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“Turkey’s Preparation for EU Accession: What Has Been Achieved?”

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Mr Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address this distinguished audience and I would like to thank the Cicero Foundation for providing me with this opportunity.

Today, we can safely state that the European Union has proven its value. It turned strife and mutual destruction into peace, stability and prosperity. The enlargement process has played a key role in this systematic change. European values and policies will have a far greater global reach and impact with the continued process of enlargement.

The Union has developed a culture which embraces diversity as a richness, mutual tolerance and understanding as a way of life, and solidarity as a code of conduct. The way it has addressed issues of common concern has constituted a role model for many regions in Europe and beyond. Turkey has much to offer to further this unique process.

The EU continues to evolve through enlargement and deepening. The Union is a work in progress in which those who want to accede will not only adopt the EU *acquis*, but will have to adapt themselves to a new frame of mind.

Turkey is Part of the European System

Why has Turkey oriented itself towards Europe? Historically, Turkey has been part of the European system. She has been an active participant in European alliances. She has also been part of the European and Mediterranean economy. Eighty years ago, under the leadership of Atatürk, Turkey made her strategic choice about the country's nature and orientation. The founding philosophy of the Turkish Republic aimed at modernization and adoption of contemporary -that is Western- civilization with all features essential for democracy and rule of law. Modern Turkey was thus established as a secular democracy in a country with a predominantly Muslim population.

Turkey has ever since closely aligned itself with the West and has become a founding member of the United Nations, a member of NATO, the Council of Europe, the OECD and an associate member of the Western European Union. During the Cold War Turkey was part of the Western alliance, defending freedom, democracy and human rights. In this respect, Turkey has played and continues to play a vital role in the defence of the European continent and the principal elements of its foreign policy have converged with those of its European partners.

In this mind-set, Turkey chose very early to begin close cooperation with the fledgling European Economic Community. She applied for an association agreement with the EEC in 1959. This was the Ankara Agreement, which established Turkey's association with the Community in 1963. Forty years ago, this document already stipulated that once certain obligations were met, Turkey could be a member of the Community.

In 1987, Turkey officially applied for membership. The EC response was that, while Turkey was eligible for full membership, the necessary conditions had not yet been fulfilled. It also stated that at that moment the EC was not ready for any new enlargement because of the ongoing work on the completion of the Single Market. So, it was not a refusal, but a deferral.

In 1989, the Commission recommended that the Association Agreement be implemented fully, and that in particular the Customs Union be completed on schedule. The Customs Union was concluded in 1995.

Finally, the Helsinki European Council of 1999 declared that Turkey was a candidate State destined to join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate States.

Turkey's prospective membership in the Union has been a source of debate since then. There are some issues which negatively influence the perceptions of the EU public opinion concerning Turkey's accession to the EU. I would like to touch upon some of these issues.

The Debate on Turkish Membership

It is argued that Turkey's population will constitute a problem when Turkey becomes a member. Demographic trends, however, indicate that population growth in Turkey follows characteristics of Western societies. Our population will reach the level of 80-85 million in 20 or 25 years. This figure will then stabilize and remain only as a small fraction of the EU population. Turkey will probably never be the European Union's most populated country.

Another argument, which is at the centre of the debate, is the cultural difference. EU has institutionally refrained from making reference to religious heritage while defining European identity; on the contrary it recognizes and respects cultural diversity. However, we hear from time to time the argument that Turkey does not belong in the Union because of its cultural and religious background. This argument is in essence contradictory with what Europe stands for. I believe that the fact that we adhere to the same values, in other words, human rights, rule of law, democracy is a necessary, as well as sufficient condition for being accepted in the Union. As long as we maintain this common vision, religious differences should be irrelevant.

