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VİYANA DİPLOMATİK AKADEMİSİ'NDE YAPTIKLARI KONUŞMA**

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“New Global Environment and Turkish Foreign Policy: Vision, Harmony, Efficiency”

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to stand before you today, here at the Vienna Diplomatic Academy. I am certain that the Academy, which has come a long way since its founding as the Oriental Academy more than 250 years ago is a source of pride for Austria. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, I am particularly happy to be here, since the original purpose of the Oriental Academy was teaching foreign languages, including Turkish to diplomats.

At the outset, I would like to extend my gratitude to the Academy and its new Director, Ambassador Hans Winkler for this opportunity. I am sure that under the guidance of Ambassador Winkler, the Vienna Diplomatic Academy will continue to raise its standards from the high point left off by Ambassador Jiri Grusha after a commendable term of service.

My sincere thanks also go to the Austrian Foreign Ministry, first and foremost to my counterpart His Excellency Michael Spindelegger, for the courtesy and hospitality extended to me and my delegation from the moment we arrived in Austria last night.

Today I was here to have fruitful conversations, discussions with my colleague Minister Spindelegger and this discussion was about Turkey-Austria bilateral relations and about many regional and international issues of our common interests. Turkey and Austria have quite good relations in many aspects. We are cooperating in lot of international settings, international organizations. Our political dialogue is quite frequent and intense. Our economic relations are also growing quite fast. Last year our trade volume approached 2 billion Euros. In Turkey right now we have more than 300 Austrian companies which have direct investments. Last year we have received 500 thousand visitors from Austria to spend some time in Turkey. The fact that we have also around 200 thousand Turkish people living here in Austria, some of them Austrian citizens, some of them Turkish citizens, also makes this relationship quite unique. The increasing human-to-human interaction between our two countries is going to provide more and more of a solid basis for our future relations.

Turkey is a country which is a member of NATO, a Western Alliance, in a way. Turkey is also a country which is in the EU accession process. We are not just a candidate country but now we are also a negotiating country for EU accession. Turkey is also a member of OIC, Organization of Islamic Conference. Turkey is also a country which actually initiated many regional organizations like the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, like the South East European Cooperation Process or most recently the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation platform. We have also more and more institutional links with organizations like the Arab League. A year ago we have started the “Arab League plus Turkey” institutional framework in which Ministers will come together at least once in six months. We started another organizational setting, “Gulf Cooperation Council plus Turkey”, which means Saudi Arabia,

Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman plus Turkey to meet at least once a year on Ministerial level and also have summits.

Turkey is also a member of the Council of Europe from the very beginning. Turkey is a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. We are already in there, in many European structures. But we also try to strengthen our links with other parts of the world. Last year in January Turkey was declared as the strategic partner of the African Union and there are only three stand alone countries which has this privileged position with the African Union; namely China, India and Turkey.

We are also enhancing our reach to the Latin America, the South Pacific Island States, the Caribbean Islands. Turkey is becoming more and more of a country which doesn't have only close regional reach but also a country which has a sense of global responsibility.

When we look at today's world, when we look at today's international relations, especially after 9/11 event. Especially after all rhetoric about Clash of Civilizations, we believe that Turkey has an important responsibility and also a role to play. We are a country which has a majority of Muslim population. We are also a country which has a democratic system and this democratic system has been continuously improved through the EU process and also through organizations like the Council of Europe which we are already a member. Turkey is also a country which has a secular system. There is distinct separation of religious affairs and state affairs in Turkey. Our understanding is the State should be at equal distance to all religions, religious sects. No religious rule should reign the way how the state functions. The state should not be involved with daily religious practices of people. Religious freedoms are also an essential part of our understanding of secularism. This combination of Islam, democracy and secularism is actually quite an interesting combination which helps Turkey to play a reconciliatory role for quite a wide region.

What is happening in Turkey right now is of utmost interest to many countries in the North Africa, in the Middle East, in the Central Asia, in the Balkans, in the Caucasus, even countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan. They are very much interested in what we are doing. When the decision was taken to start the negotiations process with the EU and that was in December 2004, we had journalists from all around the world in Brussels following the process and waiting anxiously the decision what is going to happen. Out of those journalists around 300 of them were from Arab countries. And when the decision was made it was cheered in the Arab world, in many Islamic countries as well. Because the fact that Turkey was going to enter this process and improve the standards was going to mean a lot for many countries. There are many young intellectuals, reform oriented people in these countries. But they need a functioning example in front of them to feel more powerful in their own countries to do very necessary reforms.

