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TURKEY'S EUROPEAN UNION STRATEGY

Determination in the Political Reform Process

Continuity in Socio-Economic Transformation

Effectiveness in Communication

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Determination in the Political Reform Process, Continuity in Socio-Economic Transformation, Effectiveness in Communication

Turkey's European Union (EU) process, on-going for more than half a century, is the most important modernisation project after the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey, as President Erdoğan has indicated. Turkish Government, with a strong commitment to the EU process and to the transformation taking place in Turkey, will continue its determined and consistent policy for the EU membership as recently emphasized in the Programme of the 62nd Government. In line with this objective, it has become essential to develop an EU strategy based on concrete steps and an intensive interaction network. Turkey and the EU are encountering common challenges which in fact underline the importance of Turkey's accession process in shaping the EU project.

While the globalisation dynamics deepened gradually with a multidimensional nature in the last decades, it was the Eurozone that felt the complications of the 2008 global economic crisis most intensely. The political and social problems caused by the economic crisis impelled the EU Member States to pursue protectionist policies hampering the European integration. Furthermore, the claim that the EU has suffered from "enlargement fatigue" following the largest enlargement wave in 2004 also trivialized this most important foreign policy instrument of the EU and adversely affected Turkey's accession negotiations.

However, the EU maintains its long-term strategic objectives despite the unfavourable current political and economic circumstances. In fact, the Enlargement Strategy Paper annually published by the European Commission, underlines the significance of the enlargement policy for the EU in terms of stability and security as well as increasing welfare and growth. Strengthening the global role of the EU is among the ten priorities pointed out in the Programme of Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission for 2014-2019. Accordingly, Turkey is still an important strategic partner for the EU despite the problems encountered in the negotiation process. Moreover, strategic importance of Turkey-EU relations increases for both sides in parallel with the rapid changes in the nature of international relations and in our region. The recent dramatic changes, from Syria to Ukraine and Middle East to North Africa, require Turkey and the EU to act jointly against the global and regional threats. In this respect, we believe that the EU will adopt a vision that suits its

global power instead of inward-oriented policies while carrying out enlargement negotiations and pursuing a harmonious neighbourhood policy. Turkey will make further progress and determinedly move towards its membership objective in a period that confirms our “Powerful Turkey, Powerful EU” perspective.

While the EU Member States are struggling with political and economic problems, Turkey is passing through a restructuring period characterised by three important pillars. Turkey has been experiencing a spectacular transformation process in the last twelve years thanks to further democratisation, improvements in freedoms, an economic restoration in tune with the global economy and an active foreign policy. In this period, millions of citizens have moved up to the middle class and begun to demand modern standards in all fields of social life. Accordingly, improved economic conditions have led Turkish citizens to ask for a stronger democracy. Despite all the difficulties, Turkish Government has taken important steps to include all segments of the society in the democratisation and development process. The EU accession process has been an important means for the Government to this end. Thus, the process maintains its significance for Turkey despite the fact that it has been going on for more than half a century, the belief that there are double standards for Turkey, the visa obstacles faced by Turkish citizens and on-going political problems such as the Cyprus issue.

The essential dynamics of Turkey’s EU policy are the enhancement of democracy and human rights, institutionalization of free market economy and further establishment of modern living standards in all fields. Through the political, economic and social reforms implemented in line with the EU Acquis, Turkey experiences a substantial transformation and becomes a much stronger country both in its neighbourhood and in the international fora. Turkey is unique in its region as it carries out accession negotiations with the EU. With substantial improvements in terms of democratization and human rights thanks to the EU accession process, Turkey has adopted a “citizen-oriented” approach based on rights and freedoms. Therefore, the EU process is one of the essential dynamics of Turkey’s domestic and foreign policy vision.

Turkey-EU relations are sustainable and strong since they are based on a “win-win” strategy. Turkey and the EU share mutual benefits in many areas, ranging from foreign policy, economic and trade relations, energy supply and security to border management, employment and migration policy. Civil wars and conflicts in our region attest to the fact that Turkey is a key country for the EU in terms of political and economic stability, and that the EU membership is decisive on Turkey’s stability. Turkey will contribute to the EU in various

areas thanks to its socio-economic transformation, dynamic social structure, growing economy and regional power. Hence, considering the increasing co-dependency, a common future is indispensable for both sides.

