

More than 53,000 companies have INVESTED IN **TURKEY**



+

how about you?

average annual real
GDP growth rate

5.9%

2002-2015

17th

largest
economy in
the world

University graduates

800,000

per year

average annual real GDP
growth rate forecast in OECD

4.9%

2015-2025

\$861

billion
of GDP at
current prices

Population

80 million

with half under the age of 31



IX. BÜYÜKELÇİLER KONFERANSI

2023'e Doğru: Milli Değerler ve Küresel Hedefler

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Turkish Foreign Policy in a Time of Perpetual Turmoil

MEVLÜT ÇAVUŞOĞLU*

ABSTRACT 2016 was a difficult year for the world; however, Turkey demonstrated her strength and resilience politically, economically, and security-wise. This commentary focuses on the future policies and challenges that Turkey may face in 2017. These policies include the open door policy towards the Syrian refugees and consolidation of the basic foreign policy tenets of Turkey. It is argued that in the face of these challenges, Turkey must always remember that upholding our common values and the spirit of cooperation is central to bringing peace, hope and prosperity to humankind.

As a stormy 2016 drew to a close, Turkey braced for a new year full of potential. Although 2016 was a difficult year for the world there is a new energy in Turkey to address numerous regional and global challenges. Turkey has demonstrated her strength and resilience politically, economically, and security-wise. We suffered several shocks but came out stronger. These included several terrorist attacks by ISIS and PKK and a coup attempt by the Fetullah Gülen Terrorist Organization (FETÖ). On the night of July 15, FETÖ terrorists killed nearly two hundred and fifty people and wounded more than two thousand. Warplanes bombed the Turkish Par-

liament and the Presidential Palace. These outrageous acts of violence that targeted our democracy were traumatic for the Turkish people but demonstrated the strength of our resolve to uphold Turkish democracy. Turkey is now taking steps within the constitutional order to ensure that the culprits face justice and the vestiges of the terrorist infiltration into all segments of the Turkish bureaucracy, economy, educational sector, security forces and media, are removed. All this is being done in accordance with the rule of law.

2016 was not kind to humanity; from Nice to Syria through Brussels to Afghanistan, the world witnessed

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unacceptable human suffering. This was on top of the ongoing misery of hundreds of millions who live in societies that are chronically stunted by poverty, inequality and racism or whose lives have been shattered by man-made humanitarian crises. Since Turkey cannot isolate herself from such misery, addressing human suffering is a fundamental pivot of our foreign policy. While proud to be a leading donor country providing a humanitarian aid of \$3.2 billion in 2015, it is our sincere wish that joint global efforts can one day create a world where this kind of aid is no longer needed. For this to happen, we have to work towards just global institutions that represent our peoples fairly and can act decisively. We must also join hands to eliminate the racism, radicalism and terrorism that breed misery and violence.

A Humanitarian Stance

A prime example of our humanitarian stance is our open door policy regarding the Syrians escaping tyr-

anny at home. Turkey currently hosts around 2.7 million Syrian refugees, more than thirteen percent of the country's pre-war population. While we continue to provide them with shelter, the international community needs to do more to assist them and to put an end to this tragedy. We must give hope to the Syrian people, without hope desperation becomes destiny. Our diplomacy will not give up hope and continues to promote a political solution based on a democratic, inclusive and non-sectarian system while preserving Syria's political unity and territorial integrity. In line with her humanitarian and moral precepts, Turkey has also received more than 300,000 Iraqis fleeing from the fighting in Iraq and provided them with food, non-food items, health and education services as well as social activities.

The March 18, 2016 migration agreement with the European Union has already helped decrease irregular crossings of migrants trying to reach Europe. To date, more than 2000 refugees have been resettled in Europe and over 700 irregular migrants were returned to Turkey. Most significantly, we have been able to halt the almost daily loss of lives on the Aegean. This was achieved despite a Europe that fails to live up to her pledges and insists on changing our anti-terrorism law. We have been trying to make our partners understand that Turkey acts as a bulwark against the global spread of terrorism. Rather than weakening our efforts it is foremost in Europe's interest to strengthen our hand.



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin met in the Kremlin to discuss bilateral and regional issues on March 10, 2017.

AA PHOTO / KAYHAN ÖZER

Cooperation at Work

Turkey's basic foreign policy tenets such as: respect for international law, peaceful resolution of conflicts, active roles in international organizations and a focus on humanitarian diplomacy, remain unchanged. We intend to consolidate all of them in the coming year. Our NATO membership, our strategic relationship with the U.S., accession process to the EU, our friendship and cooperation with Russia and countless others, the 360-degree policy of promoting peace and cooperation in multiple geographies and our active engagement with global and regional or functional issues in key forums such as the G20, OIC and others, all derive from such tenets. In 2017 we will make an energetic effort to promote each of these fundamentals making use of various tools at our disposal and building on Turkey's chairmanship of the Organization of

the Islamic Conference, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization and the MIKTA process, an informal partnership between Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey and Australia. We will also emphasize novel initiatives which Turkey introduced with other key partners, such as the Friends of Mediation with Finland and the Alliance of Civilizations with Spain, as well as the İstanbul Process on Afghanistan and the New Deal Process for Somalia.

In October 2016, Vladimir Putin visited Turkey for the first time since the downing of a Russian jet in Syria in November 2015. This episode was a low point in Turkish-Russian relations. However, Turkey and Russia never gave up on searching for a solution to this crisis. Eventually, the efforts of both sides culminated in President Putin's October visit to İstanbul and an agreement to revive



The photo shows a refugee camp set up by Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) in Zakho, a city in Northern Iraq.
AA PHOTO / AFAD

the Turkish Stream natural gas pipeline project. Completion of the Turkish Stream project will bring Turkey closer to our vision of becoming a regional energy trade hub. We look forward to even closer ties with Russia in 2017 and renewed cooperation in areas of mutual interest such as the Syrian war, trade and energy.

