

## **Roundtable Meeting on “Turkey’s EU Vision in 2010”**

*With State Minister and Chief Negotiator Mr. Egemen Bağış*

*January 11 2010, Istanbul*

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Istanbul Kültür University – Global Political Trends Center (IKU/GPoT) hosted a Roundtable Meeting on January 11th 2010 with the participation of State Minister and Chief Negotiator Egemen Bağış on “Turkey’s EU Vision in 2010.” The meeting was well attended by academics, journalists and diplomats, and received extensive media coverage.

Mr. Bağış provided a summary of the reforms passed since 2002 as well as political changes within the EU accession process, including his own appointment, the adoption of a National Program, diplomatic visits to Brussels, the extensive democratization process that involved women, Kurds, Alewis, Roma, changes in legislation, repatriation of Nazım Hikmet, 500 million euro investment in the Southeast, ratification of the Kyoto Protocol and others. Bağış also noted the importance given to the Judiciary Reform Strategy, as well as to the preparation of the Combatting Corruption Strategic Documents. Among other developments touched upon by Bağış were the changes in the Organizational Legislation of the Secreteriat General for EU Affairs, the increase in their personnel and units, the establishment of EU Communication and Legal Units, as the opening of the Istanbul Office. In that context, Mr. Minister also shared that the Reform Monitoring Group is now convening every 2 months and in several cities other than Ankara.

Bağış spoke extensively on the National Unity and Fraternity Project, which is being carried out in parallel with the reform process and is seen as a prerequisite for a democracy up to par with EU standards. Saying that all citizens of Turkey irrespective of their ethnic origin or political stance should have access to equal rights, Mr. Minister noted that Turkey, starting with the improvement process fuelled by the EU membership process and Europeanization, is also taking an introspective look at itself, opening up for discussion its domestic dynamics and problems and breaking taboos.

Bağış also emphasized the importance given to the civil society in terms of their role to contribute to the democratization process, as evident in the participation

of over 600 NGOs in a meeting, a first in Turkey's EU journey. Bağış said "a Turkey that listens" is just as important as "a Turkey that does the talking", and that it is crucial to show a common will to solve problems.

Noting that no elections are expected in 2010, Bağış emphasized the determination of the government to continue pass reforms in cooperation with the opposition. He also noted that dynamics within the EU have also been changing in Turkey's favor, with the Spanish Presidency and ratification of the Lisbon Treaty.

Bağış suggested that instead of focusing on the cost of going through with any given Chapter, such as the Environment Chapter opened in December 2009 with the initiative of the Swedish Presidency, such steps should be seen as transformational opportunities to raise Turkey's standards and benefit everyone in society.

Speaking on the newly prepared EU Communication Strategy, Bağış explained the 4 facets of the new program designed to better explain Turkey to EU countries and internalize the EU within Turkey itself. These facets, or platforms include gradual steps towards opening Chapters and moving forward with harmonization:

1. **Platform One:** Meeting the criteria in order to open 4-5 negotiation chapters that do not have any obstacles, as well as meeting the closing criteria for 11 of the 12 already open chapters.
2. **Platform Two:** Fulfilling the criteria for those chapters which might possibly be prevented from being opened by the Council or vetoes from member states independently of the accession process, and raising the standards in these areas.
3. **Platform Three:** Continuing political reforms and those harmonization steps that affect daily life the most (for instance, TRT-Şeş).
4. **Platform Four:** Carrying out a communications strategy in order to both explain the EU to the Turkish public and the potential impact of Turkey's membership to the publics of EU member countries; preventing the lack of dialogue, getting rid of prejudices.

Bağış also spoke extensively on the Cyprus problem, reminding the audience of Turkey's expectations regarding this issue, including the necessity to resume direct trade with Northern Cyprus, which does not equal recognition, as seen in the Taiwan example. Using the phrase "it takes two to tango," Bağış also noted that Turkey will not give Cyprus up for membership. Reminding that after Southern Cyprus rejected

the Annan Plan the international community has come to realize that Turkey is not the party to block the process, Bağış emphasized the importance of keeping the issue alive internationally. The Minister also pointed to the willing governments in all of Turkey, Greece and Cyprus and said the period until April is critical to advance on this issue.

Speaking on the steps taken regarding visa applications, Bağış noted that as per capita income increases, people become more demanding towards the lifting of visa requirements, especially after visas for Serbian citizens were revoked, in the case of the EU. Bağış said Turkey will be working towards eliminating any deficiencies on its part, such as issuing biometric passports.

Bağış also noted that Turkey's efforts in reforms have been noticed by EU countries as well, and that Sarkozy and Merkel have stopped mentioning a "privileged partnership. In any case, Bağış argued that the process matters more than the end result, the reforms being to the benefit of both sides, but especially Turkey.

In the **Question & Answer** session, regarding the question on the Heybeliada Seminary, Bağış reminded that the school was shut down 30-40 years ago on court orders and that the investigation is going on as to determine if the changes in legislation are sufficient for its re-opening, but also that at the same time the treatment of the Turkish minority in Greece cannot be ignored. Bağış stated that being an issue of human rights, this question cannot be only viewed within the context of the reciprocity principle and that it is the duty of the Turkish government to attend to the problems of its Greek citizens, just as it is the duty of the Greek government to attend to the problems of its Turkish citizens, and that it is thus necessary for the two countries to take simultaneous steps of goodwill.

Regarding the tension rising from the ambiguity in full-membership date, Mr. Minister said that Turkey should continue its determined stance and not lose focus. Bağış also noted the need for a new rhetoric and a paradigm shift in the process, with the emphasis on how Turkey is a candidate country that will take some burden away from the EU, rather than being a burden.

A suggestion from the audience anticipated that along the ex parte and reciprocal requirements in the context of Turkish-EU relations, an inventory of the instances of the EU's failure to carry out its responsibilities towards Turkey should be created in order to bring new dynamism to the relationship.

Responding to another question, Bağış said that there is an ongoing process of brainstorming carried out with the Ministry of Agriculture and Undersecretary for Foreign Trade to determine what privileges/rights could be waived within the Customs Union and what rights could be obtained in exchange and that rather than completely abolishing that agreement, there is a process of reconsideration.