The successful philosophy of the European Union is the adoption of an integrative approach to overcome the common challenges and the mobilisation of fact-based action mechanisms. This philosophy remains as our guide while projecting the future and implementing the EU Strategy with a refreshed motivation. Turkey will be better contributing to a stronger Union which is aware of its interests. Having a strong national identity based on its history and geography, important global position, power of initiative and most importantly a committed stance that prioritizes human dignity, Turkey wishes to see the European Project overcoming the challenges of the twenty-first century and extending its influence across all geographies in the upcoming period. Turkey can make an authentic contribution to this end. Turkey's European Strategy will be based on the progress made in all areas and the huge potential of the country.

As underlined in the Programme of the 62nd Government, Turkey's EU accession is a strategic goal which is pursued with determination. This process has gained even greater strategic significance due to the adopted perspective of a New Turkey, country's status at the global level and the confidence Turkey has inspired through its human-oriented policies in wider regions. The accession negotiations cannot proceed at the preferred pace due to the political stance of certain EU Member States. However, Turkey is still steadfastly committed to achieving the EU standards. The vision of a New Turkey depicts a stronger, more prosperous, respected and democratic country which is taken as a model in the neighbourhood for its economy, science and technology, politics and social and cultural policies. The EU accession process is definitely an indispensable part of this goal.

Turkey-EU relations cover many areas such as accession negotiations, political reform process, Customs Union, Community Programmes, Financial Cooperation, institution building, visa liberalisation and civil society dialogue. A boost to this spectrum of relations through the "EU Strategy" will help eliminate the obstacles on Turkey's path to the EU membership. Within the scope of an approach prioritizing Turkey's interests and benefits of the citizens, both the reform process will gain a momentum and new channels of communication will be established between Turkey and the EU confronting common challenges.

The “**European Union Strategy**” will be the first step for the concrete commitment declared in the Programme of the 62nd Government. The “**European Union Strategy**” consists of the following parts:

I- Political Reform Process

II- Socio-Economic Transformation in the Accession Process

III- EU Communication Strategy

The strategy mainly aims at achieving the EU standards in all areas through an accelerated reform process, determining the priority issues related with the negotiation chapters and implementing a strong communication framework that reveals the meaning and potential of the Turkey-EU cooperation in constructing a European architecture in the midst of harsh regional and global challenges. The “**European Union Strategy**” will become operational upon adoption of the “**National Action Plan for the EU Accession**” and “**European Union Communication Strategy**” in November 2014.

The National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis, which was prepared in 2008 *vis a vis* the Accession Partnership Document for Turkey, has been an important road map in terms of adopting the EU Acquis; nevertheless it is currently out of date. Therefore, a “National Action Plan for the EU Accession” is being prepared in collaboration with all ministries and public institutions under the coordination of the Ministry for European Union Affairs. The objective of this plan is to steer the EU harmonisation efforts and to accelerate the work in all chapters, whether politically blocked or not.

“National Action Plan for the EU Accession” will be implemented in two periods: the first period will last until 2015 and the second will cover the period of 2015-2019.

Adopting an accession-oriented approach, the Action Plan focuses on priority work, including the opening and closing benchmarks, and strengthening the administrative capacity for implementation. Accordingly, it will be an updated roadmap for EU harmonisation work and will help determine the priorities in various areas. Determining the concrete and priority steps required in each negotiation chapter, the Action Plan consists of three parts; namely “Harmonisation of Primary Legislation”, “Harmonisation of Secondary Legislation” and “Institution Building and Others”.

The EU Communication Strategy will help inform the public on the efforts carried out in the framework of the first two pillars. This strategy will be addressing the public both at home and abroad. It will be the follow-up of the European Union Communication Strategy which was adopted by the Council of Ministers and has been implemented since 2010. Target groups, methods and instruments will be updated in this new strategy focusing both on Turkish and European public opinion.

I- POLITICAL REFORM PROCESS

Further advancing the reforms of the last twelve years in the fields of rule of law, democratisation, human rights, civilianisation, freedom and security and consolidating the related gains will be the basis of the political reform process in the upcoming period.

The EU membership objective has been a significant motivation in accelerating the political reform dynamics which served to further improving the living standards of the citizens and deepening the rule of law and democratisation. Constitutional arrangements, judicial reforms and legal amendments introduced to align with the EU Acquis have helped further strengthening of Turkish democracy. Turkish Grand National Assembly adopted eight EU Harmonisation Packages between 2002 and 2004, and three comprehensive Constitutional Amendment Packages in 2001, 2004 and 2010.

Several legal arrangements, notably the recently adopted democratisation package and previous six judicial reform packages, are concrete indicators of the work determinedly being carried out for alignment with the EU Acquis.