The process of EU accession for Turkey is also an aspect which in our view is going to strengthen the European Union. We believe that the values of the European Union are universal values. Those values are not in the monopoly of any certain culture or religion or even geography. We have always seen the EU as an important peace project. A peace project which emerged after the Second World War. But this is mostly a European project right now. With Turkish process in it, this project is now turning into a global peace project, proving more and more that the values of the EU are actually universal values. This understanding, in our view, will make the EU truly global power. EU right now is a big economic power. But

this economic power isn't really reflected into political influence. In order to have a political influence matching to that economic power we believe that Turkey can contribute.

There are many areas where we can see that this process is going to be a win-win process. It is even right now we know that the membership is still far a way. Turkey is not targeting to become a member of EU today, tomorrow or next year. It will take time. Even at the end of the process there will be a big discussion whether all the members will say "Yes" or not. Turkey at that point, whether Turkey will say "Yes" or not. What is important for now is the process itself. The process by which Turkey continuously raise the standards, process by which EU seems to be the entity with open doors with universal values. A country like Turkey getting closer and closer to the structures of the EU. We have every reason as Turkey to continue this process. We have a very strong political will to do so. We don't look at the EU criteria as the requirements that we have to follow but we look at those criteria as a good framework for ourselves to improve the standards in Turkey, to improve the quality of life for our people, to improve our democracy to enhance our practices of fundamental rights and freedoms. That is the mindset that we have about our EU process and we have done a lot so far. The pace of the reforms, maybe sometimes slow, sometimes fast, depending on the climate of Turkey, depending on the climate in the EU. The paces will probable change. There will be ups and downs. But what is important is to keep the things on track and moving forward.

Turkey is now doing also more in terms of energy. We have already finished projects like Bakü-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline bringing the oil from Azerbaijan to a Mediterranean coastal city of Ceyhan. We have already finished BTE Gas Pipeline, taking gas from Baku and connecting it to our grid. We have finished the Gas Interconnector between Turkey and Greece which will continue to Italy which is under construction right now. We have already an oil pipeline between Iran and Turkey carrying Iraqi oil to a Mediterranean port. We have already Blue Stream Project with Russia. We have a major gas pipeline bringing gas from Russia to Turkey from underneath of Black Sea. There are more projects to come like Nabucco, a very important project for the EU which will help the resource diversification for the EU. We have projects like the Arab Gas Pipeline bringing the gas from Egypt to Turkey. We are also talking with Iraq nowadays, how to export the gas and oil of Iraq through Turkey to Europe or to Mediterranean ports. We have even a project with India, how to have oil go through Turkey through Mediterranean to the Red Sea, all the way to India. We are now talking with Indians about this project. Some part by pipeline, some part by tankers. So energy is going to be a major cooperation area between Turkey and the European Union.

Turkey has close cultural and historical links with the Middle East, with North Africa, with countries in the Caucasus, with countries in the Balkans, with the Central Asia, with Pakistan, Afghanistan, even all the way to Bangladesh, Indonesia and so forth. Through these links we are increasing our interactions with all these regions. We are now more involved in resolution of conflicts. We are now more involved in trying to bring peace and stability in many parts of the world.

In the Middle Eastern issues we are heavily involved. Last year when the presidential elections were held in Lebanon, there were only two Prime Ministers who were invited for the ceremony: Prime Minister of Qatar and Prime Minister of Turkey. The final meeting was made in Doha so Prime Minister of Qatar was there, but why Turkey? Because we were silently but effectively working quite hard to make sure that the domestic conflict in Lebanon

didn't turn into a civil war. Finally there was a presidential election. There is now a president a new government and elections this year.

In Iraq, we are talking with all the groups without any exception. We are helping them to get into the political process. We want all the groups of Iraq to express themselves in the democratic system, not by use of weapons. In the Middle Eastern Peace Process, the problems between Israel and Palestinians we are actively involved. We are talking with all the Palestinian groups. We are a country which can talk to Israel as well and we are using those relations to help bring solutions. Last year we started indirect talks between Syria and Israel. It was quite a successful process and until the Gaza War started. We had four rounds of meetings after which both sides were quite satisfied.

