

# TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY AND THE EU IN 2010

*While Turkey pursues a policy of constructive engagement in its neighborhood and beyond, full integration with the EU is and will remain the priority. Membership in the EU is Turkey's strategic choice and this objective is one of the most important projects of the Republican era. With the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, Europe will undertake new responsibilities on a global scale. European leaders now have a chance to demonstrate their resolve in preparing the EU for the challenges of the 21st century, both internally and, even more decisively on the global stage.*

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**A**s the EU took a long-awaited step forward as of 1 December 2009 with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the time has also come to take stock of the current state of affairs in Turkey-EU relations. This discussion is more relevant when evaluated from different perspectives, in particular through the lens of the orientation of Turkish foreign policy.

The key objective of Turkish foreign policy has been to contribute to peace, stability and prosperity in the world. By the same token, we spare no effort to develop our relations with our neighborhood and beyond. As demonstrated by the recent increase in the initiatives Turkish foreign policy has embarked upon, especially in the adjacent regions and beyond, we are deploying every possible effort to encourage the consolidation of democracy as well as the settlement of disputes, which directly or indirectly concern Turkey. Two fundamental tenets constitute the rationale behind this effort.

Firstly, from our vantage point, there is a clear need to pursue a proactive diplomacy with the aim of strengthening prosperity, stability and security in a neighborhood which spans the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Caspian basin, the Black Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, from the Gulf to North Africa, not void of tension but also abundant with unfulfilled potential. With stronger political will on the part of the countries of the region and coordinated encouragement by the international community, I am convinced that poverty and conflict can be replaced in time with prosperity and cooperation.

Secondly, Turkey enjoys multiple regional identities and thus has the capability as well as the responsibility to follow an integrated and multidimensional foreign policy. The unique combination of our history and geography brings with it a sense of responsibility. To contribute actively towards conflict resolution and international peace and security in all these areas is a call of duty arising from the depths of a multidimensional history for Turkey.

Committed to being a force for peace, Turkey today is much more result-oriented and proactive. The enlarged portfolio of our foreign policy now encompasses a wide spectrum of geographical areas, organizations and issues, without a fundamental change in its priorities. This multifaceted platform of Turkish foreign policy rests on four pillars. The first pillar consists of indivisibility of security.

Security is not a zero-sum game whereby the safety of “country A” can develop at the expense of the well-being of “country B”. The second pillar advocates dialogue; all issues and problems should and can be resolved through diplomacy and political interaction. Economic interdependence is the third pillar. This is essential if we are to achieve and ensure sustainable peace. The fourth pillar is about cultural harmony and mutual respect. The recent minaret referendum in Switzerland reminded us of how much more we need to dwell on this concept to improve understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples of different cultures and faith. Our goal is to achieve utmost integration and full cooperation with all of our neighbors based on these four principles. Our approach aims to eliminate the existing disputes and tension and to increase stability in the region by seeking innovative mechanisms and channels to resolve conflicts, by encouraging positive deeds and by building cross-cultural bridges of dialogue and understanding.

Turkey is not reorienting its foreign policy, as some argue nowadays. While Turkey pursues a policy of constructive engagement in its neighborhood and beyond, full integration with the EU is and will remain the priority. I want to make it clear: Membership in the EU is Turkey’s strategic choice and this objective is one of the most important projects of the Republican era. As stated in the EU documents that compose our “acquis” with the Union, the aim of negotiations is membership.

Turkey is already an integral part of the EU. We have completed a customs union 15 years ago and the EU is our largest trade partner. In security policies, Turkey and the EU have an extensive cooperation record. Turkey is the leading non-member contributor to the ESDP missions and operations from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Congo. Turkish military and civilian personnel work shoulder to shoulder with their colleagues from the EU in a wide geography to establish and strengthen peace, stability and security. By far the largest component of the Turkish diaspora lives in EU member states. Since my appointment as Foreign Minister last May, I paid 93 overseas visits in 2009. 47 were destined to European capitals. So intertwined are the relations between Turkey and the EU, which it is also my responsibility not only as Minister of Foreign Affairs, but also as a European, to evaluate what kind of a Europe we will be bequeathing to our children and grandchildren in 2057, a century after the EU started on this historical path.

The paths of Turkey and the EU cannot be considered as two distinct and divergent vectors. On the contrary they almost always converge. Turkey seeks to establish peace, stability and security in the Middle East; to further integrate the Balkans with the Euro-Atlantic community; to bolster democracy and peaceful resolution of conflicts in the Caucasus and Central Asia; to contribute to enhanced energy supply and security of Europe; to strengthen security and stability in Afghanistan and South Asia. So does the EU. The proactive diplomacy pursued by Turkey to attain these objectives in fact complements the EU's policies to the same ends. Expanding the area of peace, stability and prosperity can only affect positively Europe's broader neighborhood and international community. The linkage is clear: As we strive to consolidate freedom, security and prosperity at home, our neighborhood inevitably garners the dividends. Our common agenda is lavished with many more tasks for today and the future. Henceforth, our regional and global roles and responsibilities urge us to cooperate on these issues with a clear vision for the future. We share the same history. We share the same geography. We share the same vision. We share the same values: democracy, human rights, rule of law. Turkey and the EU row in the same boat, through tough waters at times but surely towards the same direction of global peace and stability.

