

Address by H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Prime Minister of Turkey
on
"The Future of Turkish-American Relations: Acting Together with a Common Vision"

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*** The following is an unofficial translation of the address ***

Mr. President and Distinguished Guests,

I salute you sincerely, and I want to express my gratitude for gathering with you here in this period of important developments for the USA and for the world. I would like to thank the Brookings Institution for hosting this event. On this note, I would like to thank the President of the Institution, Mr. Strobe Talbott, for his positive contributions to the improvement of Turkish-American relations. We are under a roof that holds a prestigious place in the think-tank world of Washington, DC. I would also like to express my appreciation for Mark Parris, who served as an Ambassador in Ankara, and his colleagues for running the Turkey program with immense success.

The American elections that took place on the 4th of November directed global attention to Washington, DC. As a result of a long and exhausting campaign, a turning point has been reached. We would like to congratulate President-Elect Mr. Obama, Vice President-Elect Mr. Biden, and the Democratic Party one more time because of their major success. I am talking as someone who knows election campaigns and their challenges: this was a different atmosphere, a different campaign, a different struggle, and a result that made the impossible possible. Mr. Obama created an optimistic expectation with his “Change” themed rhetoric in the USA and around the world, the bar has been raised. The raised bar, and the increased expectations bring about a very different framework. This will present opportunities for new beginnings and courageous decisions, but the implementation of the promises is going to be the real push for change in the world. I believe that Mr. Obama will assess this opportunity in the best way possible. Our friendship and partnership that have been strengthened under President Bush will be restored and elevated under Mr. Obama.

Distinguished Guests,

The close alliance between Turkey and the United States is based on common values such as democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law, and free market economy. As of today, another dimension of this relationship that requires more attention consists

of economics, trade and investment. We find it quite insufficient that Turkey, as a country that is a part of the global economy with its 7% average growth rate in the last 3 years and its dynamic private sector which has trade links with 5 continents, had a trade volume of only 12 billion dollars with the United States in 2007. We have worked on this issue many times, and we will keep insisting on it. This is why we will continue to pay deserved attention and give priority to this issue with the new administration under Mr. Obama.

Turkey is a country that is integrated with the global economy, that follows the latest technological developments, that succeeded in becoming the 6th largest economy in Europe and ranking 17th in the world as mentioned earlier, that continues its democratic reforms, and that is in the process of accession negotiations with the EU. This is where we stand today. Turkey is also an accredited partner with its young population, dynamic entrepreneurial class, versatile diplomacy, and its modern armed forces. Turkey's perspective on the future is out of the ordinary. It has reached the 3rd spot in the world after the USA and China when we look at its responsibilities in terms of international commitments. There are 22 Turkish firms among the 250 largest contracting firms in the world. This makes Turkey more important especially from the perspective of the countries that it collaborates with.

Although Turkey and the USA experienced differences in their perceptions of national priorities and foreign policy approaches from time to time, our strategic goals have been the same. We have had these difficulties during my term in office as well. We have tried to define these challenges, and we have tried to explain that they derive from misunderstandings and miscommunication; I think we have an agreement on this subject now because we have common goals. Turkey aims at maintaining peace and stability in the region and in the world. I have faith that our cooperation will deepen and continue in the new period ahead.

Dear guests,

The toughest global financial crisis that we have experienced since the Great Depression of 1929 is the most debated issue in the world agenda today. We are very pleased to contribute to efforts at tackling the crisis as a member of the G-20. It is impossible to go untouched by as big a financial crisis as this which affects the whole world. This will have a negative effect on us as well. However, I would like to remind you that Turkey is very experienced in this area. We have been preparing well for this process as a result of the lessons that we have learned from the financial crises of the 1990s as well as from the devastating crisis of 2000-2001. We are able to maintain the economic outlook that we have today only from deriving lessons from all those negative developments, and we have succeeded. Especially for the banking sector, I do not assess these developments as an economic crisis - I see them as a financial crisis. And it is for the sole reason that we have lived through a similar crisis before that we are not experiencing major difficulties today. But this does not mean that it will not affect us at all. We are observing some of its signs right now. We have taken major steps in the banking sector. We made sure that our banks were ready for this global crisis. In the course of the 2000-2001 crisis, the credit returns reached 35%, but we have never encountered a situation in which they go beyond 6%. This is valid even now. However, in some places the banking sector presents itself as 'coy'. From time to time, we observe credit callbacks. We have been warning against this: Please do not fall to this mistake because the people hit by the callbacks will become your customers again in the near future. Do not lose your customer portfolio. We are warning them against this. Of course, we, as the government, have to take determined steps and talk to them. You can give them money easily, but what matters is the financial management. The banks are looking for ways to guarantee their well being in the process. Similarly, the government has to make sure that the opportunities of our nation and our citizens are not being wasted by certain sources. Honesty and solidarity are key elements of tackling such a crisis, I give great importance to them, so we must make sure that the necessary steps are taken by keeping in touch with the representatives of the private sector and the financial sector. We plan ahead accordingly. Otherwise, the cost of this period will be overwhelming for the country, and we are not ready to pay for it.

