

**Speech delivered by
H.E. Abdullah Gül
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Turkey
London School of Economics: 14 March 2005**

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am honoured to be with you today at this fine institution of higher learning.

I would like to begin my statement of today by paying tribute to the wisdom and vision of the actors of the British political, intellectual, business and artistic life especially on the issues related to Turkey and my people.

It is not only because I spent some years of my academic life in this country.

It is mainly because of the importance I attach to collective awareness the British society have of the merits of our relationship.

I appreciate the level of consciousness at the United Kingdom of the value and meaning of Turkey's experience also for Europe and beyond.

If I had to cite most recent indications of the British vision of Turkey, I would mention:

- the active political support given by the British Government to Turkey's integration process with Europe,**
- The current exhibition "Turks: a Journey of a Thousand Years" organized by the Royal Academy of Arts,**
- Increasing interest in the Turkish studies at the British academic institutions including the LSE,**

- **More than 500 British companies operating in Turkey and the 37% increase in our trade volume last year only.**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During my last visit to London, almost one and a half year ago, I had delivered a speech at the Chatham House on the Turkish perspectives towards a new environment in the European Union and the Middle East.

I am sure at least some of you were present at that event.

Before coming to London this time, I looked through my previous statement in this city.

I checked if we had delivered what I had promised then.

I checked if the perspective I had given proved to be correct.

I must tell you happily that the answer is a “yes”.

In that speech, I had spared longer time on three interrelated issues:

-Turkish-EU relations,

-Regional problems with a special emphasis on Cyprus,

-Reforms in the Muslim world.

First, on Turkish-EU relations I had confidently announced that “the determined and sustained Turkish reforms will culminate in the European Union’s decision in December 2004 to open accession negotiations with Turkey”.

Indeed, in the last two years my Government launched and implemented an ambitious reform campaign. Our reforms aimed not only to complying with the Copenhagen Political Criteria. They also responded to the aspirations and expectations of the Turkish people for highest standards of democracy and rule of law.

The European Council decision of 17 December 2004 confirmed the fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria in Turkey, thus opening the way for accession negotiations.

In the meantime a lively debate took place all over Europe on Turkey’s European vocation. I find any debate useful. In this case too, every argument challenging Turkey’s

place in the EU was responded by visionaries and far-sighted politicians and intellectuals. The British contribution to this debate has been remarkable.

I do not want to repeat the arguments favouring Turkey's integration with Europe or respond those against it.

But I do want to express my conviction that both Turkey and Europe have reasons to feel stronger now than before.

Turkey and Europe have already begun generating synergy in economic or political areas:

- Turkish economy is now more confident in further opening itself to European investments and trade.**

- Even in the last few months, diplomatic consultations and cooperation between the Turkey and the EU on the crucial developments in the Middle East, Iraq or Caucasus have been further intensified.**

- We shall now be able to work on much closer lines on vital issues from the energy policies to environmental issues, from terrorism to illegal immigration and human trade.**

- Turkey and the EU can now tackle the challenges like fundamentalism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim sentiments more efficiently through joint intellectual, political and administrative efforts.**

- Transatlantic links will also gain additional strength from Turkey's European dimension. NATO Summit in Istanbul has been a symbol of such a perspective.**

I expect that this trend of fruitful cooperation of Turkey with the EU will further develop and will be consolidated parallel to the accession negotiations which will begin on the 3rd of October this year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The priority for My Government is now preparing for accession negotiations.

After the December Summit, we began by arranging a series of briefings for The Council of Ministers on the characteristics and requirements of the negotiations process. On the other hand, I personally have been conducting intense consultations with the civil society and public institutions that will have a role in the process. Now we are at the stage of structural preparations.

In the meantime we are proceeding with the political reforms and their implementation through the Reform Implementation Group which I chair. I consider democracy as a process of perfection. Therefore, our reform drive will continue as ambitious as before.

We are fully aware that the accession negotiations will not be an easy and short process. Through the challenges and difficulties of this process, Turkey's patience and stamina will be tested. I am personally confident that Turkey will pass this test successfully. This is a challenge which will give Turkey an opportunity to revitalize her capacity and potential. I believe that the Turkish society is dynamic enough to respond to the requirements of the negotiation process.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A remarkable anecdote from the EU Summit of 17 December 2004 was the unusually crowded group of journalists from the Arab and other Muslim countries covering the Summit. Their number exceeded the Europeans for the first time! Their focus was the Summit decision on Turkey. The relief, joy and pride felt in the Islamic countries after the positive vote by the EU for a Muslim country is of great historic meaning. This response proved the wisdom of the European politicians who attached special importance also to the cultural-psychological dimension of Turkish integration.

When, in my speech at the Chatham House, I focused on the need for reform in the Muslim world, the Greater Middle East Project had not been launched yet. Since then, awareness and call for reform in the Middle East has increased. Interest in the Turkish experience of reforms has grown equally. In this respect I would like to make a few remarks:

- **First, reforms in Turkey was championed by a political movement, that is AK Party to which I belong, with strong grass- roots. Therefore, popular ownership and support of the reforms was secured.**
- **On the other hand, Turkish people, through extensive and democratic debate, realised that the reforms were good for itself and useful for European integration, on an equal basis. Therefore, reforms were not considered as imposed from outside.**
- **Secondly, we moved on the premise that, as a country with over 99 % Muslim population, our traditional and spiritual values did not contradict the contemporary standards of human rights, gender equality or rule of law. We were confident that they were all compatible with each other and could even be enriching each other.**
- **Thirdly, our political and economic reforms were implemented in the same spirit and complemented each other.**

I understand that Turkey's accession process to the EU will continue to attract attention beyond our borders. Therefore both Turkey and the EU should act carefully during the negotiation process in fulfilling their mutual responsibilities. The negotiation process should help to keep the reforms on track while the economic-social stability is sustained.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Another issue I had focused in my last speech one and a half year ago in London was our search for a peaceful settlement of the Cyprus issue. I hope you will all admit that the sincerity of my Government's dedication to a comprehensive and final settlement of this conflict proved to be genuine.

