

## 200 YEARS OF TURKISH-AMERICAN RELATIONS\*

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I am deeply honored to be with you in the Faculty of Political science of Ankara University, an institution that has contributed so much to Turkey in he past 150 years. The scholars, students and alumni gathered here are the legacy of Turkey's reform movement and embody Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's commitment to education, modernity, and public service in Turkey.

In 1925 he said: "We do not claim pride for the services we render. But we find comfort in the hope that the services we are yet to render will indeed merit pride."

This institution and its graduates have certainly lived up to these words. Many of them have contributed directly to the close ties between our two countries.

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\*This is the text of Key-Note Speech by Hon. W. Robert Pearson, the US Ambassador to Turkey, at the opening session of the Conference on 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Turkish-American Relations, Ankara, 6-8 November 2000.

Today, I would like to give you my perspective on the relations between our two countries over the past 200 years; these have evolved from a sporadic contacts in the early years of our republic into the close partnership we enjoy today. And I would also like to tell you how I see them evolving during the upcoming decades.

Our biateral ties got off to an auspicious start on November 11, 1800, when the young Naval Captain William Bainbridge sailed to the *Sublime Porte* in the frigate "George Washington". According to Captain Bainbridge's memoirs, when the U.S. vessel arrived in İstanbul, a messenger from the Sultan greeted him and asked if the United States was the land known as the "New World". Upon affirmation, the messenger said that the Sultan had "particularly noted the stars in the United States' flag, which he considered a good omen of the future of friendly discourse which would exist between the two nations, as that of Turkey also was one of the heavenly bodies, and therefore concluded there must be some analogy between the people, laws, religion, habits, and manners of the Americans and the Muslims".

Harry N. Howard in his book *Turkey, the Straits and U.S. Policy*, refers to this incident as well, saying "The American flag was displayed as early as November 9, 1800, flying from the mast of United States frigate George Washington...".

While diplomatic relations were not established until 1830, American merchants and missionaries followed rapidly in the wake of Captain Bainbridge. They were America's first citizen-diplomats in Turkey. Several Turkish colleagues told me about how their lives were shaped by the good works and standarts of the institutions established by these early Americans in Turkey. They played an important role in shaping our mutual understanding in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their legacy goes beyond the schools, hospitals and forests they nurtured. Their spirit of mutual understanding and human progress through education continues today in the work of the Fulbright Commission --which celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year-- and the many private educational exchanges that bind our societies.

After World War II, the arrival of another ship, *the Missouri*, ushered in a new era when it sailed into the Bosphorus in 1946 - a

period of close security ties that would bring our countries together as allies in peace and war. This relationship was cemented during the Korean conflict, when 50 years ago the Turks fought with the American Eighth Army during the Kumeri operation. Since then, we have trained together, fought together and, most importantly, always talked with each other --even in times of difficulties. We have found our common interests and followed Atatürk's principle of statecraft, which he announced in 1930: "The accords which the nations can truly rely on are only those which bind mutual interests through a thorough cognizance and understanding".

During the past decade, our mutual interests have significantly expanded and developed into what President Clinton termed a "strategic partnership" at the Grand National Assembly in front of so many graduates of this Faculty. Security cooperation remains a key component of this partnership, as shown most recently in Turkey's role in establishing peace and security in the Balkans. It has helped reshape NATO --the world's most successful alliance-- to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It plays a leading role in bringing peace, stability and development to the new nations of the Caucasus and Central Asia. And Turkey is our full partner in confronting 21<sup>st</sup> century threats that range from weapons of mass destruction to narcotics trafficking.

US-Turkish defense cooperation remains robust. The Turkish government has awarded certain long-term contracts to U.S. contractors. The economic benefits to the Turkish defense industrial base --in terms of co-production, technology sharing and investment-- is very significant. And this support for similar modernization reflects our respect for Turkey's crucial role as a partner for peace in the region.

Trade, investment and energy are, however, just as central to our relationship as defense. In the past six years alone our bilateral trade has increased 50 percent. We are Turkey's second largest trading partner and third largest source of direct foreign investment. Turkey's exports to the US this year (2000) are the fastest growing among Turkey's major trading partners. U.S. firms today are playing a major role in meeting Turkey's domestic energy demand by investing more than one billion dollars and working on 19 other projects representing billions in infrastructure investment. Building business confidence among American and

Turkish business is now a critical element in sustaining our productive, mutual relationship.