The current global crisis will be solved not only through the individual measures taken by world countries, but also through international cooperation and common decisions. In this context, we are ready to work together with the United States and other global actors to share with them our experience. This is why we are here today. We are going to exchange ideas as to what can be done to solve the crisis in the G-20 Summit initiated by President Bush. This summit will present an important opportunity as the ideas and the contributions of the G-20 countries will be brought up in the agenda. During the summit meetings, the realistic expectation is to conduct a healthy analysis of today's financial crisis and prioritize steps to be taken. However, I would like to ask whether or not the expectations from this summit can be met – this is a question mark for me. In order to follow up on the current efforts and to accelerate the process, can the G-20 -- which used to meet on a foreign ministerial level until today -- be transformed into a leaders' summit? This can be one of the most important steps. I believe that we will put forward an important agenda in this direction as the G-20 countries.

Distinguished guests,

Turkish foreign policy performs a productive role that values the security-independence balance and that contributes to regional and global peace. It has an active role. We are in dialogue with all the parties in Iraq. We are working with the Iraqi government in full cooperation. My colleagues and I often go to the region. Similarly we receive frequent visits from the Iraqi central administration to boost efforts at working together. We have been playing an active role in the post-war Lebanon. We are mediating between Syria and Israel while at the same time contributing to the peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine. The summit process that we have started with Afghanistan and Pakistan is still alive. Meanwhile, we are in intense efforts to realize our "Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform" project. Our regional and international plans are not limited to these issues. Our foreign policy agenda covers an array of issues from the solution to Africa's development challenges to environment and security issues related to global warming.

As you know, Turkey has acquired 151 votes out of 192, and has been elected to have a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council for the period of 2009-2010. This is noteworthy considering the dialogues up until now, and the result that we got from this step that was taken 5 years ago. Turkey will continue its contributions to peace and security under the UN umbrella with its comprehensive and active foreign policy principles. Our country took on a unique responsibility especially because it is a part of the Transatlantic pact and the Western world. In this framework, full accession into the European Union is the basic strategic preference of our foreign policy. We will continue taking determined steps towards our membership. We aim at having ‘zero problems’ with our neighbors. We want to realize this. This is why we continue with the principle of “winning friends, not enemies”. When we came to power 6 years ago, our relations with our neighbors were not good at all. Our issues with Greece were at their peak. We did not have an ideal relationship with Bulgaria and Romania. In the South, diplomatic relations with Syria were almost non-existent. This was the same for Iraq and Iran, and for the countries of the Caucasus, primarily Russia. Now, I can safely say that we do not have serious issues with any of these countries. We have healthy ties with all of them in terms of trade, politics, military and the economy. The relationship with these countries depends on mutual trust and consistency. And it makes it possible for Turkey to be a contributor in world peace. Our attempts at turning a new page in our relations with Armenia are still in the works. Turkish, Azeri and Armenian foreign ministers came together in the framework of UN General Assembly. I want to express here as well that we are determined to maintain this atmosphere of dialogue and cooperation.

