

TURKEY AND GERMANY: A UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP FOR FREEDOM AND PROSPERITY IN EUROPE

Internal reforms towards a more lively democracy, more effective state institutions, transparent courts accessible to all, are not first and foremost in the interest of the European Union, but in the interest of the people of Turkey. Achieving freedom of expression is a crucial part of internal reform, and freedom of the press is essential. In an open society, the media are diverse and represent a wide variety of opinions and convictions. In a successful democracy, government and politicians not only learn to live with criticism, but are ready to face it with arguments, not with a ban. These freedoms are among the cornerstones on which European democracies are built.

Guido Westerwelle*



* Guido Westerwelle is the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Vice Chancellor of Germany.

German-Turkish relations are unique. With a long history of trade and cultural exchange, after decades of bilateral cooperation and migration, our societies are closely intertwined. We are both part of the tight international framework that has evolved in the post-war era in Europe and on a global scale. Within the UN, NATO, the G-20, the OSCE, and numerous other international institutions, Germany and Turkey have contributed substantially to international peace, security, stability and prosperity. Germany is Turkey's close partner on its path towards Europe.

Our countries and our peoples are linked by shared interests, but above all, we strive to live by shared values. As partners in the Council of Europe and states parties to the European Convention on Human Rights, we act upon a solid foundation of respect for human dignity and individual liberties. I am convinced that economic prosperity can best develop in a society of free individuals who can determine their own future. Economic interests and the values that make a society open and free are not incompatible, but two sides of the same coin.

United for Prosperity

With its swift return to robust economic development, Turkey has shown that it is able to succeed in today's open, highly competitive international economic environment. Turkey's growth rates have recovered at an impressive speed after the international financial crisis. With its economic drive Turkey is one of the strong economic forces of the world economy whose rapid modernization processes are driving globalization forward.

The positive effects of Turkey's growth on the EU, and particularly on Germany, are evident. As the largest economy on the European continent, Germany is Turkey's prime trading partner. In 2010, German exports to Turkey exceeded exports to Brazil or India; and we imported more goods from Turkey than from either one of these countries.

As closely interlinked partners in a globalized world economy, Germany and Turkey are dedicated to creating a legitimate and efficient international economic order. As partners in the G-20, we cooperate to shape rules that ensure global prosperity and economic stability in the age of globalization. Bilaterally, we contribute to developing knowledge-based economies that are fit for the challenges ahead. The Turkish-German University in Istanbul under the Ernst Reuter Initiative is an example of what we can achieve together. The university will train skilled professionals in close cooperation with German and Turkish companies, thus strengthening our academic relations and economic ties simultaneously.

Connected Societies

Relations between Germany and Turkey have been enriched by the history of migration that connects our countries in a unique way. Millions of hardworking men and women who trace their descent to Turkey have contributed to Germany's wealth and to the diversity of our society. More than 75,000 companies owned by

entrepreneurs and investors with Turkish roots employ more than 350,000 people and turn over about 35,000 million euro per year. Migrants from Turkey have experienced hundreds of thousands of success stories throughout our country. Many have become German citizens. Some make the headlines, most do not. Among those most admired are film directors and football stars, actors and pop singers, as well as politicians including a state minister responsible for social affairs in the state of Lower Saxony and five members of the German Bundestag.

And we must not forget the lawyers, doctors, engineers, shopkeepers, nurses, bakers and butchers of Turkish origin. They all are examples of what migrants and their children can achieve. They are part of our country, and we are proud of them.

Integration needs contributions from everyone. Learning German at an early age does not impair identity or heritage, but is as important for the professional careers of migrants in Germany as it is culturally enriching. Learning German is empowerment. A good education and a good command of German are key to a self-determined and successful life.

In the age of globalization, we must advocate openness. Germany and Turkey should not allow their images of one another to be shaped by emotionalized media debated or prejudice. We want our citizens –and especially our young people– to travel and to shape these images from what they experience for themselves. Easing visa procedures between Schengen countries and Turkey will boost knowledge, tourism and business. I endorse more flexibility in this regard and I would like to encourage Turkey to sign and ratify the readmission agreement with the EU as soon as possible. The dialogue on visa, mobility and migration, which is to be launched by the Commission, will offer many new opportunities to improve the mobility of our citizens.

"In a successful democracy, government and politicians not only learn to live with criticism, but are ready to face it with arguments, not with a ban."

It will take further efforts to enhance social cohesion within our countries, and we will encounter new challenges. But we should never allow minor irritants to weaken the very foundation on which we have built our friendship.

Committed to Strengthening Turkish Foreign Policy as an Anchor of Regional Stability

As a gateway to the East and to the South, as translator and interpreter, Turkey will play a decisive role in the future of our common neighborhood. I strongly welcome Turkey's policy approach of "zero problems with neighbors". The EU and Turkey share the same goals: peace and stability, energy security, free trade and political dialogue. Even if we do not always agree on the means, we share the same objectives.