This relationship has also developed well beyond security and trade. Each year more and more Turks visit the U.S. and more Americans are discovering Turkey. A recent *Open Skies Treaty* among airliners will only expand such travel and contact. Ten thousand Turks are now studying in U.S. universities, the second largest number of any European country. We are working together to better prepare for natural disasters. American and Turkish archeologists are working together to uncover and preserve Turkey's unique cultural treasures. And in all these fields rapid developments in communications technology, from satellite broadcasting to the Internet, bring our countries closer and closer together.

This is where we are today, and I will leave it to the historians in this room to more fully describe how we got to this very positive point. But, as the first U.S. Ambassador to Turkey of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I would like to reflect on where we are going.

As I discussed Turkey in Washington, New York, London and Brussels before my arrival, I came away with three strong impressions about how outsiders --Americans, but Europeans as well-- view Turkey:

1. People understand Turkey's importance to the region;
2. Business people are excited about Turkey's economic and commercial future; rather than decline in importance in the last decade, Turkey has grown in stature politically and economically and in terms of regional security; and
3. Leaders in business and government are following developments here closely.

They see a Turkey that is retooling its economy, opening markets, creating opportunities, reforming the political system and better protecting human rights.

They see a Turkey that will be a full member of the EU. Since being named as a candidate for EU membership last December, Turkey has made significant progress in its European

vocation. This is a goal that the United States has strongly supported. In two days, the EU will deliver its *Accession Partnership Document*, and then Turkey will present its work plan later in the year. The path to the EU will not be easy, and hurdles remain. But in talking with Turks --officials and private citizens-- I have heard in their voices their determination to overcome these obstacles because EU membership will strengthen Turkey and better integrate it into the world economy.

They see a young, dynamic population that is determined to succeed on the world stage, interested in education and rapidly increasing its capacity to use the technological tools of the information society. Right now they see the 16<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world, but they project that Turkey's economic reforms could put it in the top ten.

They see a Turkey whose pace of change will continue to accelerate, but on a line laid out by Atatürk when he said; "The movement of Turks for centuries has kept a steady course. We have always been marching from East to West".

They see a country going through a great transition. As Americans know from their own history transitions have never been neat and do not always look particularly noble. But the efforts of our citizens, civil servants and elected officials have ensured America's indivisibility and prosperity through change. I am confident that the spirit which guided Turks during the early years of the Republic --which I highlighted in my visit to Samsun last month-- still burns in young people here, and will help them meet the challenges of the new century.

In short, the United States sees a Turkey whose strategic and political importance will continue to grow, whose economy will prosper, and whose democratic and social structures will grow stronger. They see a strong and dynamic partner.

Thus, I expect that Turkey and the United States will continue our strategic partnership. It is my honor to try to strengthen those areas where we cooperate and find new arenas to apply the talents of our two great nations. There will no doubt be disagreements as there are always between friends, and times of tension. But it is my firm belief that the last 200 years have

provided a strong foundation --with the durability of one of Sinan's masterpieces, capable of standing up to occasionally difficult weather.

Tomorrow, Americans will go to the polls and elect our new president. Many people have asked me how a Gore administration or a Bush administration will change our approach to Turkey. While ambassadors should not speculate on such matters, I am confident about making the following prediction: tomorrow's results will have little impact on this important relationship. Turkey and the U.S. have been friends for a long time; our friendship brings us both tangible benefits and mutual responsibilities; and our leaders know this. Last year, President Clinton said: "Turkey's future will be critical in shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> century". I am sure that Vice President Gore and Governor Bush would agree.

This is an exciting and enormously productive time in the U.S.-Turkish relationship. But no relationship can remain static. In 1937, before he was Secretary of State, Dean Rusk said: "If we learn the art of yielding what must be yielded to the changing present, we can save the best of the past".

Therefore, as you examine the last 200 years, I hope you will find those elements to discard and those to embrace, so that academics two hundred years from now will say Turkey and the U.S. knew how to make their historic friendship endure and rise to the challenges of a new century.

Thank you.