We expect the new administration in the USA and in Congress to understand where Turkey stands and avoid creating situations that would harm the Turkish-American friendship. I would like to underline the importance of US support in establishing a common history commission that we have offered to Armenia. We can turn the Caucasus into a region of peace and stability with a leadership that is bold, honest and open minded. Turkey has been supporting the territorial integrity of Georgia since the beginning of the Georgian crisis, and helped third countries to send humanitarian aid to the region while sending aid itself. We had a Moscow visit at the time that the crisis

escalated, and we have presented them with the project that I just mentioned: the establishment of a Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform. We wanted to achieve this platform based on geography for the stability of the region. It consists of five countries. These countries are Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia. Well, how can we reconcile Azerbaijan and Armenia? How will peace prevail in this region from now on? As you know during the Minsk Process, the USA, Russia and France had taken on the responsibility to secure peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This could not be achieved for 17 years. The Nagorno-Karabakh problem still exists after 17 years. Then, we have to look for alternative solutions. I believe that the solution to this matter will also help solve the Turkish-Armenian conflict. We have worked on these theses for a long time. What about the Russia-Georgia conflict? I believe that if we can agree on a 5 party cooperation and sign it, the Georgian conflict will be solved by maintaining its territorial integrity. Because the common interest of all countries lies in the stability of the region. It lies in mutual respect. We have offered this to all countries. Russia said 'yes', and then Georgia said 'yes'. We moved on to Azerbaijan, they said , and during the football game between Turkey and Armenia, our President had received a 'yes'. This has been confirmed later on during the talks with the UN as well. We are hopeful on this matter. We want to continue the process. I wrote a letter to President Kocharyan in 2005. I passed on my suggestion to create a common history commission. Look, we opened all our archives. The documents have been catalogued , they are still being catalogued. There are over 1 million documents that had been classified. Expose your documents if you have them. Let us expose more documents from third countries if they exist. And let us work on them. At the end of this process, we, politicians, can sit down and make the final decision. Then, we can do whatever is necessary. However, if you choose to get results by using diaspora lobbies, I want you to know that Turkey is a closed door for this kind of engagement. Our main concern is to increase dialogue among the countries in the region and create the atmosphere to discuss the issues honestly.

On that note, another message that I want to give is on the Cyprus issue. This has been an ongoing problem for almost 40 years now. We sincerely support a fair and permanent solution in line with the negotiation process of UN that started on the 3rd of September.

Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) proved their peaceful and productive attitude in 2004 by accepting the UN solution plan that was a result of years of negotiations between the two sides. Here, there are some people who know the truth, but some of you may not know the whole story. As a leader who was involved in the process, I would like to underline the hard work we have conducted during the 2004 campaign with EU countries, President Bush, the then foreign minister Mr. Colin Powell, and with the UN representatives led by Mr. Annan. The result that we wanted to achieve was to get a 'yes' vote for the Annan Plan from Northern Cyprus. When I asked what would happen if TRNC said 'yes' and the South said 'no', the EU leaders told me not to worry because whatever would be given would be given fairly to both countries. And the interesting part is this: the referendum took place on April 24th, 2004 with a 65% 'yes' vote from TRNC and a 75% 'no' vote from the South. A week later on May 1st, 2004, Southern Cyprus was admitted to the EU while the North kept on being punished. Now I am asking you, is this justice? Is this an honest approach? There is another side to the story. Mr. Annan prepared his report on the 28th of May. That report is still on hold in the UN Security Council. 4 years have passed since then, and we still do not know the status of the report. The Secretary General prepares his report and the result is nowhere to be found. Is it not our right to investigate what this is and what had been underlined in the report? It is our right. We have constantly been asking about this, but we got no reply until today. I am having a hard time understanding this. I hope with this new period, we find an answer because we will rightfully look for the report. We have to reveal this information.

Then the Cyprus issue is used against us in the EU process. How can you do this? How can you admit Southern Cyprus in a process that goes against the *acquis communautaire* and then threaten us with the Cyprus card? We cannot say 'yes' to this. We say what is meant to happen will happen. I always say that we have thoroughly studied the Copenhagen political criteria and the Maastricht economic criteria. The injustices are being recorded in history. I believe that. Just tell us where you really stand with the Copenhagen Criteria, if it will not work out, then we will create the Ankara political criteria and keep going. Similarly, if the Maastricht Criteria will not work out, we will pick up the Istanbul economic criteria and we will keep growing. Our institutions are

already compatible with EU institutions. Actually, Turkey is more advanced than most other countries in the EU. We know how those countries are doing as well. We are ahead of most EU member countries with regard to the Maastricht Criteria. The numbers speak for themselves. Everything is out in the open. It is not fair to ignore Turkey despite all this. We expect the international community to stay loyal to their promises and take concrete steps. I believe that such steps will have a positive effect on the Cyprus process as well.

