



**IFTAR SPEECH OF
MINISTER FOR EU AFFAIRS AND CHIEF NEGOTIATOR EGEMEN BAŐI
(ANKARA, 31 AUGUST 2010)**

Distinguished Ambassadors,
Distinguished Colleagues,
Dear Friends,
Distinguished Guests,
Esteemed Members of the Press,

We have come together here once again as a gathering of friends.

With my dear spouse Beyhan, we are very happy and excited to be here together with our friends and colleagues and very grateful that you are here to share this meaningful iftar dinner with us. Please enjoy your meal. May Allah accept your worship.

We all know that friends with whom we embark on the same journey are very important in our culture.

We grew up with our parents' advice to choose our friends carefully.

For this reason, in our culture, first we choose our friends, and then we start our journey. (if you do not choose your travel partners carefully and find the right ones, you will either be left alone on the journey or you will be lost).

If you choose the right partner, you will easily finish the journey.

What we see here today is the gathering of the friends who walk the same path in the same direction, with the same objective and same destiny.

It is a great honour for me to start the journey with such a staff, to go through the journey with such a team towards the same objective.

I thank each and every one of you on this occasion, and wish you the best with your work and your dedication.

Dear Guests,

I have mentioned the importance of finding friends in our culture.

There are other criteria for choosing friends, which are relatively more important in our culture.

For example, in our culture, a friend should be wise, intelligent, and honest. A friend should be loyal. Above all, a friend should bear humanistic values.

We can extend the list.

However, in our culture, there are also some unacceptable attitudes.

For instance, in our understanding, the questioning of one's faith and ethnicity, and excluding someone based on his/her race or faith is not acceptable.

Both our religion and culture are based on the value of tolerance.

It is clearly stated in our holy book: ~~We~~ We believe in Allah and in what has been sent down to us, and what was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the offspring of the twelve sons of Jacob and what was given to Moses, Jesus and the Prophets from their God. We make no distinction between one another among them and to Him we have submitted.+(Ali Imran Sura, Verse 84)

Anatolia which is the cradle of civilisations and the land of tolerance has been ornamented with different motifs of each civilisation and religions and was enriched with the beauty of each of those motifs.

Istanbul, which I have always been proud to represent, is an excellent symbol of peace and tolerance.

You can see the places of worship of the three Abrahamic religions, Islam, Christianity and Judaism, on the same street together for centuries in Istanbul without posing any threat to the freedom of each other.

The churches constructed in the 1st and 2nd centuries are still standing in Mardin. Mardin is the only place where an Orthodox church and a Catholic church have been constructed back to back to each other.

The Church of Saint Pierre, recognized as the first Christian church in the world is in Hatay, among many mosques and synagogues.

The Etz-Ahayim Synagogue has been freely carrying out its religious services next to the Ulu Camii (Grand Mosque) since the 14th century.

The Akdamar Church in Van, Balıklı Lake of Prophet Abraham in Sanliurfa, Sumela Monastery in Trabzon, Mevlana Mausoleum in Konya; all depict the history of mankind.

The Ayasofya Museum and the Consul in Iznik; the House of Virgin Mary in Izmir, which is one of the most sacred places of Christianity; and Church of Saint Nicholas in Antalya are among a few examples of our two thousand year-old common culture. As an example of tolerance, the Do ramac2zade Ali Pasha Mosque in Bilkent, which is very close to us, accommodates a mosque, church and synagogue in the same place and enables people of different faiths to pray under the same roof for the same God.

As it can be seen from these examples, Anatolia has been a land in which people belonging to different beliefs and cultures have lived together in mutual understanding and tolerance for ages.

We are proud to be the children of a civilization which says %We love the created because of the Creator+ and makes an invitation %Come, come, whoever you are. Come+.

The culture and history of Anatolia has developed with this understanding of tolerance.

For this reason, we claim that Turkey's membership to the European Union is an opportunity that will serve as one of the historical turning points for world peace.

Robert Schuman, the French Foreign Minister of the time commenced his declaration, which established a concrete basis for the idea of the European Union on 9 May 1950, with these words: %World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it+.

The Holy Prophet Mohammed says: %The Arab has no superiority over the Persian and the Persian has no superiority over the Arab, red also has no superiority over black and black has no superiority over red. No nation has superiority over the other.+ Turkey's membership to the European Union will also be the most symbolic example in the 21st century of integration of civilizations and of the fact that differences can live together peacefully and that people can unite around the common values of the humanity irrespective of any type of ethnic, racial and religious differences.

Distinguished Guests,

We attribute great importance to Turkey's EU membership process in terms of world peace.

Besides, Turkey's bid for EU membership will help raise the democratic standards of Turkey and provide our citizens in every field the opportunities of a modern country.

With this objective in mind, we are determined. We have no intention to give up our efforts to raise the standards in Turkey even if we confront some obstacles.

Because, Turkey has started this journey with the right travelling partner.

The road which was once long and narrow, has shortened and become an attainable target.

Now, we are on the verge of a historical process that will shorten the distance and increase the speed limit.

With the Constitutional amendment package that will be submitted to referendum on 12 September, we will realize the most comprehensive reform package on the way to EU membership.

This package, which can be counted as a historical opportunity in all aspects, will help Turkey break its chains and get rid of the anti-democratic character of the Constitution of the military coup.

Our citizens are already impatient to eventually reach a constitution at EU standards.

This package will not only change many things in Turkey but it will also provide many opportunities for change.

Greece, Spain and Portugal; all became members of the EC in the 1980s, following their liberation from dictatorships, by amending their constitutions inherited from the military regimes. Now it is Turkey's turn to do the right thing and to become a member of the EU.

Therefore, all of us, the right and the left, the Alawite and the Sunni, the young and the old, workers and civil servants, will certainly not miss this opportunity by voting YES.

After voting %ES+ on September 12, we will knock on the door of the European Union on September 13, more resolutely.

Dear Guests,

Before concluding my speech, I would request that you remember the people of Pakistan and include them in your prayers and your donations, particularly during these days which are close to the Ramadan Bayram.

We have all been following this tragic disaster on the media.

One fifth of the country is submerged under water; 20 million people have been affected by this disaster. The people of Pakistan are struggling to stay alive without food, water and shelter.

I represented Turkey at the UN's special session on Pakistan on August 19. During this meeting, the Foreign Minister of Pakistan said %Please convey our thanks to your President, Prime Minister and your people on behalf of the Pakistani people. It is very heartening to know that Turkey, both as a state and nation, stands by the Pakistani people.+I found these words to be very moving.

We should not and will not leave these sentiments unreturned. We intend will be visiting Pakistan tomorrow with Ms. Emine Erdogan, the esteemed spouse of our Prime Minister, accompanied with a delegation in order to participate in the relief work.

We hope that our visit will be helpful to attract national and international attention to the gravity of the disaster. We hope that normal living conditions will be achieved by the delivery of aid to the region as soon as possible.

As I conclude my speech, I would like to express my gratitude to you, my distinguished friends, for your participation.

As the poet, Özdemiir Asaf had said:

When a word is added to a word,
When a sound is added to a sound,
When a person joins a person,
They grow, grow, grow...

Welcome again. I am very honoured by your participation.