

FUTURE WORKSHOP

— BULGARIA —

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“Future Development of Relationships between Bulgaria and Turkey”
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[Full transcript]

First, I would like to use the first anniversary of the Sarafovo Burgas attack, to express my condolences, and say that Turkey condemned all acts of terrorism.

The title of the lecture is, as you may all see, “Future Development of Relationships between Bulgaria and Turkey.” In order to better understand the future development, or the prospects for a better future, I will ask for your patience, while I go over the main lines in the Turkish foreign policy, especially in the view of the Balkans and some of the main cordial relations with Bulgaria.

Distinguished guests, we live in an era of interdependence in all spheres of our life. Economy comes first of course, but security, social issues, ecology closely follow. The aspects of globalization in the last two decades, has transformed our world into such an integrated place, that now we cannot assess our national interests in isolation from the collective interest of the international community. Take the current economic crisis for instance. It started out as a fiscal meltdown, but quickly turned into an economic crisis that no country in the world could remain immune to.

Yet on the global political scenery, there continue to be too many countries and regions in the world that continue to be subject to political instability threat to international security and stability. From security prospective, we quickly come to realize that it is not unsymmetrical and unconventional risks that define the current international security landscape. Conflicts in the conventional sense still happen, particularly in regions, where conflicts were frozen in the past and they tend to spread to the world, if not contained immediately from outside regions.

The vast majority of the international problems, threats to international peace and security are taking place in Turkey’s (and Bulgaria’s) vicinity. Furthermore, we are witnessing important tensions and transformations in our region and beyond. This is not only a challenge, but it also brings new opportunities. As a country that is situated at the crossroads of strategic bases and cultures, Turkey aims to inspire confidence in its region by mobilizing its political, economic and human resources.

To give you a general idea of the main outpoints of the Turkish foreign policy, I will touch upon some basic principles that are currently shaping our policies. The first one is to strike a balance between freedom and security. If security is good for one nation, for

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one country, for an individual, it is so for others as well. We should not defend security to the detriment of freedoms, and vice versa. Thus, we need to find an appropriate balance.

The second principle is integration of Turkey with other countries within the region in order to implement more effectively wider and far-reaching policies. Our goal is to achieve maximum cooperation with all our neighbors. Despite the recent developments in the Middle East, we still keep allegiances to improve our relations with our neighbors. The high volatility and instability of our region, does not change our commitment. We are determined to contribute to the peace and stability around us.

The third one is to conduct effective diplomacy through neighboring regions. To that end, we are acting on the maxims: security for all, political dialogue, economic interdependence, as well as cultural harmony and mutual respect. In recent years, my country has become an active member of the international community. We have enhanced our partnerships with the emerging powers in Africa, Asian Pacific and Latin America. Turkey is present economically and politically in all parts of the world. Therefore, it has to deal with wider areas of issues. The fourth principle is complementarity with global actors: the EU, the USA, and the Russian Federation, among them.

The fifth principle is the effective use of the international forum and new initiatives, in order to galvanize actions toward tackling common challenges. Our contribution to international organizations such as the UN, NATO, the Council of Europe and many newly established organizations, such as the African Union, the Shanghai Cooperation organization, Association of Southeast Asian Nations. In a sense, our approach aims to end disputes and enhance stability in the region by innovative mechanisms and channels to resolve conflicts by encouraging resolving conflicts by building cross-cultural bridges of dialogue and understanding.

Our foreign policy has three main characteristics: its region oriented, not crisis oriented, its proactive, rather than reactive, its integrated and schematic beyond a single axis.

So, where the Balkans sit within this outlook of the Turkish foreign policy? The Balkans is a priority for Turkey. It is not only so from the economic, political or geographical perspective, but also due to its historical, cultural and human ties with the region. The Balkans being the geographical connection with the rest of Europe, there is a great importance with a special place it had in the historical process that shaped the Turkish identity, and the future potential it carries in the context of regional integration and the EU accession objective that we share with all the countries of the region.

Our policy in the Balkans is based on four main pillars. The first one is improving the security alignment in which we all live. We want security and safety for all regional countries and for all ethnic and religious groups, without making any discrimination. This is conceptualized in terms of regional ownership and inclusiveness. Our starting premise

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is that this region belongs to the local peoples, who have lived there for centuries and continue to live in this region. All ethnic, sectarian and linguistic groups are an integral part of the region and will remain so in the years ahead. The nations of the Balkan region are not only neighbors, living side by side, but also one family with dense social and cultural ties that bind them.

