



**SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER RECEP  
TAYYIP ERDOĞAN**

***“WHY THE EU NEEDS TURKEY”***

**Oxford, 28 May 2004**

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Distinguished Guests,

I am honoured to join you at Oxford University, an institution that lays claim to over nine centuries of existence. I wish to thank the European Studies Centre for giving us this opportunity.

I have been informed that until this moment today's conference programme was devoted to Turco-Greek rapprochement. I understand that we will conclude the day with Turkey.

I would not wish to ignore the "Eastern Mediterranean balance" which has been an important element in the Turco-Greek strategic equation. Therefore, let me first spare a few words on our relations with Greece, trying not to lose sight of the EU perspective.

I am one of those who believes that perceptions are equally important in the course of history as are national interests.

If you look at world history, at those who win and those who lose, at those who govern and those that have been governed, at those who are for the status quo and those who are against it: They have all had different view points.



Prof. G. Lewis, Mr. R.T. Erdoğan, Mr. T. Garton-Ash, Dr K. Nicolaidis

It is indeed our perceptions that make us define our interests.

Therefore, in inter-state relations, permanent, absolute and universal criteria by which one can judge behaviour do not exist.

For that very reason, in international relations, I believe one should look at the perceptions of the other side together with one's own.

I would like to note that our "win-win" approach toward the Cyprus conflict is also built on this basis.

For years, Greece perceived Turkey as possessing hegemonic aspirations. In

the eyes of a Greek, Turkey's intervention to Cyprus was the best proof in that sense.

For Turkey, true hegemonic aspirations lay with Greece. For it was Greece that occupied West Anatolia back in the 1920s. It was Greece that pursued ENOSIS in Cyprus, and pervasive policies in the Aegean. For Turkey, all these were *the* proof.

The ebb and flow of the two countries as regional powers did not coincide with each other, either. At the time when Turkey completed its War of Independence and was growing stronger thanks to the reforms of Atatürk, Greece had entered a volatile period following her defeat in Anatolia.

In the early 1980s, when Greece became an EU member, this time Turkey was experiencing difficult times.

After and even before its EU membership, Greece had been welcomed as part of the European system, and never had any reason to doubt the European support.

Turkey, on the other hand, always found itself in a position of having to prove why it was European, and the contributions it could make to the EU. In fact, in a few minutes, I myself will be doing the same. Unlike the other candidates, we never had a red carpet thrown before us. To us, this was only because Turkey's strength, its capabilities and global contribution were not correctly perceived.

In the end, it was Greece which was favoured and Turkey which was to be handled with caution.

Against this background, could you expect mutual perceptions between Turkey and Greece to be healthy? How likely would it be that the interests are well-defined?

If Turco-Greek rapprochement is possible today, it is because we have a common ground through which mutual perceptions are formed most accurately. That common ground is the EU.

It is a "Europe as a union of values", instead of a narrowly-defined geography or a union of rigidity, which is capable of producing a synergy that will rectify perceptions before policies. If this capability is utilised correctly, we could then be more optimistic about the future of our region and the world.

Greece has been an EU member for over 20 years. During this period, Turkey-EU relations went through many difficulties. But recently, Greece has recognized that efforts to push Turkey away from the EU are not in its best interest. Nor are they likely to work.

Turkey's relations with the EU go back for more than 40 years. For the last 17 years, it has been aspiring to join the Union. All through that time, there were many occasions that cast doubt on the EU's true will to accept Turkey. Such feelings are not yet totally gone. Nevertheless, today Turkey has come ever closer to EU membership.

Our efforts to rectify the misperceptions that our European friends have about my country, have also played an important, interactive role together with Turkey's strong will to make the "European values" the "Ankara values" as one.

By that, I certainly do not mean we shall accede to the Union immediately. If the decision is taken in December to open the negotiations, we are aware that we shall have a long way to go. Indeed, our own performance shall determine how long this process will take. And I am not totally unhappy with this fact. For I attach importance to the quality involved in this road, rather than the distance.

By stating that Turkey is ever closer to the EU, I mean our perspective of accession has become



much stronger. Despite the counter-arguments, which must be seen as expected to a certain extent, the question "why the EU needs Turkey" is now being answered in a more satisfactory manner.

Turkey's ability to shoulder the responsibilities of EU membership with great seriousness and conscience is now better appreciated.

I state this latter point particularly in relation to the Cyprus issue.

Turkey has exerted every effort to prevent the Cyprus issue from being brought into the EU. Since the 1994 Corfu European Council, we have drawn attention to the EU's erroneous decision to accept the Greek Cypriots unilaterally.

Eventually, we took every step possible so that a united Cyprus would join the EU on May 1.

Regretfully, the side that did not show the same willpower, conscience and responsible attitude is now an EU member. The Union has thus imported an international issue.

