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A STRATEGIC OVERVIEW OF TURKEY

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TURKEY'S STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

The world is undergoing rapid and tremendous changes in the post-Cold War era. Its unique location, vigorous market economy, well-established tradition of co-operating with the West and large armed forces, second in size after the US in NATO, makes Turkey a geo-strategic player in world affairs.

The geopolitically important area called the heartland of Eurasia, located on the periphery of Turkey, has always been a centre of world politics. Turkey's unique location provides certain leverages for international influence. Turkey is centrally situated between Europe, where much of the world's political and economic power is concentrated, and Asia, which has lately become a vital centre of economic growth and rising political influence. Turkey fully supports the Middle East Peace Process by maintaining a balanced position that considers the legal rights and interests of all parties. Steadily increasing relations between two democratic countries of the region, Turkey and Israel, are expected to give momentum to the peace and stability efforts in the area.

Today, Turkey's geopolitical influence is expanding across continents. Turkey exercises a powerful influence on all the states on its periphery, particularly the Caucasus and this influence continues into the Central Asian states where a Turkic ethno-linguistic zone extends eastward to the Chinese border.

Turkey's importance derives from the following factors:

- it stabilises the Black Sea region
- it controls the Straits
- it serves as the southeastern anchor for NATO
- it balances Russia in the entire southeastern zone, which includes the Caucasus
- it acts as a model for the newly independent countries in the region and helps them to protect their independence and entrance into the international community
- it plays an important role as an energy bridge between the rich natural resources of the Caspian basin and Central Asia, and the Western world
- it serves as a springboard for the progressive expansion of Western values deeper eastward
- it acts as an active geo-strategic player in the region, particularly eastward, with the ability to affect existing volatile geopolitical states of affairs
- it acts as a pivotal country in Balkan and Middle Eastern affairs
- with its secular regime, it offers a dynamic alternative to fundamentalism.

TURKISH-US RELATIONS

Turkey and the US share, as friends and allies, similar strategic viewpoints on many issues of mutual concern. Turkey-US relations are now better than ever. Common interests and areas of interaction between Turkey and the US have reached an unprecedented level. In both countries, there is a strong will and the potential to improve bilateral relations on the basis of mutual interests and towards a new strategic partnership. This covers not only the political and security fields, but also energy, trade, investment and cultural matters. There are tremendous opportunities in the new economic and trade initiatives in the Black Sea, Caucasus and Central Asia.

TURKEY'S INTEGRATION WITH EUROPE

Turkey continues to pursue its basic goal of integrating with Europe. Turkey's aspirations to be a full member of the EU is not impulsive, but a conscious political decision with long-range objectives and its roots go back even before the foundation of the Republic of Turkey.

Turkey's deep-rooted traditions, dedication to secularism and its great strides toward implementing a free market economy, coupled with a dynamic population, competitiveness and political strength, both in the international and regional arena, place Turkey in the forefront of nations seeking EU membership.

The Luxembourg Summit in 1997 erroneously did not include Turkey as a candidate in the EU enlargement programme, asserting however that it was within the enlargement process. EU concerns about human rights issues, democratisation and disputes with EU member Greece were put forward as pretexts for the different treatment of Turkey. After making great sacrifices in fulfilling its responsibilities within NATO for the security of the Western community for more than 45 years, Turkey does not want further delays of its membership nor can it wait behind other candidates, the bulk of which cannot compete with Turkey. It is highly irrational to accept former Warsaw Pact adversaries as candidates to become full EU members and exclude Turkey, a staunch NATO ally. Turkey's exclusion from the political and economic integration of the EU is unjustified and in no way constitutes a healthy condition, not for Turkey nor for other Western countries. The harmful effects of this attitude are manifest by disappointment and a great loss of confidence. These setbacks created by the EU prevent the present Turkish regime from fulfilling its responsibility to prepare and leave to the next generation in the twenty-first century a fully safe and wealthy country. The EU's stance toward Turkey is thought to stem from a mostly inward perspective, with a narrow vision of an enlarged European community, which may then further spread its influence toward its eastern periphery.

The importance of anchoring Turkey to the West and incorporating the future of an undivided European continent with the strong presence of a geo-political and geo-strategic crossroads between the East and West, is self-explanatory. Turkey definitely belongs to Europe.

Turkey's commitment to the European ideal has always been put forward clearly and decisively. Turkey's views and expectations for a united and democratic Europe have been expressed to our European friends on every occasion. It was stated that Turkey served as a bulwark for democratic values in this critical part of the world, and struggled resolutely to defend them when they were threatened. Today Turkey is a bridge conveying these values to new geopolitical regions. However, the decisions taken at the Luxembourg Summit indicate some leaders of the EU member states have unfortunately not understood Turkey's rightful concerns and expectations.