Iran is an important neighbor of Turkey, an important country in the region. We have good relations with Iran. Our border with Iran is the same border since 1639. We are in a position to understand them well. But we are also in a position to cooperate with the Western world about how to approach Iran and how to have a dialogue about Iran's nuclear program.

We have also special relations with Afghanistan and Pakistan. When those two countries had problems between themselves back in 2007, we invited two Presidents to Turkey and launched a trilateral summit process. There have been already three summits. The final summit was held on 1st of April this year. For the most recent summit we have also invited the chiefs of army and chiefs of intelligence from both countries, so that they could have bilateral and trilateral meetings with their Turkish counterparts. We are trying to help these two countries to cooperate better to fight against terrorism to fight against extremism. Why Pakistan and Afghanistan Presidents met in Turkey? Because they both have trust in us and we helped them to cooperate better in all the challenges that they faced.

We are also working on to have a totally new geopolitical situation in the South Caucasus, not only through the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform that we initiated but also through bilateral talks between Turkey and Armenia and between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well. As you know right now 20% of the Azeri land is under the occupation of the Armenians. There is a set of talks going on at the top level. Two Presidents are meeting from time to time to talk about how to settle the problem. We are also helping that process. We are also right now in a process with Armenia. We are trying to normalize our relations with Armenia. We have put all the problems on the table and we have started with a comprehensive approach targeting full normalization. That process is also continuing.

The Balkans is also a very crucial area, a region where Austria is also quite interested. This year probably Bosnia-Herzegovina is going to be a country which we all have to follow very closely. It is very important to keep the unity and territorial integrity of Bosnia –Herzegovina. They have problems. I think we all need to help them. Kosovo, quite a few EU member states recognizes Kosovo as an independent state, some still have not. But, Kosovo is a very important country where we all have to be very careful so that things will continue to be stable over there. Serbia is a very important country which has responsibilities for regional stability. Or countries like Macedonia, EU candidate as well. It is a country which almost got into NATO, almost a member of NATO. They have a problem about the name. But they will become a NATO member as soon as that problem is resolved. They have already fulfilled the criteria to become a member. Croatia is a country which is already in the EU process. Our view about the Balkans is that they need a unifying umbrella and that umbrella should be EU-NATO anchor, very important. The Balkans is a relatively small area with many differences,

with many different ethnicities, religions, religious sects and quite recent history of conflicts. Strong anchors of EU and NATO for Balkans is very important to have stability and security in that area.

One last subject which I want to touch is an initiative that we started together with Spain which is called Alliance of Civilizations. It was 2005 when two governments came together. We said that we need a new setting, a new framework, new initiative for interfaith dialogue, for intercultural dialogue; how to close the differences between different cultures, religions, faiths, how to bring people around commonalities and how to prevent tensions, conflicts. This initiative was only a Turkey-Spain initiative at the beginning. Then it started to attract a lot of attention and we turned this over to the United Nations. Now it is a UN initiative. Secretary General appointed a High Representative who is the former President of Portugal, President Sampaio. He is now the High Representative for the Alliance. Right now we have 84 countries already in the Group of Friends voluntarily listing them in the Friends Group of Alliance. We have the first Forum in Madrid last year. The second Forum was in Istanbul just a week ago. I was very happy to see that from 84 countries we had participation and 40 ministers came. 1200 journalists from round the world. Quite a success I would say. Because we had scholars, academicians, politicians. We had 25 panels, simultaneous events, discussions where people were very free to just discuss their ideas and come up with some novelties in a way. About what to do? To close the differences. Now countries are preparing their national strategies, concrete projects about what to do about the Alliance of Civilizations. We have already done ours a year ago. But now more and more countries are preparing their own national strategies. These strategies come up as a Cabinet Decree. We are going to have the next Forum in Brazil. Qatar and Austria already volunteered to have following Forums. Other than the Annual Forums we have also regional meetings. One meeting for example is going to take place in Sarajevo soon. At the end of last year we had a big event in Kazakhstan. Argentina hosted another big event. So there is already good global interest to these issues. Alliance looks at the roots of the problems. It is not a conflict resolution mechanism. It does not really bring countries together to resolve conflicts and so forth. But it goes down to the roots of the problems, then tries to enhance communication and understanding, it tries to do this with concrete projects. That is something also which we are happy that going on well. Austrian Foreign Minister was also there, in the meeting including many foreign ministers and other ministers around the world.

Thank you for your attention.