One of the main problems of the 21st century is, without a doubt, global terror. The September 11 attacks had a massive effect on the international community as well as the American public. Turkey has been one of the countries that understood the tragedy of September 11, and it has taken side along the USA and its allies in fighting global terrorism. Regarding the terrorist activities in Turkey, the 5th of November 2007 was the first time that President Bush had expressed clearly that the terrorist organization in Turkey is the common enemy of the USA, Iraq and Turkey. He also announced the sharing of real-time intelligence and declared the common struggle. After that the process of information sharing started. Needless to say, we are hoping that this cooperation which is vital for Turkey will keep on increasing under the new US administration as well.

Another important matter on our common agenda is the situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan. I would like to emphasize the significance of the developments in these countries for the region and for the world. Turkey has historical friendships with both of these countries. We are utilizing this special relationship for the maintenance of peace and stability in South Asia. We see our presence in Afghanistan as a long term responsibility, and we continue participating in the reconstruction efforts by providing services in education, health, and agriculture. There is a point here that I would like to underline. Dear friends, in areas dominated by terror, it is not adequate to pump money into the region. We hear about how much money flows into Iraq right now. Be it 500 billion dollars or 1 trillion dollars, I do not know. But, I am assuming that it should be more than 500 billion dollars. The information that I get indicates that. I do not suppose that Afghanistan is included within this figure, I think even more cash is flowing into that

country. I have been to Iraq and I have been to Afghanistan, but I did not observe an uplifting situation there. Where does all the money go? Think about this, we have passed in front of the National Defense Ministry - the building was still destroyed like it was on Day 1. It has been 6 years, this building could at least be reconstructed or a new one could be built. I am also thinking about the effects of these on the morale of the public because I know that it is very important to protect and raise these public utilities under any circumstance – war, civil war or terror. The perspective of a people that was devastated is very different from the perspective of a people that has been resurrected. We need to pay attention to this. Is Afghanistan different? It is just another catastrophe. Right now, we are not giving money to Afghanistan -- we are investing in Afghanistan. What do we invest in? Education, health, roads, running water, etc. If you see how people live there, you will notice that it has nothing to do with humanity. So, what can we do there as human beings? We said we should build schools to rid them of ignorance and we did that. Every health facility had been destroyed, so we started rebuilding them. There is no clean water so we started to drill for water. We started building roads. We are currently working on PRT in Vardak, a city south of Kabul. Our friends are working there despite many challenges. A short while ago, our foreign minister paid a visit to the region and told me that our work there is going on, and will go on. The point is to be able to leave these marks in the area to boost the public's confidence. On another note, the coalition forces in Afghanistan should not be seen by the public as enemies; the public has to be convinced that we are there to protect, serve and fight for them. The military wing of the operation cannot be enough in itself – this is my personal opinion. Hence, we work with such a methodology there.

On the other hand, I think that the new Pakistani government's efforts against terrorism and extremism have to be supported and assisted. Similarly for Darfur in Sudan – I have gone to Darfur and investigated on site to find out that the people living in tents are leading a life of misery. They live under health conditions far from personal hygiene which threatens human life. I also happen to know that the USA sends serious amounts of money there. I have talked to President Bush about this and told him what I had seen. He was also concerned about what was happening to the money. Our investments there are

aligned with these concerns. We build, we do not send money. Because when you send money, you cannot be sure of its whereabouts. Give the money and forget about it – this is a price we are not ready to pay, so we want to leave marks and we apply this everywhere as a principle. We do the same in Lebanon. The soldiers that we have sent to UNIFIL are constantly building schools and hospitals. We observe the positive results of these on public in underdeveloped regions.

The IMF and the World Bank play a very active role in all these areas. I firmly believe that the cooperation of the two in the steps to be taken to reconstruct deprived areas is crucial in achieving our goals. We believe that the G-20 should be encouraging this. We will present this suggestion tomorrow.

Distinguished Guests,

I think that the basics of a good friendship lie in productive dialogue and discussing the issues of concern with openness. We, as all the other allies, will be aiming at strengthening these ties with the new USA administration in the near future. It is instrumental for us to maintain the strategic partnership that we have with our friend, the USA. We, as Turkey, are determined to put forward any effort possible. In addition to politics and security, our economic, social and cultural ties will continue increasingly with concrete steps. When we look at our common ideals and our vision as well as our strategic interests, I am convinced that we will be working together in the future. In concluding my remarks with these thoughts, I thank President Talbott and his colleagues one more time for providing me with this opportunity, and I salute all of you with appreciation and respect.