

Address given by Pat Cox to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (Ankara, 2 March 2004)

Caption: On 2 March 2003, Pat Cox, President of the European Parliament, delivers an address to the Grand National Assembly in Ankara in which he places particular emphasis on the progress made by Turkey so that it is in a position to accede to the European Union.

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Mr Speaker and fellow parliamentarians, it is for me this afternoon a great personal privilege and honour that I should be invited here to address the Grand National Assembly of Turkey as the first European Parliament President ever to have that honour. I thank you for it, especially you Mr Speaker Arinç. Let me say also to all of you that I appreciate your presence here this afternoon. I know that you are active in election campaigning, and I know as a practical politician that when we are active in campaigning normally we are on the ground in our constituency and not taking our seat in Parliament. So I thank so many of you for being here at such a politically important time.

It is, too, an appropriate time for me to be here in terms of my European Parliament function. This is an important year of change in the European Union, this is an important year of choice for the European Union, and I am pleased to be here to mark the maturing relations between the European Union and Turkey. 2004 will be a year of renewal and redefinition for the European Union. We shall have, in the European Parliament, our parliamentary elections on a continental European scale in June of this year. On 1 May this year, our Union of today, which comprises 15 member states, will grow to a Union of 25 member states. We face this year several significant and major European questions. We have not yet resolved the answer to our question to ourselves regarding our constitutional treaty of the future. Who shall be the actors and who shall do what in the new European Union? We have, still, ourselves in the European Union to answer that question, when we ask, what is Europe in terms of its decision-making order? We in the European Parliament earnestly hope that this year, 2004, will deliver that answer. Let me say to you that I am extremely pleased that the Grand National Assembly was an active part of the Convention on the Future of Europe, which met in the European Parliament. I am pleased, also, that the government of Turkey is an active part of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) between the states of the European Union and the aspiring states to Union membership.

A second European question this year, which we have begun our debates on, is what is Europe's capacity to act in the future in terms of the European Union's budget? This is always a complex and difficult debate. I do not suppose that we will close that debate this year, but it will grow in intensity.

The third major question for Europe this year is Europe's question in December 2004 regarding Turkish membership of the Union. Next October, as you know, one of the last acts of the outgoing Commission, led by President Romano Prodi, will be to produce this year's report and assessment on Turkey's progress in your accession partnership with the European Union. Several weeks ago Romano Prodi stood here. He assured you that that assessment will be fair, that assessment will be balanced, and that assessment will be made in the same terms as each assessment of a similar type was made for other states at a similar moment. Let me reiterate to you here today that we in the European Parliament will study that report in October and we will, before December and the summit meeting, produce our report. I have no doubt that we, too, in that Parliament will be fair and will be balanced in our assessment, as the Commission President pledged the Commission to be in their assessment. That is our prelude to our shared December rendez-vous.

The choice to be made is, of course, a choice for then and not a choice for now. I make that point to you because this is the choice which will be made by a new European Parliament, freshly mandated from the European elections of June. But let me assure you that we in the European institutions maintain an institutional continuity. We do not start at zero, happily, in a new Parliament; we start with the legacy of the previous.

I want to say to you, particularly in Parliament, and I say as I look around at the different members from the different parties, both the parties that support government and the leading party of opposition - I want to thank all of you, all parties, who have shared Turkey's European vision. It is important, in a Parliament of all places, that this should be a vision which is owned by all. It is not exclusively the property of one party, nor exclusively the property of government or opposition. If you are to progress and mature your EU relations, as we have seen in the states of Central and Eastern Europe and elsewhere in our enlargement debate in recent years, then let me tell you that if we are to make this progress it is something which must be a great

national consensus - not belonging to one side, not belonging to another, not subject to the ebb and flow of daily political change, but a great national consensus. I take great encouragement from the way you have worked together in this parliament on that issue.

I want to thank you, especially since the Copenhagen summit meeting of December 2002, for the dramatic progress that you have made in the reform process. When I was first elected to the European Parliament in 1989, I would then have regarded what you have succeeded in doing as inconceivable. When I was elected to the presidency of the European Parliament in January of 2002, I could not have imagined the amount of real reform that you have worked on in the interim period. You have, in a certain way, over the past 18 months done more than you talked about doing in the previous four decades. That is a very powerful achievement, and I want to acknowledge that to you here today in the Grand National Assembly.

Internally, and internationally, on the question of Iraq, on the fight against terrorism, you have shown in this house and in this republic, impressive evidence of political stability and real political maturity. I thank you for that also, because you are an important regional player and an important regional leader. Let me tell you here today, on behalf of the European Parliament, as I did in the European Parliament, our great sympathy with all the victims of terror that you suffered so recently in the attacks in Istanbul. We stood in the European Parliament and paid our silent tribute to those who have died and been injured, and we stood to express our solidarity with you. I take this opportunity here today to repeat that solidarity and to say, although I shall not be in a position to attend it tomorrow, that we give our solidarity to your Foreign Minister, Mr Gül, and to the British Foreign Minister, Mr Straw, who tomorrow shall, in Istanbul, recall those tragic acts of terrorism.

