

# TURKEY'S ROLE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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For many in the international community, the twenty-first century had a somber and apprehensive start. And while the menaces to security are indeed real, this is an extremely promising period for humankind. The prosperity and stability which existed only in North America and Western Europe a few generations ago is now rolling out globally. If we cooperate as this process accelerates, we can overcome many of the global challenges we face today.

Turkey – with its potential for continuing growth and stability – is well placed to become a more significant player, both economically and politically, in the international community. For eight decades after the end of World War I, its role was relatively peripheral. But this will not be true in the decades ahead. As the British author of a new book on Turkey writes, by the middle of the present century, Turkey will be one of the economic giants of a new world order even if it only reaches the average income level of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).\*

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## FOUNDATIONS FOR AN INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

WHEN THE TURKISH REPUBLIC was established in 1923, after eleven years of continuous warfare, its economic and social conditions still lagged far behind those of the advanced industrial countries. Turkey was absorbed by enormous challenges: rapid demographic expansion, urbanization, the development of modern communications and transport infrastructure, and a transformation in education that eventually led to universal literacy and then the growth of universities.

\*Andrew Mango, *The Turks Today*. New York: Overlook Press, 2004.

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Since Turgut Özal's landmark reforms in 1980, there has been an ever-accelerating transformation in Turkey. In a single generation Turkey has become a modern urban society with multichannel satellite television and the internet. This reflects a radical shake-up in economic philosophy and culture. A country which once believed in autarky has now become a strong trading nation with a democratic political framework, whose goods have been successfully competing inside the European Union since 1996.

### THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION

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AGAINST A CHANGING GLOBAL BACKDROP, the European Union will make its momentous decision about Turkey on December 17. We expect the EU to confirm that Turkey now meets the basic membership criteria so that negotiations can start. For us, it is a landmark achievement that Turkey has come this far. It is also a triumph for the EU's ideals and for the Atlantic partnership toward creating international harmony and convergence, and thereby global stability. The reforms help consolidate universal symbolic values such as the rule of law, the respect of human rights, and the protection of minorities. In business terms, they create a propitious climate for cooperation and investment.

AS A FUTURE MEMBER of the EU, Turkey has a great deal to offer, apart from her own dynamic economy and large markets. Working with our neighbors inside the EU, we can bring stability and prosperity to a much larger area around us, building a band of democratic values and stability beyond the south eastern frontiers of the EU. Our joint work will be to replace ancient animosities with cooperation and prosperity. That, we believe, is the true European spirit and a worthy mission for all of us, particularly at these difficult times.

### REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

TURKEY'S NEIGHBORS to its south and east have not had such success in building modern industrial democracies. In fact, Turkey is already a sizeable regional economic power. It is the sixth largest external trading partner of the European Union and the European's largest trading partner in the arc of countries stretching from Vienna through the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East and around to North Africa.

Yet Turks tend to be self-conscious that their income levels are still behind those of the rest of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and

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Development (OECD). Income per capita in Turkey is around US\$7000 per annum in PPP terms, but the gap is steadily closing. This year Turkey's GNP growth rate will probably be around 10 percent – in fact in the second quarter of the year it was growing at around 13 or 14 percent. Inflation has, after more than two decades, dipped virtually to single digit levels.

The gap is thus closing. Turkey, unlike most of its Middle Eastern neighbors, has established partnerships with the international financial and trading system, in addition to its already close partnerships with the United States, in particular, and the European Union countries. As a strong regional economic power, Turkey is now poised to help spread its democratic and free-market values to its neighbors and beyond.

Every discussion of Turkey's foreign policy at some point includes Atatürk's brilliant dictum: "Peace at home and peace in the world." This slogan encapsulates the two basic principles of Turkish foreign policy – first, the protection of sovereignty and security; second, the pursuit of cooperation with other countries for prosperity. It also explains why the new and stronger Turkey that is now emerging will be a team player committed to upholding international stability and cooperation.

Turkey's immediate neighborhood – the Eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Arab Middle East – is full of ancient animosities, unfulfilled ambitions, and active or potential disputes. Turkey has always realized that because it risks being drawn into regional conflicts, partnerships, whenever possible, can keep tensions and disputes on the backburner and allow bilateral cooperation in matters such as trade and investment. Partnerships bring prosperity, the best solvent for international antagonisms.

### TERRORISM

WHILE INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM remains a scourge for the world, security issues also remain a top priority in Turkey's international relations. For many years Turkey has been a haven of peace and security compared to several other countries around it. Internal peace in our region does not come easily. As one international security official said, "One of the things the Western world tends to forget is that Turkey is a bulwark against terrorism for it and always has been. The problem of Middle Eastern terrorism would be much more serious for us, if Turkey was not so firmly opposed to it." Just as in America after the September 11, there was always a strong national consensus in Turkey against terrorism and violent extremism of all kinds; Turks were prepared for the sort of emergency safeguards that the people of North America have also accepted in the last three years.

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Solidarity against terrorism comes at a price. The al Qaeda – inspired attacks on Istanbul in November 2003 showed that Turkey is one of the many frontlines in the international war against terrorism. This is an issue, however, on which Turks stand united.

### COOPERATION FOR DEVELOPMENT AND STABILITY

TERRORISM GROWS out of political confusion and economic backwardness. Turkey therefore supports all moves to bring prosperity and stability to countries which have never known them in modern times.

Turkey's economic transformation is a strong factor for stability in a wider area. To give one example, though Turkey's hydropower projects in the southeast have been criticized by campaigners, these projects will create something like a new California in the Middle East. Such a transformation is not going to solely benefit the people of Turkey. It will be a magnet for development across the border in Iraq and Syria as well.

Political issues must not be allowed to overshadow the economic prospects which will strengthen peace and stability in the region. Building blocks must be stable national units inside recognized boundaries. The continuing unity of Iraq is an essential prerequisite for durable progress. Centrifugal tendencies must not be allowed to dismember the country and the rights of all groups in it (for Turkey the Turkmens, though overlooked by the world's press, are naturally important) must be respected on a basis of fair and equal partnership within their nation state.

Turkey and Iraq are neighbors and have always been close partners on issues such as trade. The new partnership with the United States rests on solid local foundations. We believe that the other neighboring countries in the region should be drawn into this partnership as well. Solidarity offers the best hope of extinguishing the fires which now blaze in Iraq and can prevent them from spreading.

Within the Atlantic alliance – which now faces challenges but also great opportunities – Turkey seeks a positive and constructive, rather than an assertive or high-profile, regional political role. We believe that a widening circle of cooperation in areas such as trade, investment, and technology is the sure way to cement together foundations of a stable new order in our region. Its economic and social transformation enables Turkey to play a key role in this quest for a better and more secure life for everyone in the twenty-first century.

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