The US has long favoured membership for Turkey in the EU. Thus, Turkey's increasing role is better appreciated by the US, which uses its influence in Europe to encourage Turkey's eventual membership of the EU. American support for Turkey's inclusion in the EU counterbalances the negative approach of the EU toward Turkey.

Turkey has reacted to the unjust and discriminatory decisions taken at the Luxembourg Summit in a manner compatible with its greatness and dignity. Consequently, as a result of the subject decisions,

Turkey has severed its political dialogue with the EU on all issues. Turkey shall not discuss the Aegean, Cyprus or Turkish domestic issues with the EU. Turkey will also not attend the European Conference nor will the Turkish Cypriots take part in EU accession negotiations along with the Greek Cypriots. However, bilateral ties with EU countries will continue and Turkey, to sustain its efforts toward achieving an undivided, democratic, unified and prosperous Europe, will continue its relations with the EU. The dispute with the EU over Turkey's membership bid will not damage Turkey's ties with NATO or its relations with the West in general.

Turkey considers the enlargement of NATO, the EU and the WEU in Eurasia as an interrelated whole. Any architecture in Eurasia, whether political, economic or for security, cannot be realised without Turkey being a part of it. In addition, the EU's Eastern Mediterranean and Near East policies cannot be implemented without Turkey's contribution. Therefore, we should see a future for Europe with Turkey in it.

There is a need to rectify the erroneous decisions taken at the Luxembourg Summit last December. Until this mistake is rectified, Turkey will pursue its relations with the EU within the context of the Association Agreement. It is desirable to see Turkey-EU relations return to their normal course. This is possible, however, only if the discrimination against Turkey is brought to an end.

TURKISH-GREEK RELATIONS

Greece customarily follows an anti-Turkish policy in many international forums, particularly in the EU. It introduces obstacles and displays various hostile attitudes that could lead to long-term instability in the region.

Turkey has repeatedly pointed out that the most logical method to address the present disputes would be dialogue, negotiations and legal procedures that would not exclude any other peaceful means of settlement. In contrast, Greece has given no sign whatsoever that it favours settling the disputes through a mutual dialogue.

Turkey's destination, policies and objectives are well established and they cannot be changed arbitrarily overnight. Therefore, we should intensify our efforts and focus to reduce those elements that divide us. We see the role played by Greece in the efforts to alienate Turkey from the EU as a grave mistake and believe these efforts will also not serve Greece's long term interests.

As long as Greece enjoys the unilateral advantage of being an EU member and continues to undermine Turkish interests, by trying to keep Turkey out of the EU, there is little hope to resolve the differences between the two countries. Turkey's full membership of the EU is key to true stability in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, and could ease tension between Turkey and Greece. In the meantime, rational interaction and dialogue is essential between the two countries. Both sides should not be provocative. Any wrong step in this direction could result in serious consequences.

CYPRUS PROBLEM

Two interrelated problems increase the present tension and pose setbacks for progress toward a negotiated settlement of the Cyprus question. The decision to open accession negotiations with the Greek Cypriot administration, regardless of Turkey's objections, will no doubt hinder opportunities to find a just and viable solution to the Cyprus problem within the framework of the UN.

On the other hand, steps taken to upset the strategic balance in the Eastern Mediterranean, such as the S-300 missiles, the inauguration of Paphos air base, the construction of a naval base in Southern Cyprus and excessive armament by the Greek Cypriots, constitute serious threats to regional peace and stability. Military integration of Greek Cyprus and Greece has already happened and now political and economic integration is planned through the EU.

The UN Security Council has adopted a basic principle, which stipulates that any Cypriot membership

to the EU may come to the agenda only after a solution is reached on the Island and referendums on the issue are held by both sides. As none of these conditions has been fulfilled, the Turkish Cypriots refused to participate in the Greek Cyprus negotiating team, maintaining that the Greek Cypriot application to the EU on behalf of the whole island was illegal from the beginning.

The entry talks between the EU and the Greek Cyprus are a flagrant breach of international law. By overlooking the principle of two peoples with equal legal and political status on which the independence of the Island is based, the EU has committed a historical mistake. The EU has opened the way for Greek Cyprus's integration with Greece and will bear the heavy responsibility of the partition of Cyprus. Consequently, all previous solution frameworks and parameters envisaged to resolve the Cyprus problem have been eradicated.