These reforms have strengthened the status of the international agreements in our legal system, extended the scope of freedom of thought and expression and eliminated the torture and ill-treatment in line with the adopted “zero tolerance” principle. The reforms also paved the way for institutionalization in the field of human rights. The acquisition and disposal of property by non-Muslim community foundations were also facilitated. Moreover, important efforts were exerted for improving gender equality and removing the impediments in activities of the associations and foundations. Significant steps have been taken to ensure that Turkish citizens can use their traditional languages and dialects in the public sphere.

The developments in the international law necessitate a dynamic process of harmonisation regarding the political criteria. Turkey had fulfilled the political criteria to a great extent before the start of the accession negotiations. Steps taken in the Chapter 23 on Judicial and

Fundamental Rights and the Chapter 24 on Justice, Freedom and Security constitute the backbone of the efforts for political reforms and harmonisation with the political criteria. Although many reforms have been implemented, these chapters remain politically blocked in contradiction with the basic values of the EU.

Removing the Imprints of the Military Coup of September 12

The political reform process will continue, by taking international norms, zeitgeist, necessity of the times and social demands as the references, in line with Turkey's objective of pluralistic, liberal, participatory democracy. The priority of this process is to guarantee the fundamental rights and freedoms of the citizens and to remove all limitations on the use of these rights and freedoms without any discrimination. Although fundamental laws and legislation have already been repealed or amended, all legislation bearing the imprints of the military coup of September 12 will be reviewed in detail under the work for a new constitution.

The new constitution will pave the way for the initiatives that Turkey needs by expanding the scope of politics and removing the imprints of the military tutelage. Hence, the systemic problems stemming from the current constitution which pose obstacles to a stronger democracy, fundamental rights and freedoms and rule of law, namely to the construction of the New Turkey, will be eliminated.

Continuation of the Reform Process in line with the EU Acquis

Although the relevant screening reports have not been conveyed to Turkey, we will steadfastly continue a comprehensive reform agenda on all areas covered by the political criteria and the Chapters 23 and 24, such as freedom of expression, institutionalisation in the field of human rights, border management, organized crimes and management of migration.

The upcoming reform efforts will involve many significant steps, particularly, the acceleration of the approval process of the international agreements which were signed by Turkey, updating the Judicial Reform Strategy, and implementation of the Action Plan on the Prevention of ECHR Violations. The efforts in the areas of judiciary and fundamental rights will also contribute to the positive image of Turkey in the international fora.

The European Convention on Human Rights, the Case-Law of the European Court of Human Rights and the EU Acquis will continue to serve as the references for the political reform agenda.

The Reform Monitoring Group (RMG), which was established in 2003 to monitor the political reforms implemented within the scope of Turkey's EU accession process, holds its meetings with the participation of Minister for European Union Affairs and Chief Negotiator, Minister of Justice, Minister of Interior and Minister of Foreign Affairs. The RMG takes decisions on the priorities of the political reform process and presents these decisions to the Council of Ministers for approval. In addition, the Political Affairs Subcommittee (SIYAK), composed of high-level bureaucrats of the relevant ministries, was established under the RMG in order to monitor the decisions taken and to make proposals on legislative changes and implementation. The work of the RMG and SIYAK will be intensified in the upcoming period for preparation of the next reform packages. Furthermore, within the framework of the EU Acquis and the best practices, joint work will be carried out with all relevant stakeholders in order to establish a sound basis for the political reforms.

Increasing Importance of the Balance between Freedom and Security

Significant transformation has been observed in all areas due to the redefined threats and developments triggered by technology. Hence, the importance of the balance between freedom and security has increased in definition of the rights, freedoms and responsibilities of the citizens. Without compromising freedoms for security but ensuring security of its citizens, Turkey continues to implement important political reforms. Considering the dynamic character of the international legal norms in this field, it is essential to collaborate with the EU on the basis of mutual trust.

Implementation of legal arrangements in the areas of security, fight against terrorism and organized crime, migration and asylum and border management is among the primary objectives for ensuring full enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms. In line with these objectives, the Visa Liberalisation Dialogue initiated following the signature of Readmission Agreement with the EU on 16 December 2013 will eliminate the visa obstacles to Turkish citizens and bring Turkey closer to the EU Member States. All necessary steps will be taken for the successful conclusion of the visa liberalisation process.

Political Reforms Strengthening the Foundations of Democracy

The steps already taken in the framework of the democratisation packages will be further advanced. Necessary work will be carried out for developing the established human rights institutions and promoting their effectiveness. New mechanisms will also be formed when necessary. Work on enhancing the rights of women, children and disabled people will continue. Freedom of organisation and right to peaceful assembly will be further improved by considering the related decisions of the ECtHR.