Unfortunately I cannot tell the same for some other parties related to this issue. Turkish Government and the Turkish Cypriots supported the UN Plan for a settlement. We and the Turkish Cypriots took risks and accepted making sacrifices. We acted with a vision of contributing to peace, stability, security and prosperity in the Eastern flank of the European Union. We opted for compromise because we considered it as a part of the European culture.

We have proved that Turkey's one and only aim in Cyprus is fully guaranteeing the legitimate rights and security of the Turkish Cypriots. Those who claimed that Turkey has been after military or strategic interests in Cyprus have been disproved.

I hope you will understand our feelings of deception, disappointment and frustration. Turkish Cypriot people, who have voted for peace and reunification of the island is still being punished through anachronistic embargoes and isolation. The other party, which rejected a solution is yet to pay a price.

Rejection of the UN Plan on Cyprus was not a lost opportunity for the Cypriots only. Peaceful settlement of this issue would encourage peace parties everywhere from Palestine to Karabagh. UN would gain credibility which it badly needs. European Union would not be in the unusual position of importing a chronic conflict treated by the UN.

However, Turkey will continue to act in consistency with its positive position and push for a peaceful settlement of the Cyprus problem. Turkish Cypriot people have already demonstrated their strong desire for a solution. The other party of the conflict has clearly proved to have no intention for a negotiated settlement.

Turkey, as a power with responsibilities in the region is acting with a vision with regard to the Cyprus issue. Our vision is to create a basin of peace and prosperity in the East Mediterranean, including Greece, Turkey and the island of Cyprus, thus forming a strong pillar of the EU in the future. Turkish-Greek relations and dialogue is now almost exemplary. Turkey and a reunified Cyprus would have every reason to be each other's best neighbours once a just and permanent settlement of the conflict is achieved.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Turkey, as a candidate country at a very special geographic location will constitute an asset in the implementation of the European Union's Neighbourhood Policy.

Peace and stability in the Southern Caucasus is one of our common concerns. My Government is exerting every effort to encourage the consolidation of democracy and settlement of disputes in this region. I strongly believe that in the Caucasus, poverty and conflict can be replaced by prosperity and cooperation. This can be achieved through stronger political will of the countries of the region and coordinated encouragement by the international community. Turkey's joining of her efforts with the EU will surely increase the efficiency of the Neighbourhood Policy of the EU.

My Government's consultations and cooperation with other powers like the USA or the Russian Federation on the developments in Eurasia have already proved useful for all.

In the last few weeks in Ankara, I held extensive consultations with my colleagues from both Azerbaijan and Georgia on the possibilities of easing the problems at the South Caucasus.

With my Armenian colleague, I met six times in the last two years. Last year in Istanbul I arranged a tripartite meeting with my Armenian and Azerbaijani colleagues. We focused on the modalities of a settlement of the Karabagh dispute. I welcome and encourage the ongoing contacts between the two countries. Any progress towards a settlement which would end of occupation of the Azeri territories would also contribute to the normalization of the Turkish-Armenian relations.

In the Balkans, although the situation is better than a decade ago, political stability and economic-social order is far from fully achieved. Kosovo's final status negotiations will be held in a tense atmosphere. Bosnia-Herzegovina needs special attention because of her still fragile structure. Macedonia is very sensitive to the developments around her. Both EU and Turkey have special responsibilities and duties in this region. Our political and security cooperation continues to be fruitful here.

One of the areas where the Turkish-European cooperation could be most useful is the Middle East Peace Process. Turkey is a country which has good and special relations with all the parties of the conflict. I have recently visited Israel and Palestine and held useful talks with both parties. I am happy to see that our suggestions to the parties have

been perceived well and taken into consideration by them. Now, it is most important not to lose the momentum of the fragile peace process.

After Israel's eventual withdrawal from Gaza, security and economic issues will require more international efforts. We have already offered our contribution and cooperation in this process to the parties and the international actors as well.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, part of the problem is solved. However these two countries continue to generate problems ranging from terrorism to drugs in an increasing pace. These issues are very complicated and require our joint and careful response. Resumption of the Transatlantic dialogue on these issues has been most useful.

Turkey has taken over the command of ISAF for the second time in the last three years. The performance of the Turkish Armed Forces in Afghanistan and in other peace operations has once more proved it to be an able, modern and democratic army.

In Iraq, we welcome and actively support the new phase of the political transition process. Through our constant dialogue with all the parties in the political arena of Iraq, we encourage a healthy functioning of the political process.

The new transition parliament and the government in Iraq will have historic responsibilities in preparing and carrying the country to full democracy. Iraqis should now leave aside religious, sectarian or ethnic criteria and focus on finding political solutions to their countries problems. They should be aware that Iraq's integrity is part of the delicate balances of the Middle East. Any disturbance of these balances would bring nothing but suffering to the people of the region and the world.

I thank you for your attention. I can now have your questions.