Let me encourage you in the House, since you started this path of reform, to continue with your commitment to democratic reform and to modernisation. I was very impressed by a statement made by your Prime Minister, Mr Erdogan, when he referred to what he called the Ankara criteria. I was impressed because it shows a willingness to take ownership, not to regard these things as external to who you are, but internal to who you wish to be. So, I commend to you further deepening of your commitment to what your Prime Minister called the Ankara criteria. In other words, you are making a choice first as Turkish political parliamentarians and leaders, for Turkey itself. Through that, you are taking an indispensable step towards your engagement with the European Union, and your aspirations in that regard. Your achievements are clear - constitutional reform, penal code reform, reform of the National Security Council, abolition of the death penalty.

As you know, last November the European Commission and the Parliament, in their reports, commented on your progress, acknowledged your reform, offered praise where it was due, and offered constructive criticism in parts. As you know, we emphasised, the Commission and the European Parliament, the need to continue the strengthening of the judicial function in Turkey in the overall framework of exercising fundamental freedoms. We emphasise the need for further alignment with European practice in terms of the civil-military relations here in your state. We welcomed the new expression of cultural diversity in individual and minority rights, although we did comment in many of these areas that the strength and the first part of the reform was in the expression of these new rights, more than in their full implementation.

So, if I had a message to you in the months that remain, before the October report, before the European Parliament assessment, before our rendez-vous next December at a summit meeting, my strong advice to you would be to use all of your leadership efforts to move as much as you can from paper to practice. If there was one word I would tell you and tell you several times, it is implementation, implementation, implementation. This is now the key. None doubt your appetite to lead the legislative and constitutional reform. Now we need to work together to bring it to its full expression. This is true in every culture and in every political society. Changing law on paper is indispensable, but it is easier to do than changing attitudes and practices that may be long-since established. So, it needs determination and leadership. I appeal to you here in parliament to tell and sell the story of reform, and to give that leadership in all aspects of public administration.

Yours, Mr Speaker, is a country that endured a long and costly campaign of terrorism within throughout

much of the 1980s and much of the 1990s. You paid an enormous price - thousands dead, thousands injured, a human cost, an economic cost, a social and political cost. Happily, this is no longer so. Let me be the first here to acknowledge that you as a republic have the right and duty to defend your own territorial integrity. I know the many sensitivities in this house because I have followed your debates over many years. Permit me to make a brief remark about the case of Leyla Zana and others against the background of my remarks on your territorial integrity. We in the European Parliament hope that in this time of change we will see also a change on that front. I know that your judiciary is separate from your government, and this is correct. I know that your judiciary is separate from the parliament, and this is correct. So, in making the point I do not make an appeal to you to interfere with your judges, this would be a wrong appeal and I do not ask you to do it. But, permit me to make this observation: if you, now, are the leaders of reform and modernisation, and if you have in your republic a sea of change, it may be here and there that you still may have some islands of resistance to change. So, my appeal is a broader appeal to all of the elements in this society to recognise that the moment of change and modernisation is here and to act accordingly. In this case to which I refer let me assure that we in the European Parliament draw no general conclusion about our relations with Turkey from this specific case. But, the case has, outside your borders, a symbolic value which you should not underestimate. It is for that reason that I have permitted myself to make these remarks.

Let me recall, Mr Speaker, the strong interest of the European Union in a settlement of the Cyprus question. We welcome the renewed commitment to talks on the Annan Plan. We welcome its deadlines and its commitment to consult the peoples in a referendum. Let me tell you here that this is not a new pre-condition in our dialogue with Turkey. But, it is a matter of common interest, and as the Foreign Minister, Mr Gül, said in this house to this parliament and I quote, "It would be a powerful mood enhancing and mood changing factor". Your Foreign Minister was correct. Indeed, a reconciled Cyprus joining a reconciling Europe would be a powerful success. Let me tell you this, that is we can find in the coming weeks, between the leaders of the two communities in Cyprus and the role of the two mother states - Greece and Turkey, the foundations for a settlement, then in the European Parliament and in the institutions of the European Union for the first time, beginning on 3 May in Strasbourg, Turkish language and civilisation would take its full place. For, if there is a settlement on the terms and deadlines suggested by Annan, at least some of the representatives of Cyprus would be from the Turkish Cypriot community. They would bring to our Parliament our obligation to you to provide services in Turkish to accommodate their needs and your growing connection with us. I think it would be a very powerful bridge, and one which I would commend to you. I fully understand that this house has a constitutional role and that you will guard your right to express yourselves on any eventual settlement, and I respect that. I ask you just one thing. If an equitable, balanced settlement can emerge with the good will of the peoples, I would urge you to use your good offices to give it full support.