2016 also saw a breakthrough in the Turkish-Israeli relations. Negotiations that started after the 2010 *Mavi Marmara* incident were concluded in June with an understanding on normalization. Israel, besides an apology and the compensation, also agreed to facilitate Turkish aid to Gaza and the rest of Palestine. The understanding is expected to contribute to the stability of the whole region. Turkey and Israel started working on possible areas of cooperation on energy projects related to the Eastern Mediterranean

hydrocarbon resources. These two outstanding improvements in foreign relations with neighboring countries encourage us to extend our cooperative attitude to other problematic relationships.

Challenges Ahead

The coming year will not be easy, but it brings a new opportunity for the international community to work together to resolve many of the world's ongoing disputes. As regards the Cyprus issue, it is clear that the current period requires the two sides and all relevant parties to make sincere efforts to move the negotiation process forward. Turkey is determined to keep supporting these efforts in every possible way, believing that this is the last chance for a new partnership state. A possible settlement in Cyprus will sig-

nificantly contribute to peace, stability and cooperation in the wider region. It would also constitute a primary example that peoples with different ethnicities, religious and cultural orientations can live peacefully side-by-side, in cooperation and partnership.

Our biggest challenge both regionally and at the international level however, is likely to remain the conflict in Syria. It creates instability for the region, causes security problems for Turkey, prevents cooperative relations in the region, and destroys people's hope for the future. We are following a preventive solution policy for regional and global problems on the ground, because if we fail to solve them the spillover effect of these problems will dramatically affect our domestic societies. This is the bitter lesson we have learned from the Syrian disaster.

Participants to the October talks in Lausanne were unable to produce a concrete plan for a political solution. Nevertheless, Turkey continues to push for the immediate implementation of the road map outlined in the UNSCR 2254 in line with the Geneva Communiqué (2012) to achieve a genuine political transition. The recent ceasefire supported by Turkey and Russia is a promising step in the right direction. Turkey will maintain her active support to the consolidation of the ceasefire and the efforts to bring about an early political solution.

We will also continue our cooperation with the International Coalition to fight ISIS, which is not only a significant threat to global security, but

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is now also an imminent threat for Turkey. ISIS' acts of terrorism have taken hundreds of innocent lives in Turkey and as the nature of the threat evolved, we launched "Operation Euphrates Shield" on August 24, 2016. The Operation has been very swift and effective in producing results and our borders were cleared from ISIS elements in just ten days, with ISIS being put on the defensive elsewhere in northern Syria. Now the focus is on making sure that these liberated areas remain a "terrorist-free zone." In the meantime, we will maintain pressure on ISIS to ensure its total defeat.

Like the Syrian crisis, Turkey will also continue to prioritize the removal of the vestiges of FETÖ from the numerous areas it has infiltrated. The organization's reach stretches from the United States to Africa and poses a threat to the societies in which it has masked itself for years. FETÖ has for years been planting the seeds that were supposed to eventually lead to the overthrow of Turkey's democratically elected leaders. While many of the perpetrators of the coup attempt are in prison, their mastermind remains in Pennsylvania, in the U.S. In this context, we attach utmost importance to the provisional arrest and ex-

tradition of Gülen to Turkey to stand trial. To this end, we have transmitted the necessary documentation to the U.S. authorities. We understand that the decision of extradition will be made after he has undergone due process. He will then be tried in the Turkish justice system.

Two Traditional Pillars

Turkish foreign policy has traditionally given a greater importance to its relations with the U.S. and European Union. When it comes to relations with the U.S. under the new administration, Turkey is optimistic about the future of Turkish-U.S. cooperation, especially in light of President Trump's campaign promise to defeat ISIS. We would also welcome more active U.S. support in our fight against the PKK terror organization and its affiliate PYD/YPG. We will closely follow developments in the United States that are relevant for Turkey while, as always, maintaining close ties with our longtime NATO ally and strategic partner.

Today, concerns about globalization and the economy, coupled with rapid political changes contribute to shaping public opinion the world over. These may have fueled the recent Brexit decision which now needs to be factored into discussions about the future of the EU. This is important for Turkey too, with the result of the June referendum in the United Kingdom also demonstrating the need for a change in the EU's policies. Turkey, as a negotiating candidate country, will

continue to make her contributions, as relevant, to addressing the issues on the EU's agenda during the Union's period of soul-searching. We also expect to see the EU stand by Turkey in the face of common challenges such as terrorism and the migration crisis.

An overriding concern for us and the rest of the world is the rise of racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia in Europe as in various other parts of the globe. In this regard, and true to its motto of "unity in diversity," resolute and swift policies by the EU against extremist movements will certainly go a long way towards helping to maintain harmonious societies. After all, the upward trend in xenophobia, considered by some as partly leading to the Brexit decision, poses a vital threat to the universal values of the EU. Turkey, as a democratic country with a predominantly Muslim population, is well-placed to contribute constructively to reconciling the sensitivities of different cultures.

I am certain that a multitude of changes occurring rapidly and often simultaneously will continue to challenge us all in the period ahead. In the face of these challenges, we must always remember that upholding our common values and the spirit of cooperation is central to bringing peace, hope and prosperity to humankind. While the trials and tribulations of life will never stop testing our endurance, we should never lose optimism and our aspirations for the future. It is my sincere hope that the year 2017 will be much more pleasant, peaceful and auspicious for all of us. ■