At this point, the correctness of Turkey's position since 1994 has become evident. Everyone has seen which side has worked for a comprehensive settlement, and which side against it.

I believe that Turkey's efforts to resolve the Cyprus issue have proved its determination.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that Turkey's own policies and suggestions to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus based on the Annan Plan have been in parallel to the EU. The same cannot be said for Greece and the Greek Cypriots.

This has proved once again that Turkey will not bring burden to Europe. On the contrary, Turkey represents a burden-relieving dynamic for the EU.

In any case, we cannot formulate our policies on "if's and but's". We can only look to the future. We must look to the future.

Our priority is to ensure that the Turkish Cypriots, who voted for a solution, should no longer be punished. Effective and bold steps need to be taken to end their isolation.

In the same vein, we cannot accept Turkey-EU relations to be over-shadowed by the Cyprus issue any more. We expect all sides to adopt conscientious and realistic policies. Turkey is determined to play its part in that respect. The responsibilities of the EU and of Britain are also significant.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Turkey, Greece and Cyprus stand in the Eastern Mediterranean where all links between Europe, West Asia, the Middle-East and North Africa intersect. The strategic value of this region has not diminished through centuries, and it is unlikely that it will.

Turkey, Greece and Cyprus separate not only the Western and Eastern civilisations, but also the North and the South.

Their national and global interests require that they co-operate rather than be at odds with one another.

As I mentioned previously, Greece seems to have understood this perception. I hope that the Greek Cypriots will do the same at an early date, although the current state of affairs does not leave much room for optimism.

On the other hand, the EU and the USA are also players in this strategic framework.

For these two, the Eastern Mediterranean has recently gained a value much above being a front line. With the fall of the Soviet bloc, the basic threat perceptions of the EU and the USA retreated to the very edges of the Eastern Mediterranean.

The nature of the threat has also changed.

It is more complicated and challenging than it used to be. It no longer rests on substantive military-nuclear balances of power or on deterrence, and is fed by such abstract notions as socio-economic welfare, conflict of civilizations and extremism. It is difficult to foretell when, and in which form, it will confront us.

As I have frequently underlined elsewhere, our universal values face today a threat which has no ideology, nationality, religion, geography or an address.

The threat perceptions are no longer limited to our borders. They are in the minds, ways of life,



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thoughts and beliefs of those who portray themselves as the “other”.

Under such circumstances, it is to our common good that the Turco-Greek-Cypriot equation is not detrimental to security in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The formula to ensure this situation is already available: Just match up the equation with the EU. And ensure that Turkey, Greece and Cyprus meet within the EU on an equal footing as partners, instead of adversaries.

If that could be ensured, all agenda items such as Cyprus or

the Aegean issues which we now perceive to be controversial, would be absorbed in our common geography.

I believe that one answer to the question “why the EU needs Turkey” is now evident: The EU needs Turkey because of the strategic importance of the Eastern Mediterranean, and the additional strategic importance that Turkey possesses within the Eastern Mediterranean.

In the words of a renowned Turkish academic, Turkey’s role in its region is “not military, but rather of deterrence based on military, political and economic power as well as stability”.

This role seems to have gained additional significance and new aspects in the face of the danger of a new Cold War this time among values, civilizations, religions, cultures and identities.

Obviously, such a Cold War could give way to uncertainties unmatched with its predecessor, and might endanger all that the world civilisation has accumulated to date.

In that context, it has once more become vital that Turkey has chosen integration with the EU as its main strategic aim.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The recent developments in our vicinity have brought Turkey and the EU closer.

Iraq is turning into a growing source of concern. The developments in Iraq are further complicating the already stumbling peace efforts in the Middle-East.

The international community must still collaborate to sustain the stability of the Balkans and the Caucasus. If we relax our attention, the conflicts are likely to come to the front burner.

The situation in Afghanistan and the activities of the Taleban and Al-Qaeda are more worrisome.

In all these regions, the interests of Turkey and the EU are common. The potential for cooperation is huge.

I must underline that in our view, it is not only the EU that needs Turkey. Ours is not a kind of “political narcissism”. Our vision is based on political realism. Turkey, too, needs the EU.

For decades, Turkey-EU relations have evolved on common interests, mutual interaction and needs.

Regretfully, there are some in Europe who still cannot see or do not want to see this fact.

In that sense, I find similarities in the discussions on Turkey’s and Britain’s relations with the EU.

For years, the British public has questioned how far its relations with the EU should go. Churchill’s assertion that “Britain is with Europe, but not of it” is still remembered.

On the other hand, a degree of emotional distancing towards Britain has prevailed within the EU. Britain was vetoed twice by one of the members when it first attempted to join the then-European Economic Community.