Regarding the debate on the geographical boundaries of Europe, first of all, if the Balkans and Cyprus belong to Europe, why not Turkey? Europe, throughout its entire history, never had predetermined borders. There is no internationally agreed formal definition of Europe. The unification experiment of Europe has been based on political rather than geographical considerations, as all past attempts through the use of force were ultimately a failure. Perhaps it is this accumulated historical experience which provides a solid foundation for the slow but steady process of European integration. Therefore, the on-going debate on the borders of Europe relies on no more than intellectual and philosophical prejudgements. The founding fathers of the EU, Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, did not conceive of any geographical

limitations while devising the Treaty of Rome, but instead based the construction of Europe on shared common values.

In fact, Article 1 of the draft Constitutional Treaty states that the Union shall be open to all European states whose people share the same values, respect them and are committed to promoting them together. Therefore, it's clear that the principles lying beneath European unification are unchanged after more than 40 years.

What Has Been Achieved?

Fortunately, such intricate discussions have not prevented us from engaging in intensive work in cooperation with our European partners. So, as the title of my speech directs me to, let me summarize what, indeed, has been achieved on the road of Turkey's EU accession.

The recognition of Turkey as a candidate for accession at the Helsinki European Council in December 1999 ushered in a new era in the relations between Turkey and the EU. For both parties, Helsinki marked a new beginning.

As foreseen in the Helsinki European Council conclusions, the EU Commission prepared an Accession Partnership for Turkey. The Turkish Government, in turn, announced its National Program for the Adoption of the EU *acquis*. Both documents were adopted in March 2001.

At the same time, the Turkey-EU Association Council began to meet regularly. Eight sub-committees were established to carry out an analytical assessment of the level of harmonization of the Turkish legislation with the *acquis communautaire*.

However, our most pressing aim has been the opening of accession negotiations, which has been linked by the Helsinki European Council to the fulfilment of the Copenhagen political criteria. For this purpose Turkey engaged in extensive reforms. The four years since Helsinki have witnessed dramatic developments.

First came a major review of the Constitution. Thirty-four Articles were amended in 2001, many of these amendments coinciding with the actual provisions of our National Program.

The package of constitutional amendments covered a wide range of issues, such as improving human rights, strengthening the rule of law and restructuring democratic institutions.

Then, was adopted a new Civil Code which entered into force on 1 January 2002 and introduced improvements notably as regards the freedom of association and the right to assembly, as well as gender equality and child protection.

This was only the initial step which was soon followed by complementary legislative and administrative measures to ensure their implementation. Legislative reforms have been adopted in packages. There have been a total of seven such packages.

The first four packages were adopted in 2002, before the Copenhagen European Council. They already contained substantial improvements in areas regarding freedom of expression and assembly, prevention of torture and ill-treatment. As a most noteworthy improvement, the abolition of death penalty with the third package was acclaimed worldwide.

The fifth annual Progress Report for Turkey, as well as the Strategy Paper prepared in 2002 by the European Commission recognized the political reforms realized in Turkey as a fundamental step towards meeting the Copenhagen criteria.

Following this report, the Copenhagen European Council of 12-13 December 2002, ruled that “if the European Council in December 2004, on the basis of a report and a recommendation from the Commission, decides that Turkey fulfils the Copenhagen political criteria, the EU will open negotiations without delay.” Although this decision fell behind our expectations, as we wished that accession negotiations start before May 2004, we believe that it constituted a new stage in our relations with the EU regarding our accession process.

In accordance with the Commission’s recommendations in the 2002 Strategy Paper, it was also decided in Copenhagen that in order to assist Turkey towards EU membership, the accession strategy for Turkey would be strengthened; the process of legislative scrutiny would be intensified; the Customs Union would be extended and deepened; and the Union would significantly increase its pre-accession financial assistance for Turkey.

The revised Accession Partnership, which was adopted by the EU General Affairs Council on 14th of April, is a roadmap that helps our Government in its efforts to comply fully with the Copenhagen political criteria. Our National Program has also been revised accordingly and submitted to the Commission.

