



**Speech delivered by Mr. Ömer Sabancı, President of TÜSIAD  
at the dinner on the occasion of the inauguration of TÜSIAD Office in Paris**

**Paris, 9 March 2004**

Minister Mer, Minister Babacan, Excellencies, dear friends and colleagues.

Thank you all for coming. We are privileged to have your company here tonight.

Throughout this critical and potentially momentous year, we will take our message to members of the European Union and talk to them of the realities of Turkey.

We will explain the advantages for the European Union of Turkey's membership. We will speak of the need not to sacrifice a historical decision to short term domestic considerations or an impending enlargement fatigue.

As we embark anew on this journey, France is our first stop. The reason for visiting France first goes far beyond the occasion of the opening of our office here in Paris.

When generations of idealists who opposed the autocracy of the Sultan looked for a place of refuge it was to France that they turned. When efforts to modernize the Ottoman Empire began in earnest it was the philosophers of the enlightenment, the literature and political thought of France that attracted the reformers.

The Turkish Republic was designed in large measure after French political and administrative example. Kemal Atatürk's private library includes many well-thumped, meticulously annotated works by French thinkers, notably Rousseau and Montesquieu.

Hence, we hold France, our friendship with her and what she has historically stood for in highest esteem. These strong historical and intellectual bonds also give us the reassurance that France will understand our aspirations.

We firmly believe that France will appreciate the historical, strategic and political significance of helping Turkey join the European Union.

We are here, then, to brief you about a Turkey that is yet unseen but is fast emerging. We wish to talk about what we can do for the EU as the post-Cold War world is finally and with great pains taking shape. We want to reflect on a Turkey that, in the words of the general manager of a top French company, will be "the engine of growth for Europe".

Mr. Minister, over the past two years Turkey made great strides in bringing itself up to par with the Copenhagen Criteria. We have also, under the duress of an almost complete meltdown of our economy, begun to restructure our economic system.



Since the devastating crisis of 2001 the Turkish society made great sacrifices. We did indeed, all of us, bite the bullet.

With the guidance of a program supported by the IMF and then admirably managed by Minister Babacan we have finally reached calm waters. From now on, the Maastricht criteria and the Lisbon Strategy of the European Union are also our main guidelines.

As of this month the rate of inflation dropped to single digit levels, a feat forgotten for over a generation. Growth has been restored to the economy even if employment figures have not yet caught up with the rebound. Interest rates are at their lowest since a quarter century ago and budgetary discipline has been mostly restored. Turkish companies are emerging as world-class competitors in sophisticated industrial products.

We are yet to restructure our expenditures, move ahead with privatization, formalize the informal economy and broaden our tax base. Administrative reform is an absolute must and work on it has already begun. We are confident that these goals are achievable and they will be attained.

These are issues that are dear to us at TÜSİAD. But as importantly perhaps is our commitment to bring Turkey's economy to the standards of most competitive countries in terms of its technological sophistication.

With the start of the negotiations early next year, we expect an influx of foreign direct investment. This should enhance the intensification of economic activities in our country. Our economic dynamism is helping the economies of neighboring countries. We expect Armenia to soon join Syria, Iraq, Georgia, Russia, Iran and other regional countries as a viable trade partner of Turkey when the border is opened.

By the beginning of the next decade Turkey will be an energy corridor as gas and oil pipelines cross the country north to south and east to west. The European Union would be one of the beneficiaries of such a development since these multiple pipelines will enable it diversify its sources of energy.

Distinguished guests, at TÜSİAD we worked hard and long for Turkey's democratization. We have taken risks, staked our reputation and pushed our democratic agenda relentlessly. The legal aspects of the reforms are almost completed. Implementation is our real challenge and it is already gaining pace.

We are the watchdogs of the reform process. We will not let it fail. Moreover we have no doubts in our minds that our current government is fully committed to the membership agenda. This agenda includes the supremacy of civilian authority as well. What we ask from our partners in the EU is encouragement and a fair assessment when December arrives. Turkey is ready for the process of negotiations, which we know will take several years to successfully conclude.

By that European Council, Turkey will have done its part in securing a Cyprus resolution. We hope that our Greek counterparts, particularly in the island, will do the same.



Part of the reason for my certainty stems from the extraordinary role Turkey is likely to play in strategic terms in the world that is being shaped. September 11 and the conduct of the war against Iraq led all of us to a reassessment of Transatlantic relations.

We are all more appreciative of a world order where secular thinking prevails. We all have a common interest in not allowing a so-called clash of civilizations. Just as much we have a common interest in stabilizing the Middle East and assure the emergence of a secular, representative political order in that critical region.

I am sure you share my view that such a task would be almost impossible without Turkey's participation and contribution. Developments of the past year and a half, particularly the context of the Iraq war have highlighted the commonality of interests for Turkey and the European Union. We should work to deepen our dialogue and understanding. And this can only be achieved as our partnership evolves to fellow membership in an EU that becomes a full player in world politics just as France desires.

The decision to start accession negotiations will propel Turkey towards the final stage of its political, economic and social transformations. We then hope to contribute to the shaping of Europe that is being launched as the continent unifies.

Mr. Minister, I thank you for your patience and most of all I express to you my gratitude for having given us this opportunity to share our views with you.

Before I leave though, I would like to share my gratitude to MEDEF's President Mr. Seillière and MEDEF International's President Mr. Perigot for their kind cooperation with TÜSİAD to promote French-Turkish relations and also to make this evening possible. Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you and bon appetit to all. « Afiyet olsun ».

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