I do not challenge or criticise past decisions. I only wish to underline that the contributions Britain would make to the development of the Community’s economy and trans-Atlantic relations could be overlooked at the time.

When looking back, can one really ignore these contributions in developing the EU into what it is today?

When Britain was pursuing its process of membership, Turkey was at the first stages of its association with the Community. Of course, much has changed through time. First and foremost, the EU has changed. The criteria for membership have evolved.

We are fully aware of these requirements. We know that we have important political and economic reforms to accomplish before becoming an EU member. We also have to develop our administrative capacity to enforce the acquis.

We are ready to abide by the rules of the game. However, we cannot and will not abide with prejudices. We cannot agree with those who allege without foundation that Turkey will be nothing but a burden to the EU.

We cannot agree with those who close their eyes to the assets Turkey could bring to the EU, just as they once closed their eyes on Britain. Those who pay no heed to Turkey’s potential to contribute to the EU’s regional and trans-Atlantic relations are definitely not doing any good to the EU.

In the 2003 IMF reports, the Turkish economy ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> in the world, placed above some of the EU Member States. Those who disregard this potential seem to have forgotten the efforts needed to boost the EU economies.

Those who support the exclusion of Turkey on religious, cultural or some superficial border definitions do not realize that they are in fact hindering the integration of the Muslims who already live in the EU.



Mr. R.T. Erdoğan, Mr. T. Garton-Ash, Mr. Hilmi Güler

I do not deny the issues that Turkey has to overcome. However, I do not believe that it is in Turkey's or the EU's interest to portray Turkey as nothing more than an amalgamation of issues.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We in Turkey have reconciled our traditional Islamic culture with our secular and democratic structures.

We have demonstrated that a country with an overwhelmingly Muslim population could turn its face to and integrate with the Western world.

We have shown the true progressive and modern face of Islam.

We have targeted not the conflict of civilisations, but their meeting in Turkey.

We believe that all sorts of religious divisions should be buried in their well-deserved place in history. In the contemporary world, religion belongs not to specific organizations or territories, but to individuals. It should be left to the individual.

The idea of "Christian Europe" belongs to the Middle Ages. It should be left there.

Today, Islam has become a reality for the EU. Over 10 million Muslims reside in the EU countries.

There should be no doubt that Turkey's full membership will reinforce the desire and will for co-habitation between the Christians and Muslims.

When discussing Turkey, please do not disregard the fact that our differences are in fact our strength and wealth. Please do not take them as they are, but in view of their potential added value for the EU.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Most frequently, the question "why the EU needs Turkey" ends with the remark "Turkey is not even European". Unlike the other candidates, Turkey is usually confronted with a burden of proof.

To define "Europe" and the "European", what matters most is where you stand and what you are looking at.

An article recently published in Germany's "Die Welt" argued rightly that for someone looking from the eastern coast of Asia, Europe might well be the extension of Asia. Except for those artificial borders in our minds, there are no dividing lines in between.

If you want me to work with geographical indications alone, I can provide you with a definition of "Europe", and accordingly of the term "European".



If you ask me to use economic criteria, my definitions would be totally different.

If you take religion as the basis, one has to alter even some state borders.

In fact, those values of which the EU claims ownership today were created in the wider Mediterranean, rather than Europe in particular. The Phrygian Kingdom that interacted greatly with Hellenism was cradled in the midst of Anatolia. The two civilizations shared their myths and gods. They created the legends of Midas and Goddess Kybele. The words "Europe" and "Paris" are said to originate from the Anatolian

myths.

Moreover, Europe is not tantamount to the EU. Like the Council of Europe and NATO, the EU is a product of history, of sovereign nations.

For one moment, let us assume that those who believe Turkey is not European are right. Even then, this would constitute neither a proper rationale nor a sound justification to exclude Turkey from the EU. The criteria for membership have been defined by the EU states themselves, and do not include religious, cultural, psychological or emotional standards.

I am aware that I am following quite a simple line of thought. Unfortunately, when it comes to Turkey, even the simplest facts can sometimes be forgotten.

Lastly on this issue, when Turkey applied for membership in 1987, the EU had accepted to evaluate it in accordance with its Treaties. I would like to remind you that these Treaties require that applicants be of Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Economic and commercial links have always occupied an important place in Turkey's orientation towards Europe. Turkish and European businessmen acknowledged decades ago where their interests were. They have been moving in that direction despite all the ups and downs in our political relations, and with a determination that should inspire us, the statesmen.

Thanks to their efforts, for decades the EU has ranked the first in Turkey's foreign trade and direct investments.

When the EU completes its enlargement, it will become the world's biggest trading bloc; stretching from the Atlantic to the Russian-Ukrainian border in the east; with a population of around 500 million; integrated in a number of areas from customs union to monetary and political union.

Our responsibility as Europeans is to sustain and enhance the dynamism and innovative power of this giant bloc.