Thanks to the liberal discussion climate that emerged in Turkey in the past twelve years, civil society can freely express its opinion. The continuation of this free and transparent discussion climate facilitates the social integration and solution process which will help strengthen the pluralistic democracy that is based on the principle of non-discriminative citizenship. This process will pave the way for internalisation of the achievements that political reforms brought about, by all segments of the society without any discrimination.

The next wave of political reforms will reinforce the foundation of democracy. Thus, all citizens will feel more confident and responsible in having a say in the construction of the New Turkey.

II. SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN THE ACCESSION PROCESS

Thanks to a remarkable move in the last twelve years, Turkey has tripled its national income and become one of the strongest economies in Europe with its sound public finance and private sector. In this period, millions of citizens have moved up to the middle class and begun to demand modern standards in all fields of social life. Accordingly, improved economic conditions have led Turkish citizens to ask for a stronger democracy. Despite all the difficulties, Turkish Government has taken important steps to include all segments of the society in the democratisation and development process. The EU accession process has been an important means for the Government to this end.

The EU accession process is a significant reform project which facilitates adoption of global standards and best practices in Turkey. The process requires fundamental changes in all fields of daily life from production to consumption, justice to security, health to education, agriculture to industry and energy to environment. Each political, judicial, economic or social reform implemented on the path to the EU accession upgrades the living standards of the citizens and increases the economic power, democratic prestige and security of our country on

the global scale. The significance of the EU accession process for Turkey is to establish modern standards in all areas of life and to improve the fundamental rights and freedoms of its citizens with the created impetus. Turkey's EU accession process is a socio-economic transformation project which has fundamental effects on the current and future life of the citizens.

The EU accession process not only contributes to the socio-economic transformation but also redefines the relationship between the state and citizens in Turkey. The citizenship concept which was previously identified with responsibilities to the state is now being redefined based on the rights of individuals, thanks to the EU accession process. The reforms have sealed the indispensable aspects of democracy such as transparency, accountability and participation as a part of daily life.

Turkey started to transpose the EU legislation as of 1996 after the agreement on Customs Union. However, a systematic harmonisation process with its rules and institutions emerged with the beginning of the accession negotiations. Turkey's accession negotiations started with the adoption of the Negotiating Framework on 3 October 2005. Currently, 14 chapters have been opened to negotiations, while one chapter has been provisionally closed. Although 17 chapters remain blocked due to the political obstacles introduced by the Council of the European Union and some Member States, Turkey maintains its harmonisation efforts in all chapters regardless of the opening of chapters, suspensions or blockages. In the last twelve years, Turkey has adopted 326 primary and 1730 secondary legislation to ensure alignment with the EU Acquis.

The sustainability and consolidation of this great change in Turkey require not only proper implementation of the reformed legislation but also an accompanied change in mentality. The occupational accidents which recently took place in Turkey point to the importance of implementation, inspection and mentality in alignment with the EU legislation. Today, Turkey has aligned its legislation to a large extent especially with regard to the Customs Union; however, it still has major shortcomings in terms of implementation and related administrative capacity. Adopting legislation is not sufficient for harmonisation with the EU. Effective implementation of the legislation requires a change in mentality both in the public and private sector; only then the adopted legislation will serve to the objectives. Accordingly, upcoming reforms will not only focus on new legal arrangements but also on enhancing the implementation capacity.

Established in accordance with the EU Regional Policy to reduce inter-regional and intra-regional disparities enabling use of EU funds for regional development, the development agencies will assume an important role. These Agencies serve as important actors of transformation contributing to regional economic and social development by interacting with the citizens at local level.

“National Action Plan for the EU Accession” will address Turkey’s priorities in continuing and enhancing the socio-economic change and identify the legislation to be harmonised in addition to the areas of action for improving the administrative structures in proper implementation. Turkey’s EU Strategy will be based on the socio-economic transformation which is the *sine-qua-non* of a powerful democracy.

III- EUROPEAN UNION COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

At the end of the accession process, the people of both Turkey and the EU will decide on Turkey’s membership. Therefore, it is of great importance to support the political and socio-economic reforms that have changed the outlook of Turkey with tailored communication efforts. A successful communication strategy does not only serve to adoption of the reforms by the nation, but also help underpin the external image of the country with the facts instead of misperceptions.

