

Address given by Denis MacShane on Turkey's accession to the European Union (Izmir, 14 January 2004)

Caption: On 14 January 2004, one month after the decision taken by the Brussels European Council to open negotiations with Turkey on accession to the European Union, Denis MacShane, British Minister of State for Europe, delivers an address at the University of Izmir on relations between Turkey and the European Union.

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Denis MacShane, *Britain and Turkey together in Europe* (14 January 2004)

[...]

TURKEY AND THE EU

When Mustafa Kemal Atatürk set off from Samsun in 1919 to begin his 'War of Independence' against the foreign forces occupying Anatolia, few expected that the journey would take him to Ankara; it was unimaginable that it would end in Brussels. But that is where Turkey is heading. Atatürk saw the need for Turkey to modernise as a state. Today the process of sustaining his vision requires an all-out effort to take Turkey west towards its European destiny.

The question of Turkish eligibility was resolved at Helsinki in December 1999 when the EU declared that 'Turkey is a candidate State destined to join the Union'. But there are still some who question the principle of whether Turkey should become a member of the European Union. For them the issue is whether Turkey is really part of Europe. I, for one, have no doubt about this. Turkey is a country with a rich culture and deep traditions. But this should be no more of a barrier to Turkey's entry to the EU than it is for Hungary or Poland or any other candidate. Part of the beauty of Europe is the fact that it is not boringly homogenous, but a mosaic of diversity. The only 'European values' that matter for EU entry are the values enshrined in the Copenhagen criteria, and Turkey is demonstrating through its reform agenda its commitment to these.

Turkey's history is Europe's history; from Ephesus to Byzantium, from St George – an Anatolian – to the introduction to Turkey of the beautiful game – football. I am told this happened in 1890, courtesy of British residents here in Izmir. However, these days, British clubs are desperate to sign Turkish players, like Tugay. Our interdependence is equally on show here, in Izmir, on the academic plane. I was delighted to learn about this university's connections with the James Watt College of Further Education in Glasgow, and with the University of Abertay in Dundee, which I had the pleasure of visiting last week where I met a bright young Turkish business student who I am sure will help to promote economic links between our two countries in the 21st century.

Turkey's journey into Europe has been long and arduous, and it is by no means over. During the last year in particular – as the Commission's latest Regular Report noted – Turkey has made significant progress towards fulfilling the Copenhagen political criteria, which all candidates have to meet before they can start EU accession negotiations. This has been largely due to the efforts of the present Turkish government. Since AKP came to power, the Turkish Parliament has passed a plethora of legislation aimed at safeguarding the rights of all its citizens. These have included measures to promote rights in the area of minority language education and broadcasting, and other aspects of freedom of expression, and increased civilian participation in the National Security Council.

Making these changes has not been easy, especially given concerns, throughout the Republic's history, at dangers posed by internal and external threats; and past disappointments in EU-Turkey relations. It has required determination and vision, and a readiness to explain to public opinion why change is necessary. As it happens, however, Turkey's reform programme has been more credible in the eyes of European governments because it has been driven, not in the first place by a desire to satisfy the EU, but out of a desire to give Turkish citizens the quality of life which they deserve – and for which they voted. There is now no sense in which Turkey is pretending to be European. On the contrary, it is Turkish democracy which is transforming this country, and – in the process - proving Turkey's European credentials. From this perspective, as the British Minister with responsibility for the EU enlargement process, promoting Turkish accession is simply another part of my job description. That job won't be finished until Turkey is an EU member. Until then, Europe itself will be incomplete.

If Turkey can maintain the pace of legislative reform and ensure effective implementation, and so meet the Copenhagen political criteria, then the EU will, as agreed at the 2002 Copenhagen European Council, decide this December to start accession negotiations 'without delay'. Such a result would put an end to the cycle of estrangement, rapprochement and rejection that has plagued Turkey's relations with the EU over the last 40

years. But putting legislation on the statute book is one thing – implementation and changing the attitudes of all parts of society, is another. In Europe, no-one should face pressure for saying, writing or publishing opinions on political, cultural and identity issues. The European Union is defined by Voltaire's philosophy of 'I may object to what you say but I will defend your right to say it.' At times, this is the most difficult reform of all. But it is a sine qua non of EU membership. And I sincerely believe that this prize is within Turkey's grasp.