When I imagine Turkey as an active member of this bloc, my belief in the prosperity of our common future becomes stronger.

It is a fact that our economy is currently passing through difficult times.

Some try to present these difficulties as "chronic". They argue that Turkey will be an economic burden to the Community.

I respect these ideas. However, since they are based on Turkey's current situation, and not its potential, I find them somewhat unconvincing.

For that reason, I wish to let the figures speak for themselves.

In 2003, the current account deficit of EU-15 was around 11 billion Euro's. In the same year, the EU had a surplus of around 4 billion in its bilateral trade with Turkey, which is almost one third of its total current account deficit.

To put it in other words, Turkey alone financed a considerable share of the EU's current account deficit.

Despite the difficulties, the Turkish economy grew by 8 percent in 2002, and 6 percent in 2003. In the next couple of decades, per capita income is expected to exceed 10 thousand Dollars.

The Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis recently published a report on the economic consequences of Turkey's EU membership. The increases in economic welfare and income ensuing from membership are estimated to raise the Dutch exports to Turkey by 20 percent. For the EU-15, Turkey's membership is expected to bring about a welfare increase of around 8.5 billion Dollars.

We have reviewed our legislation and taken steps to restructure the financial sector, to ensure transparency in public finances and to enhance the competitiveness of the economy.

We have completed the legislative steps to ensure the independence of the Central Bank.

We have set up autonomous regulatory authorities in banking, telecommunications, energy and public procurement.

We have abolished the monopolies in energy, sugar, tobacco and alcoholic beverages, and established autonomous regulatory authorities to monitor these markets.

Turkey secured these accomplishments mostly with its own resources. The financial assistance we have received from the EU since the 1980's has not been commensurate either with our needs or the advanced level of our relations. Some of the EU's commitments in the framework of the Customs Union have not been met, either. Our financial cooperation has only recently shown signs of improvement.



Dr O. Anastasakis, Mr. T. Garton-Ash  
Mr. R.T. Erdoğan

I do not raise these points to criticise or blame anyone. My point is that Turkey has achieved its progress and growth without tangible assistance from the EU.

We shall continue our structural reforms in a determined fashion.

I do not doubt that the Turkey of the future will offer to the EU much wider export and investment opportunities, once it has completed its structural reforms and reinforced the competitiveness and flexibility of its market.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As for the political criteria, we took decisive steps to pave the way for a decision in December to start accession negotiations.

Certainly, no single state could claim that it had reached the point of perfection in the functioning of its democracy. The standards and practices improve continuously.

Just as the concept of basic rights and freedoms enshrined in the Magna Carta has changed over time, they will be much different again in the following ten, twenty or fifty years. The only unchanging article in my political Magna Carta, however, is to uphold the common good of the whole world, over all kinds of prejudices and interests.

Once a level has been reached in the process of democratization, which Turkey has achieved, fulfilment of the political criteria is no longer a matter of “yes or no”; but of degree and intensity. After that, a sustainable track record and political determination start to count.

In other words, the assessment in December concerning Turkey’s fulfilment of the Copenhagen political criteria has to take all aspects into account.

Naturally; we may have shortcomings, and they will be highlighted.

However, the most important factor will remain whether or not we have shown the required determination and progress in the specified areas.

Indeed, the other candidates have also been assessed in this manner. The “to do’s” list for those candidates who were assessed as having fulfilled the political criteria was never empty.

The issues that Turkey has yet to address in order to start the negotiations were listed under 5 main headings in the conclusions of the December 2003 European Council.

We believe we have reached the required threshold in both legislative terms and effective implementation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In its history of 40-odd years, Turkey-EU relations have proceeded on a contractual framework established by mutual consent and agreement.

Despite various ups and downs, our mutual relationship has never lost sight of full membership. Our Customs Union of 1995 approved by the European Council and the European Parliament, is recognized in our Association Agreement of 1963 as a step in the way of full membership.

We are approaching the decision in December on this contractual framework.

The decision to open the negotiations will be a demonstration of the EU’s vision of Turkey, and its will to keep its relations with Turkey on track.

I do not want even to contemplate it, but must nevertheless ask you to think how a non-decision might affect our relations?

Former British Prime Minister Disraeli once said “finality is not the language of politics”. This could be true.

Nevertheless, our biggest responsibility as statesmen is to avoid, to the extent possible, the contingency of using the word “finality”. This is indeed *the* proficiency in politics.

I sincerely believe that, as pioneers of the art of diplomacy, we Europeans will attest all our proficiency in this limited, but delicate time left until December.

In that sense, Turkey will continue to play its due part.

Being a European who understands Europeanness as “politics commanded by values”, I would expect all that I have said to be put on record as expressed for the common good of Europe and the world.

Thank you.