I am confident that through this initiative, we would be able to achieve a continuous and objective voice in France.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Now, I leave the floor for Institut du Bosphore Scientific Committee Co-chairman Mr. Kemal Derviş.