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**“EU- TURKEY RELATIONS AND THE SWEDISH PRESIDENCY”**

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Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs. This Institute is a platform for useful debate on international relations for over 70 years. Its publications as well as its public library, named after Madame Anna Lindh, provide invaluable material to researchers in a rapidly changing world.

I also wish to commend the Global Political Trends Center of Istanbul Kultur University. It stands out with its innovative and distinctive policy analyses in various fields of international relations.

I believe that an elaboration on “EU- Turkey Relations” will remain incomplete unless one truly portrays the interaction between Turkey and Europe.

In fact, cornerstones of history that originated in Europe like Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment and the French Revolution, played a key part in the transformation of the Ottoman Empire, and the creation of modern Turkey.

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This process has had a profound impact on both sides. It inspired Mozart composing the “Ronda alla Turca”, Ayvazosky in his paintings and Pierre Loti in his books. It is humanitarian, as the Ottoman Empire was also the refuge to European Jews so badly sought in 1492 and again in the late 1930’s and 1940’s. It is security, as Turkey has been contributing to NATO or the CFSP or various security cooperation arrangements. It is economic, as Turkey is Europe’s sixth largest economy. It certainly is political, as the Ottomans joined the Concert of Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while modern Turkey was among the founders of the Council of Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

And, as you all know, Turkey has pursued the goal of joining the European Communities since 1963, which, in time, have successfully evolved into today’s European Union.

In our eyes, EU membership is part of this strategic process of transformation and modernization of Turkey.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When compared with the existing members of the European Union, the road that Turkey took towards accession has been a long one. It was not always as smooth-running as one would have hoped for, either.

Over the years, there were many ups and downs. But the direction was towards ever more integration. The decision to establish Customs Union in 1995 was an important highlight of this period. Turkey and the EU have since been bound by tight economic links and the Turkish economy

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was fully integrated to that of the EU. Turkey was and remains to be the only candidate country having a Customs Union with the EU, before becoming a member.

Then there have been two recent turning points in our relations: the Helsinki European Council decision of December 1999, whereby Turkey was declared a candidate country, and the subsequent step to open negotiations with Turkey in October 2005.

These two visionary decisions are also critical for the substantive transformation of the social, cultural and political fabric of Turkey in a direction that Turkish people have deserved and given political mandate for. With the prospect of EU membership becoming ever more tangible, a “silent revolution” came about in Turkey, in the early years of the new millennium. Deep and effective reforms brought an end to decades-old taboos.

It has been over three and a half years since we started the negotiation process with the EU. Ten chapters have been opened and one provisionally closed, a pace not reflecting Turkey’s performance. This is due to the domestic political considerations of certain member states. Bringing our membership process thus far wasn’t easy. The road was full of obstacles and it required dedication and hard work to tackle them.

What remains of this road will be no different. The enlargement of the European Union is not an easy process and has never been one. A milestone in this process is yet to come since Turkey will not stray from the goal of joining this peace project in Europe. We continue our work to fulfill the opening benchmarks for future chapters. The reforms are

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ongoing. The harmonization process with the EU is truly all-encompassing. "Ownership" has become our motto in the accession process. Our institutions, the academia and the civil society are engaged with a view to bringing all of our country into this modernization project.

But this dance needs a partner. The EU must commit itself in a way that encourages candidates and also honors promises. We need stability and predictability in the process. This support has been generously given to waves of previous accession candidates but never fully to Turkey. As the European Commission has repeatedly reminded, the EU as a whole must not only stick to its commitments, but also act in accordance with the previous decisions taken by consensus. No country has ever had to defend the decisions taken by the leaders of the EU as much as Turkey has had to.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Both Turkey and the EU have much to gain from this long awaited union. This fact is pivotal to ensure that our membership be realized sooner rather than later. The input we receive from some of the member states is far from being satisfactory.

The general impression in Turkey is that discussions in Europe are often marked by an overall tendency to make a cost/benefit analysis. I do not think that this is the correct way.

The EU draws its strength from the sense of common destiny, with its common values, policies and institutions. The EU's greatest achievements of the last decades, from the "Single Market" to

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“enlargement”, have all been the results of acting collectively and responsibly in an inclusive way.

Let us consider some of the major challenges facing our Continent today:

Economic recession; Unemployment; Demographic decline; Illegal immigration; Terrorism; Energy security; Climate change, Global food security and others.

I am convinced that all of these challenges will be tackled much more effectively as the EU enlarges to Turkey. For the strategic vision that binds Turkey and the EU together are already strong and deep-rooted.