I am aware, too, from conversations with many of your political leaders, of anxieties in this Grand National Assembly about the emerging political discourse in some member states of the European Union, and in the upcoming European Parliament elections, regarding Turkey's European Union vocation. Let me say here as I stand here with you in Ankara something to political leaders of all of our parties in the European Union: If we must have a debate in a democracy, debate is a good thing. But let us have a debate which is responsible, let us have a debate which is balanced, let us have a debate which is strategic. I do not fear debate as a democrat. The job of political leadership - and you know it, you are politicians - is to try in part to shake public opinion. Another part of the job of political leadership is to listen to public opinion. I think this is an important European debate. It is, in some respects, overdue, and is maybe the first time that there is a serious public debate in Europe on this question. How would I interpret this debate for you today? Let me tell you. I think your national anthem has some of the words. I would say to you, as your national anthem says, "do not fear". Do not fear a public debate. This is a step in our political system from Europe's studied ambiguity about Turkish membership to serious focus. Serious focus on Turkey is good because your time has come to expect and to demand that that serious focus be given.

A second question, a second anxiety, which I hear many times from parliamentarians here, and from political leaders that I meet from Turkey, is what is my answer to the assertion that some have made that the European Union is a "Christian club" and as such has no role for the other. Let me give you the answer of the European Parliament report of last year to that question. It was in the Oostlander report and it was voted

by a large majority. Permit me, please, to quote the passage which was voted by majority. It said, "The European Parliament recognises that the political values of the EU are chiefly based on the Judeo-Christian and humanist culture of Europe. But, no one has a monopoly on these universal values of democracy, rule of law, human and minority rights, and freedoms of religion and conscience - values which can perfectly well be accepted and defended by a country where the majority is Muslim. The European Parliament believes, therefore, there are no objections in principle to Turkey's European Union membership". This is the European Parliament's answer to the question which I posed and this is an answer which is open to engagement on the terms indicated by the Copenhagen criteria.

Yours, we appreciate, is a country that has been indispensable, through its NATO membership, to wider European security, Yours is a secular democracy and republic, but a predominantly Muslim society, and you have found a special balance here - the legacy of the vision of Atatürk. Yours is now a democracy committed to modernisation and reform, to use the words, to this house, of Prime Minister Erdogan. Yours is a Turkey preparing for the 21st Century, based on the powerful vision and legacy which Atatürk left to all Turks in the 20th Century. It is an exciting time and a challenging time, and next December we have a rendez-vous with that history.

I want to say to you, if I may, in concluding, Mr Speaker. I had a very interesting discussion at dinner last night here, hosted by you Mr Speaker Arınç. There, at the table, the question was asked - the European Union Ambassador was there and he wore a pin, the European flag, the blue background with the 12 stars. The question was asked, "would they add more stars after the enlargement, in the way the United States has one star for each state?". I can answer the question - the answer is "no". We will add no more stars; we will stay at the number twelve, even though today already the number of member states is fifteen. Let me tell you the symbolism of the flag, because symbols matter. The blue background represents the northern sky. The stars in your literature, as in our Irish literature, call us to dream our dreams and to avert our gaze from our daily concerns. The circle in heraldry symbolises harmony and unity. The twelve stars are the hours of the day and the months of the year and are a constant forward momentum in unity and harmony together - a bit like the whirling dervishes of Turkey - constant revolution in search of truth. This circle, if you notice our symbol, has the stars not touching but separate. So, the circle is open to those who truly will share our values. That is the symbolism of that flag. When that symbol was adopted by the Council of Europe fifty years ago in Strasbourg in 1954 there was a debate. It is in the files, and I have read the files. A question was asked, because of the quotation I made earlier, the predominantly Judeo-Christian and humanist roots of Europe, "should there be a cross placed inside that circle?". The Council of Europe decided "no" because there should be no denomination which had a specific ownership of the harmonious, constant, forward, value-based dimension. There is in that symbol, my friends, a clear message.

So, again, in closing, let me thank you for the wonderful opportunity which you have given me, and, through me, the Parliament which I have the privilege to lead, an opportunity to tell you that you are doing well on the reformist and modernising path on which you have stepped. I encourage you to continue down this pathway because it matters, first for Turkey - the Ankara criteria - and it is indispensable to your European Union vocation - the Copenhagen criteria. In a certain way what you do now to get ready for Turkey's 21st century is the direct inheritance of the legacy of Atatürk, the moderniser of the 21st Century. When you reform and modernise your republic you are the legatees, the inheritors, of the mantle of Atatürk. If you continue on that path, you continue on a path of prosperity and engagement. On behalf of the European Union, I wish you well on your chosen path.

I thank you for the honour of speaking to you.