Today's multifold challenges such as the financial crisis, energy security, illegal migration, epidemic diseases, climate change, organized crime, cross cultural and religious intolerance, extremism and terrorism can only be addressed through genuine and effective solidarity in the Eurasian space. If we are to eradicate all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or creed, to promote a democratic and equitable international order, to obtain robust economic growth and to achieve sustainable development, then Turkey's membership in the EU will only help render the latter a leading global player in the 21st century.

Yet, fifty years on since the beginning of the contractual relationship between Turkey and the EU, the debate on Turkey's European vocation has not waned. These views, also nourished by the politics of identity, disregard Turkey's well-established place in European history. The last 200 years of Turkish history are marked by various struggles, both internally and externally. The most important was fought for political, economic and social modernization, and it transcended generations. Both the transformers in the Ottoman Empire and the founding fathers of modern Turkey were influenced by the cornerstones of European history

like the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Atatürk's reforms towards solidifying the modernization of Turkey are the ramifications of this revolutionary mindset. The next step in this journey of transformation and modernization is Turkey's membership in the EU.

With significant challenges and opportunities before us, we must now put the tiresome debates on Turkey's European vocation to rest and focus on the added value inherent in this accession: Turkey, seeking membership in the European Union, generates peace at home, peace in the world. It is the only country that is simultaneously a member of G-20, NATO and the OIC. We are also a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. It is the world's 17th, and Europe's sixth largest economy. It is a bulwark for democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; that is, European ideals and values.

In this new era ushered in by the Lisbon Treaty, the EU is preparing to emerge stronger on the world stage through a new institutional structure. At this juncture in time, I also see a new opportunity to bring in a fresh wind of optimism into Turkish-EU relations. It is a time for new ideas, new ways of thinking. We must seize this opportunity to move our relations into an ever closer Union.

The EU is the successful outcome of a dynamic integration process. Through the EU, Europe has been able to leave behind past conflicts. Thanks to the culture of dialogue and compromise it has become a beacon of liberty, stability and peace. The Lisbon Treaty will further solidify the political unity of the European Union. An internally stronger EU is tantamount to a more effective and visible EU on the global stage. The smooth implementation of the Lisbon Treaty and mobilizing popular support for enlargement in general, and Turkey's membership in particular appear to be two strategic tasks that lie ahead in this respect. We hope that with the entry into force of the Treaty, the argument that was put forward by some countries that enlargement could not proceed without institutional reform will finally be buried. At this new juncture where the EU is in search of a new soul, it is exceptionally important that a positive style and substance prevail in Turkey-EU relations.

The process of accession negotiations is lengthy and difficult. We were aware of this fact before we set out on this journey. Yet, we face several political obstacles in stark contradiction to the commonly agreed framework for the negotiations.

This serves only to undermine the credibility of the EU. As membership will not happen overnight, the ultimate decision on this issue should not be prejudged from today. By that day, Turkey will have attained the same standards and norms as that of the EU, and this will definitely be in the interest of all sides concerned.

Turkey's accession process follows an irreversible course. The negotiations continue to advance at the technical level. No single week goes by without an expert meeting taking place in Brussels, Ankara or elsewhere. Our legislation in every field –from environment to food safety to education– is being revised. The massive work carried out by the Turkish and EU officials has brought about a silent revolution. There is a consistent quality to this side of the picture *vis-à-vis* the political rhetoric on the other side.

Let me repeat that membership in the EU is the strategic objective of our foreign policy. We will undertake whatever is necessary. My government is determined to advance its comprehensive reform agenda with this aim in mind. The components of our “homework” are clearly and extensively stated in regular reports of the European Commission. We take good note of these to-do lists and undertake to accomplish whatever necessary. On the other hand, we also believe that the EU should do more to preserve the credibility and consistency of political Europe. Our list would be shorter, comprised of only three items:

- 1- The EU should abide by the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*,
- 2- The EU should not allow bilateral issues to hold back the accession negotiations and
- 3- It should not let Turkey's accession process be manipulated for domestic politics.

I am of the opinion that there are basically two paths the EU can take. Either it will be a global power with a dynamic economy or remain a continental power with a more inward-looking perception. The starting point should be to focus on a functioning and productive relationship between Turkey and the EU. At present, Europe is going through a transformation in many ways. With the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, Europe will undertake new responsibilities on a global scale. European leaders now have a chance to demonstrate their resolve in preparing the EU for the challenges of the 21st century, both internally and, even more decisively on the global stage.

We are fully committed to the EU process and determined to advance our reform agenda. Indeed, in the last seven years my Government launched and implemented an ambitious reform campaign. Our reforms aim not only to comply with the Copenhagen political criteria but also to respond to the aspirations and expectations of the Turkish people for the highest standards of democracy and rule of law. Turkey will pass this test successfully, no matter how demanding it will be. We see this process as a formidable challenge, which presents Turkey an opportunity to reinvigorate its strong potential. I firmly believe that this will be a road of remarkable achievement.