The interests of Turkey and the EU overlap in a vast geography and across many areas. Like Sweden, Turkey cares deeply about removing the last vestiges of poverty and underdevelopment in the world, and is recognized as an emerging donor country. It is the only country that is simultaneously a member of the G-20, NATO and the OIC. It is the largest non-EU contributor to ESDP missions. Turkey is a determined partner for security, stability and harmony in a multitude of regions.

On issues as diverse as Iran, Iraq, the Middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Georgia, Kosovo and others, Turkey’s efforts are directed at facilitating dialogue and compromise. We have taken the initiative in the Caucasus by suggesting the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform. The normalization between Turkey and Armenia is in progress. We are giving full support to the acceleration of the work of the Minsk Group.

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Like the Caucasus, we also work for the stability of the Balkans. Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina still need our attention and support.

Only in the last few years, Turkey brought Israel and Syria, Pakistan and Afghanistan, Lebanon's and Iraq's embittered groups together in quiet but effective diplomacy. Our support to the Middle East peace process is continuing. We expect that the Syrian-Israeli talks could be resumed soon. We are cooperating with the international community on Afghanistan and Pakistan. Our contributions to Afghanistan and to the integrity of Pakistan are continuing. Our keen interest in the integrity of Iraq is well-known.

In addition, the African Union, Arab League and Gulf Cooperation Council have established strong relations with Turkey. Apart from membership to the UN Security Council, Turkey will be assuming the respective presidencies of the Council of Europe, of CICA (the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia), and of SEECP (the Southeast European Cooperation Process) in the next 3-year period.

The EU's own initiatives like the Union for the Mediterranean, the Black Sea Synergy and Eastern Partnership stand a much better chance of success with Turkey on board.

Energy is yet another area of interest for all of us. It is obvious that energy security is closely associated with prosperity and stability. Let us not forget that Turkey is close to nearly 70 percent of the world's energy resources. It has a strategic location along the main transport routes of

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the oil and natural gas resources of the Middle East, Central Asia and Caspian regions.

On climate change, Turkey has recently become a party to the Kyoto Protocol. Our efforts to promote renewable energy are ongoing. The opening of the related chapters (Energy and Environment) during the Swedish Presidency will definitely give a boost to our efforts of alignment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The essence of Turkey's EU membership is integrating the world's 16<sup>th</sup> largest economy. It is about implementing comprehensive strategies in every field to raise Turkey's standards further as a European and regional power, in particular by consolidating technology-based growth and information society.

Turkey's EU membership is also about declaring that tolerance is replacing prejudice. It is about Europe being a timeless and inspirational idea that unites a continent, not artificially divides it.

In short, Turkey is a force for good in a number of the world's principal pressure points. Clearly, the common future of Turkey and the EU is dictated by strategic vision and mutual dependence, rather than sporadic requirements. This is a natural process.

Let me also spare a few words on Cyprus.

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Our expectations include those EU commitments that have not been fulfilled regarding the Cyprus problem. The way this issue is practically being made into a kind of mortgage on Turkey's accession process is very unfair. Time to correct this political stance is long overdue. The Cyprus problem can only be solved in the UN, under the UN discipline and on the basis of long-established U.N. parameters, which are bi-zonality, political equality and a new partnership which will have two Constituent States of equal status. The Leaders declared their agreement on these points on the 23rd of May 2008.

The focus should be on reaching a comprehensive settlement as soon as possible, and partial approaches should be avoided. I should note that this is also the understanding of UNSG's Special Advisor Mr. Downer.

Our vision is to create another strong pillar of Europe in the Eastern Mediterranean among Turkey, Greece and the island of Cyprus once a comprehensive settlement has been reached.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world needs the EU's "smart power". And to become a global power, the EU needs Turkey. For such a successful "peace project" involving 500 million people, Turkey's membership is the most viable way forward.

Sweden has always been gifted with visionary leaders. Sweden shares our understanding that the notion of a Europe whole and free will be

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incomplete as long as Turkey remains outside the EU. It is this principled stance of countries like Sweden which ensures that Turkey-EU relations remain on track.

The visible and vocal support extended by Sweden has positive ramifications on our public's backing to our accession process. We appreciate Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt's support. This also goes to Foreign Minister Carl Bildt. His vision on Turkey's accession is instrumental. Such positive messages would definitely create an upward momentum, enabling us to engage more vigorously in the reform process. I am confident that my dear colleague Ambassador Belfrage and his team will do their utmost in bringing Turkey one step closer to the EU and the EU one step closer to Turkey.

We are looking forward to working closely with Sweden not only in terms of advancing Turkey's accession process, but also promoting the much-needed positive agenda and the correct perception of our relations with the EU. We should make best use of this period to establish the new premises for a shared vision and common future.

Thank you.