"I strongly welcome Turkey's policy approach of "zero problems with neighbors". Our approach towards Iran may be different, but we are convinced that preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons would make the world safer."

Our approach towards Iran may be different, but we are convinced that preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons would make the world safer for EU members, for Turkey, and for all countries throughout the Middle East, including Israel.

It is still too early to fully assess the historical dimension of the recent developments in the Arab world. We are aware of the tremendous opportunities that arise from the call for freedom and democracy. Now it is time for Arab leaders to listen to the demands of their peoples. Turkey is an inspiration for the entire region: a largely Muslim society and a hugely dynamic country with a strong economy and democratic set-up.

In Afghanistan, Turkey has been an important member of the International Security Assistance Force ISAF for many years. It has demonstrated admirable leadership in Kabul. In 2010, the opening of the Turkish provincial reconstruction team in Sheberghan strengthened Turkish-German cooperation. Our military as well as our civilian forces are bringing security to the Afghan people and helping to boost socio-economic development in the region. The efforts of the Turkish government to improve education and health services are exemplary. Today, Turkey is a leader in fostering stability in the entire region. The upcoming second Istanbul regional conference will again bring together Afghanistan's neighbors, including Iran and

Pakistan, the Afghan government and international observers for consultations on Afghanistan's future and on how regional integration can benefit all peoples in the region. Turkey will play a major role in preparing the International Afghanistan Conference in Bonn which will define the international community's long-term partnership with Afghanistan.

Turkey is a bridge between the West and the Muslim world. I strongly encourage Turkey's intention to play a more active role in its neighborhood as well as in global politics. We need a strong Turkey that engages in fighting poverty, continues to be a key ally in NATO, and promotes pan-European security by working closely within missions under the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). The German government will search for new approaches to find a way out of the EU-NATO impasse.

Dedicated to Building a Common Future in Europe

Decade after decade, the international environment in which we develop our relations has been subject to change, sometimes radical, sometimes gradual. Today, our foreign policy is inconceivable without European integration as a common focal point.

Since the Treaty of Rome was signed, European integration has shaped the face of Europe while undergoing many changes itself. European integration has experienced times of crisis and periods of progress. But in the end, the EU has always kept its promises: to deliver lasting peace, stability and prosperity to the peoples of Europe. Even though the way towards more integration may be difficult to foresee, we have every reason to be confident about Europe's ability to reinvent itself.

The Turkey we know today, economically strong, well-connected within the region, with an active and stabilizing foreign policy, is not the same country that applied for membership almost 25 years ago. The same is true for the European institutions, which have evolved from three European Communities comprising exclusively Western European nations into today's European Union.

Throughout the history of European integration, progress has always depended on political will and the readiness to compromise. In this spirit we need to advance the accession process and overcome obstacles, whether they lie inside or outside Turkey. The dispute with Cyprus has overshadowed Turkey's path towards Europe for too long. Both sides need to cooperate to reach a solution. Germany is ready to facilitate this process in any way possible. We encourage the Turkish government to ratify and implement the Ankara Protocol, and we support negotiations on Cyprus under the aegis of the United Nations. As important as it may be

to analyze what went wrong in the past, we should not dwell on mistakes that lie behind us but move forward. Our citizens expect us to make the right choices, so that the policy options of today do not become tomorrow's missed opportunities.

We should never forget that Europe is far less about institutions than it is about ideas. The ideas that stem from the age of European Enlightenment were powerful elements in shaping the vision of modern Turkey: a Turkey which looks to Europe but does not forget the East and the South, a modern, secular and self-confident country, in which men and women enjoy freedom and equal rights.

Internal reforms towards a more lively democracy, more effective state institutions, transparent courts accessible to all, are not first and foremost in the interest of the European Union, but in the interest of the people of Turkey. They are not imposed by the EU but agreed upon between the EU and Turkey. As demanding as it may be to adapt the legal framework and adopt the changes in real life, they are essential for the future of the Turkish people and society.

Achieving freedom of expression is a crucial part of internal reform, and freedom of the press is essential. In an open society, the media are diverse and represent a wide variety of opinions and convictions. In a successful democracy, government and politicians not only learn to live with criticism, but are ready to face it with arguments, not with a ban. These freedoms are among the cornerstones on which European democracies are built. It should not be surprising that the institutions in Brussels as well as member states are closely following the developments in this field.

Enlargement cannot be separated from the depth of European integration. Deepening and widening are not opposites. European integration has been an open process since the very beginning. Member states and candidates alike have lived well with openness.

The European Union was founded under a different name, with structures and ambitions which appear small and modest in hindsight. The founding fathers of today's Union did not dwell on abstract ideas about the final stages of European integration, but searched and found answers and solutions for the problems of their day.

No historical process is without its own imponderabilities. But Turkey is not an object of European integration. Turkey can shape its accession process, create realities and stake legitimate claims. More and more, the logic of the process will play in Turkey's favor. I am looking forward to the day when Turkey fulfils its European legacy.