Concurrently, the last three harmonization packages have been adopted this year. We now believe that we have ensured compliance with the Copenhagen political criteria as far as the legislative measures are concerned.

To give a brief summary of all legislative reforms,

- We have, during the last two years; extended the scope of basic rights and freedoms, such as freedoms of expression, assembly and association have been further strengthened
- We have abolished the death penalty;
- We have lifted the legal restrictions concerning the learning of different languages and dialects used by Turkish citizens in their daily lives; we later further facilitated the process of establishing courses in such languages and dialects.
- We have created the possibility of broadcasting in these languages and dialects, even by private networks,
- We have introduced the possibility of retrial on the basis of judgements rendered by the European Court of Human Rights;
- We have facilitated the construction of churches; and created an opportunity for community foundations to register real estate in their possession.
- Deep structural changes to our public administration have been introduced. We have aligned the duties and competences of the Secretariat General of the National Security Council with the consultative nature of the Council and with the needs of a democratic executive.
- We have extended the Parliamentary scrutiny to cover also the use of public assets and public expenditure in the areas outside the budget, including military expenditures.

By opting for legislative packages, the Government has expedited the legislative process so as to bring forward the decision on the start of the accession negotiations. The Government's long-term goal, however, remains a comprehensive overhaul of our basic legislation. This

process is well underway and it will soon start yielding tangible results. I emphasize however, that in our view all legislative reforms needed to satisfy the Copenhagen criteria are already finalized.

The efforts have not been limited to internal legislative reforms. Turkey will soon become party to all the principal human rights conventions of the UN. The instruments of ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the so-called Twin Covenants, are being deposited in New York.

We have initiated the process for signing the First Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights concerning the competence of the Human Rights Committee to receive individual complaints.

We have also submitted all our reports to the monitoring bodies of the UN Conventions. At present Turkey does not have any overdue reports. Turkey is among the countries which have extended a standing invitation to the special procedures of the UN.

The instrument of ratification of the Sixth Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights, abolishing death penalty in peacetime, is being deposited in Strasbourg. We have also initiated the process to sign the Thirteenth Protocol, abolishing death penalty in all circumstances. The Council of Europe Civil Law Convention on Corruption has been ratified and the instrument of ratification is being deposited in Strasbourg. The Criminal Law Convention on Corruption is on the agenda of the plenary of the parliament for ratification.

The Government is committed to ensure full and effective implementation of all the legal reforms that have been accomplished. There is a number of secondary legislation that will be adopted to put legal reforms into practice. The Government has set the goal of “zero tolerance” to all torture and ill treatment. Training programmes of public officials have been intensified.

A special monitoring group has been established at the political level to overview the progress in the actual implementation of political reforms. The Minister of Foreign Affairs chairs this group which is comprised of the Minister of Justice and the Minister of the Interior. They will

meet regularly to define and address issues of implementation. Senior officials from the three Ministries concerned, including the Secretary-General for EU Affairs, the new Head of the Human Rights Department of the Prime Ministry and the Chairman of the Human Rights Advisory Council will assist them. The implementation of the reforms has also become a permanent item on the Agenda of the Council of Ministers.

The participation of NGOs in improvement of human rights is encouraged. The civil society actively participates in the work of the Human Rights Advisory Council and expresses its views on the reforms and their implementation.

As a crucial aspect of implementation, the establishment of an “Ombudsman” in Turkey is currently under serious consideration. The Ministry of Justice will soon report the work being done in this regard.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that all these courageous steps are being taken at a time when personal liberties were being restricted due to security concerns in many countries.

These reforms have been adopted after healthy parliamentary and public debates. The opposition has participated in a constructive manner in the legislative work. All relevant institutions contributed to the process. A real change in mentality and practice is underway. Turkey’s European drive will continue to prevail, as long as the European Union itself keeps giving the correct positive response to the reforms. More than seventy percent of the Turkish public opinion is in favour of Europe, but it needs to be encouraged and reassured.