CYPRUS

Cyprus, however, remains the 'wild card'. A solution to the Cyprus question is not a pre-condition for the opening of negotiations. But the reality is that a solution will not only give all Cypriots the chance to become citizens of the EU but also enhance Turkey's chances of getting the outcome which I as much as you want to see at this December's European Council. It would have that effect automatically, in the sense that the new Cyprus described in the UN Secretary-General's plan would be required, under the terms of that plan, to support Turkey's EU candidature. The Annan Plan would ensure that Turkish Cypriots were at the table, in Brussels, when the EU came to take decisions about accession negotiations for Turkey. But – just as importantly, on the political plane – a settlement which allowed a new, peaceful, unproblematic Cyprus to accede to the EU in May, would increase – not decrease – Turkey's influence in Europe. As a champion of Turkey's EU candidature, Britain wants decisions about that candidature to be taken at a moment when the benefits of partnership with Turkey are at their most blindingly obvious – at a moment when the EU and Turkey were already helping to make a success of a Cyprus settlement.

I therefore warmly welcome the Turkish Government's statements expressing its support for the resumption of negotiations on the basis of the Annan Plan. I sincerely hope that the Turkish side's detailed proposals will reflect this. An initiative outside the framework proposed by the UNSG stands very little chance of leading to a settlement. I know that there are people - on both sides of this dispute - who get frustrated with all this pressure for a settlement in Cyprus. They say, 'of course we want a settlement, but not at any price'. Here in Turkey, that price is often measured in terms of national security interests. That is a legitimate concern. But my own reading of the Annan Plan, and all the benefits which would flow from a settlement on that basis, is that Turkey's security interests have been carefully respected, and would be strengthened, not weakened, by the UNSG's approach. Besides, a holistic view of national security - with political, economic and military aspects intertwined - is precisely what Turkey and Britain are already working towards in the new NATO, which has become a vector for democracy and stability, as well as collective security. Turkey - in the broadest sense of its government, people, Parliament, armed services and state institutions - will win huge prestige, in Europe and the whole world, if she takes a lead in achieving a Cyprus settlement. And she will be more secure.

I have no doubt that a Turkey which meets the political and economic criteria for accession will make a substantial contribution to the EU. It will bring into the EU a young and dynamic country with Europe's second largest market; a state, which like the UK, appreciates the importance of the Transatlantic relationship and national sovereignty; and a nation that will help extend the EU's reach into the Middle East and beyond. And an EU that accepts Turkey will be a shining example to the doomsayers, proving that tolerance can and will bridge religious differences. This is why the UK is assisting Turkey's EU candidacy on a political and practical level with project assistance of over £1.5 m this financial year.

CLOSING REMARKS

Together we will shape a new Europe in which membership of the European Union adds value to what nations do. And it will be a new Europe because the old Europe has run out of steam. As I said to students - very much like yourselves - at the London School of Economics in November, it is today's generation of people leaving universities that will have a chance without precedent in the 2,500 years of European history. That is to build a continent of peace and prosperity, of rule of law and social justice, cooperating internationally under enforceable rules.

Working together we will show by example and self-discipline and tolerance that different nations, religions,

culture, ethnicities and beliefs can co-exist rather than hope for national or religious or ideological supremacy.

And this is why I am determined to support Turkish EU aspirations – to use the words of Sertab's Eurovision winning entry – 'in every way that I can'. Turkey is at a critical turning point in political and economic terms. It is your generation that will ultimately face the challenge of proving that those of us who are today pressing for Turkey to join the EU were right. And that those who shelter behind fear and prejudice were wrong.