Unless the existence of two separate and equal peoples, democracies and states on the island is acknowledged, no progress toward a common solution is possible.

In response to the integration process of Greek Cyprus with the EU, Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) have decided to develop very close and special ties. In this context, the Turkey-TRNC Association Council has adopted a series of political, economic and security measures to counterbalance whatever Greek Cyprus does in order to integrate indirectly with Greece within the EU.

TURKEY'S BALKAN POLICY

Turkey is determined to develop its historical and close friendship with the Balkan countries and raise regional co-operation to the highest level. Turkey pays great importance to regional peace, stability and security among Balkan countries. Political, economic and security integration of the Balkans with Europe is essential for the maintenance of a viable and permanent peace in the Balkans. Turkey also supports the new international initiatives in the area.

The fact that the Dayton Agreement still has not been fully implemented to protect the fragile peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina is a source of concern with regard to the future. Turkey continues to extend material and moral support to this country.

Turkey favours a democratic solution to the Kosovo crisis within the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the principles of the CSCE.

TURKEY'S MIDDLE EAST POLICY

Turkey has been supporting the Middle East Peace Process since its inception. Turkey follows with concern the current developments, from which failure could arise, and believes that all parties should fulfil their commitments.

Turkey maintains that the lack of confidence among the parties must be overcome. The Middle East Peace Process is a golden opportunity for the region that must continue.

Turkey calls on Iraq to fully abide by the resolutions of the UN Security Council and to come to terms with the international community. The lack of authority in northern Iraq has converted the region into a haven for terrorists; a base from which they can launch attacks against Turkey. It is Turkey's inherent right to fight terrorism and adopt security measures as deemed necessary. Turkey firmly believes all efforts should be focused on the prevention of terrorism and violence wherever it may occur.

Turkey enjoys historical and cultural ties with the Arab countries. Turkey's relations with Israel should in no way be construed as an alternative to its relations with other regional states, in fact, these ties can be a part of Turkey's contribution to the regional stability.

CASPIAN BASIN AND CENTRAL ASIAN RESOURCES

Today, a new energy geography is emerging in the Caspian Basin and Central Asia which accounts for about three-fourths of the world's known energy resources. These huge resources will establish a new base for co-operation, thereby increasing the region's common welfare. Sooner or later, the resources of the region will be fully exploited and the regional economies will integrate with the global economy. The geographical and eco-strategical location of Turkey presents rich opportunities for this process.

Within this framework, the Trans-Caucasian oil and gas corridor, which Turkey has introduced to the world agenda and supported with concrete projects since 1991, will no longer be just a dream but a reality. The basic objective of this project is to save these land-locked countries from having only one transportation alternative, over land. The Baku-Ceyhan pipeline project was initially developed to transport Azeri oil via Turkey to the Mediterranean and to world markets. Today, the project is a Caspian-Ceyhan oil pipeline project to include Kazakh and Turkmenian oil and natural gas. Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and, in particular, the US extend political support to the trans-Caucasian corridor. Turkey is working with these countries and with Russia to bring the energy resources in this region to the world economy. Actually, Turkey views the natural richness and potential of the region as a means of conciliation and co-operation rather than competition and tension, and continues to declare resolutely that this project will increase the economic and social welfare of all regional countries.

Turkey and the US share the view that multiple sources of energy are necessary. Of course the Baku-Ceyhan gas pipeline has tremendous advantages, and US support for the construction of this pipeline is particularly appreciated. Co-operation in the energy field, as well as Turkey being named as one of the big emerging markets, further strengthen Turkey-US relations. 1998 will be a critical year for the realisation of the Caspian-Ceyhan project.

SUMMARY

- Geopolitical and geo-strategic changes on the periphery of Turkey could cause the enhanced partnership between Turkey and the US to be upgraded to the strategic partnership level.
- Turkey should definitely be included in the EU enlargement process and the US should continue to use its influence in Europe to encourage Turkey's eventual membership of the EU.
- Chances are low for solving the problems between Turkey and Greece as long as the anti-Turkish stance of Greece continues and Turkey is kept outside the EU. Turkey and Greece could better solve their differences if both countries stand together within the EU.
- The EU decision to start accession negotiations with the Greek Cypriots has dramatically complicated the strategic atmosphere regarding the Cyprus problem. This decision has paved the way for the establishment of special ties between Turkey and the TRNC.
- Turkey and the US should strengthen their mutual cooperation on energy, trade and investment and aim for the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline becoming a reality in 1999.