Hence, the communication strategy has two dimensions. The first one is **communication at home** which aims to solidify the domestic perception of the EU process as a modernisation project that improves living standards of our people. Such a perception will definitely ensure support of all segments of the society for adoption and proper implementation of the reforms. The second dimension of the strategy addresses the **international community** for unveiling the facts about Turkey to shape a correct perception in the EU public opinion. This dimension will help establish a trust in terms of Turkey’s commitment and self-confidence in the EU process.

Both dimensions of the communication strategy will be enriched with the opinions of all segments of the public such as the Parliament, public institutions, civil society organizations, universities, business society, and local administrations. It will also be implemented with a participatory approach. The initiatives to be taken in scope of the strategy will not be reactive but proactive and perception-oriented.

In the first period of the European Union Communication Strategy (EUCS), which started to be implemented after its approval by the Council of Ministers in 2010, several successful activities have been conducted both at home and abroad. In the framework of the domestic dimension of EUCS, EU Coordination Units have been established within 81 Provincial Governorships to support the EU-related work at the local level. Various programmes and projects have been implemented in the provinces to this end. Civil society organizations have been supported in hundreds of projects promoting Turkey-EU Civil Society Dialogue and town twinning programmes have been implemented enabling joint projects between Turkish local administrations and their EU counterparts. Turkey has the highest number of applications for the EU education and youth programme, the Erasmus+ which was previously called as the Lifelong Learning Programme. This clearly indicates that the work carried out in the first period of the communication strategy has aroused enthusiasm and excitement about the EU in all segments of the society.

Considering the new actors and new priorities in the process, a participatory and proactive strategy supported with the modern modes of communication and tailored communication methods will be implemented in the upcoming period.

Main objective of the domestic dimension in the Communication Strategy is to increase the support of the public as it is the major impetus behind the reform efforts. It is also aimed to strengthen the public opinion that the EU is a modernisation and democratisation project for Turkey positively changing every aspect of life. It is mainly the civil society that will benefit most from the EU accession process. In line with this notion, participation of all societal actors such as civil society organizations, think-tanks, local/regional/national media, business society, academicians and the local administrations in the process will be promoted based on their fields of interest, expectations, concerns, and information needs. The Development Agencies principally engaged in improving the cooperation among public institutions, private sector, local administrations, universities and civil society organisations, will play an important role not only in socio-economic transformation but also in implementation of the Communication Strategy.

The centre of gravity of the new Communication Strategy is at its foreign dimension. In this context, the major activities will be oriented towards the Member States which remain reluctant about the membership of Turkey and are also influential in shaping the EU public opinion. Foreign dimension of the Communication Strategy will be based on a flexible and

participatory approach which is sustainable, have measurable impact and can be rapidly updated when necessary. This strategy aims to build permanent bridges between the two communities instead of one-off activities. The most important feature of the foreign dimension of the strategy will be its proactive and perception-oriented approach. It is vital to shape the public opinion about Turkey's sincerity and determination for the EU membership. In addressing various segments of the EU citizens, activities of the civilian actors such as domestic and foreign civil society organisations, universities and business organizations will be prioritized. In addition to the conventional communication methods which render insufficient in the global age, the new Communication Strategy will effectively make use of social media and digital technologies which enable interactive access and allow personalised and organised collaborative work.

The European Project will be stronger on a platform based on willingness, integrating vision with pragmatism and reinforcing the desire to collaborate. The threats such as extremism, xenophobia, hate speech and Islamaphobia have been rising in Europe recently. Thus, the initiatives pioneered by Turkey and adopted in international fora such as intercultural dialogue and alliance of civilisations have become increasingly important. The geo-strategic location and political structure of Turkey may help in eliminating misperceptions between the EU and its neighbourhood, and maintaining the core philosophy behind the EU Project. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero promoted the "Alliance of Civilisations Initiative" in 2005 under the auspices of the UN for struggling with threatening polarisation. The EU Communication Strategy will support similar initiatives within the EU.

Today, the EU is encountering serious challenges within itself and at regional and global level. In such a period, the European Union Strategy is prepared to determine the steps that strongly emphasize the meaning and significance of Turkey's EU membership. It is vital that this strategy is adopted by all relevant stakeholders. President Erdoğan declared 2014 as the European Year and the 62nd Government has reiterated its commitment to the EU accession process. However, as the EU accession is about all areas of social life, it is the civil society not the Government that will benefit most from Turkey's EU membership. Therefore, Turkey's accession process can only be completed with the participation and contribution of the people. This strategy may only reach its targets to the extent that all the public institutions, civil society, business organisations, universities and other stakeholders internalize it.