We have also undertaken significant structural reforms in the economic area, regardless of the fact that Copenhagen economic criteria have not been set as a prerequisite for initiating accession negotiations.

In line with the National Program and in response to the serious economic crisis that Turkey has been going through, numerous reform measures have been adopted. In terms of the economic criteria, Turkey has restructured its financial sector, ensured transparency in public finance, and enhanced competitiveness and efficiency in the economy. The structural reforms

have already started to yield tangible results and considerable progress has been made in meeting the priorities envisaged in our National Program.

Work on the harmonization of Turkish legislation with the *acquis* also continues unabated. Turkey's alignment with the Community *acquis* have been analysed and developed since 2000 by the eight sub-committees, which convened three times. Thus Turkey is technically ready for the accession negotiations.

We will of course continue our efforts to further adapt our economy to the international norms as well as to those of the EU. Turkey will come closer to the EU in the economic field with the structural changes it will undertake in the next decade and with the progress achieved by the mobilization of its young and dynamic population. Therefore, contrary to what is believed, Turkey will not be a burden on the EU budget.

Turkey's Participation in the Convention

In accordance with the Laeken European Council Conclusions, Turkey has participated actively in the Convention on the future of Europe on an equal status with the other candidate countries and has contributed to the Convention's work with two parliamentarians and a government representative, as the other candidate countries. Turkey now participates as an observer in the Intergovernmental Conference which will finalize Europe's new constitution.

The current developments in the international scene, mostly in our region have provided Turkey with the opportunity to contribute to the debate in the EU. There have been intense consultations, which we have welcomed. We wish to continue to bring our input also regarding the reconstruction of Iraq and the implementation of the road map in the Middle East. The world is changing and new challenges, among them organized crime, terrorism and illegal trafficking of human beings, epidemics and chronic poverty, are replacing the old ones. We need to be able to meet them together.

Once Turkey becomes a full a member of the EU, it will have an even stronger voice in projecting the basic principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law to neighbouring regions. The strategic and economic advantages Turkey's membership will bring to the EU will help the EU become a more prominent global actor. As the first country in the Union with

a predominantly Muslim population, Turkey's membership will raise the profile of the EU in the prevention and settlement of conflicts between the western community of nations and the Islamic world. This will further help mitigate tensions between civilizations.

The Helsinki European Council was a Watershed

To sum up, the Helsinki European Council was a watershed in that it was a commitment not only for Turkey, but also for the EU to reach a new level of convergence.

The opening of accession negotiations with Turkey as soon as possible will accelerate our efforts towards total harmonization with EU standards. The EU will also benefit from such a development given the fact that our relations are based on mutual interests.

We are fully aware that the duration of accession negotiations will depend upon Turkey's performance in the process. In any event, membership will not be granted until Turkey delivers on all of its commitments and reaches EU standards in each and every sector. However, the decision of the European Council in December 2004 to open accession negotiations with Turkey will consolidate and give impetus to our political reform process. Such a decision will no doubt boost our efforts towards complying fully with the economic criteria as well.

By openly and unambiguously stating that Turkey is a candidate, the Union has effectively demonstrated its determination not to be an inward-oriented fortress. Turkey's membership in the Union will reinforce religious and cultural diversity. It will also demonstrate that the Union is able to withstand the so-called threat of the "clash of civilisations" on the basis of European values. It will show that the EU is determined to unify Europe without creating new fault lines. This is a historical mission both for the EU and Turkey. This will reaffirm the common values that constitute the very basis of the European Union. It will promote peace, security and stability, especially in the still volatile South-eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean.

I believe Cicero himself would agree, since he once said "*We are obliged to respect, defend and maintain the common bonds of union and fellowship that exist among all members of the human race*".

Now is the time to proceed towards a stronger and more efficient Union that can make its voice heard around the world. Turkey will add to the Union's strength.

Thank you for your attention.