Regional ownership and inclusiveness does not mean that there will never be again any disagreements, but a family approach essentially requires that the countries of the region should manage crisis with the spirit of a family. We need more regional initiatives to strengthen regional cooperation and develop ways and means to resolve problems. In this sense we have put a trilateral mechanism between Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia as a historical step. No one could have imagined in the 1990s that Turkey and Serbia would be working together now. The initiation of such bilateral, trilateral or other multilateral processes will stimulate wider regional initiatives, which could be the leading focus of the Southeast Europe cooperation process forward.

Secondly, we have to resolve to political dialogue and diplomacy rather than the use of force in conflict resolutions. As an important tool we encourage high-level visits and exchange of views. The 20th century was a century of division. The policy-makers should turn the 21st century into a century of reintegration within the Balkans region. Instead of micro-level division, we have to foster macro-level integration. On this point, political dialogue is of crucial importance. There should be high-level bilateral and multilateral dialogue mechanisms that meet on a regular basis.

Thirdly, we need to create interdependence among regional countries and to encourage maximum integration. That means more trade. That means more investment. That means more financial transactions, more trade routes and more energy pipelines. Last, but defiantly not the least, we should spare no effort to preserve the multiethnic, multicultural and multi-religious fabric of the countries, located in the Balkans, sharing a peaceful coexistence.

Despite the bitter experiences of the 1990s, multiculturalism as practiced and experienced in the Balkans for centuries is authentic, and reflects the diversity of the region. It is not only a byproduct of migration. Balkan multiculturalism is the product mainly of the authentic historical experiences that have been accumulated over centuries.

The multiculturalism in Paris, in London, and maybe in Berlin is the result of migration, which has resulted in reactionary and to certain extends of course, defensive opposition by some. The Balkan region posses many practical lessons and has a great potential to contribute to the shaping of the European culture sphere.

When I come to bilateral relations between Turkey and Bulgaria, I have to mention first that these relations are deeply rooted historical relations. With the transition of Bulgaria

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into democracy and free market economy, bilateral relations have made a comprehensive progress in every field and in the context of all levels have increased. The legal framework, required to improve the bilateral commercial and trade relations, has been completed.

Our relations in the political, economic and cultural spheres have remarkably deepened and expanded. At present, we enjoy good neighborly relations with Bulgaria. Turkey would like to sustain and enhance its cooperation with Bulgaria based on sovereign equality and mutual interests. This is the basis of our approach to Bulgaria.

There should be no efforts spared by both sides. Our relations have become more important. High-level visits between the two countries are exchanged on regular basis, and there are certain cooperation mechanisms that at present are working. Along with strong bilateral relations, these two countries are enhancing cooperation within the region and within the international arena: the Black Sea economic cooperation, southeast cooperation process, NATO and the United Nations.

Turkey and Bulgaria share a common mission to strengthen cooperation among the countries in the region through significant regional platforms, in order to enhance peace, stability and prosperity.

In the framework of this common region, Turkey supports the full integration of the countries of the region to the Euro-Atlantic structures. It is understandable that Turkey supported the membership of Bulgaria into NATO in fact, to the point that Turkey was probably the only country to adopt a resolution in the assembly to this respect.

We believe that the prospective membership of Turkey into the European Union, will further diversify and deepen the Turkish- Bulgarian relations in all fields. In this regard, we value the principle Bulgarian support to the membership process of Turkey to the EU. The multidimensional character of our bilateral relationship provides us with plenty of avenues for cooperation to further mutual interests.

From the prospective of regional cooperation in the sphere of trade and investments, the relations between Turkey and Bulgaria have flourished immensely during the past couple of years. By 2007, Turkey absorbed nearly 12 percent of Bulgaria's exports. In 2012, Turkey was one of the first five trading partners of Bulgaria. The bilateral trade volume between the two countries maintained a steady course between 2011 and 2012 both figures amounted to 2.8 billion US dollars. Turkey is the second biggest export market for Bulgaria, after Germany.

The main items that we export to Bulgaria are iron and steel, motor vehicles, electric and nonelectric machinery and equipment, iron and steel goods, plastic and plastic goods.

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Main items of great importance in Turkey's imports from Bulgaria are iron and steel copper, copper goods, mineral fuels and mineral oils.

The Turkish investments here in this country, including the capital flow from third parties, amounts to some 1.5 billion euros. Besides the two Turkish ordains, there are 1 500 active Turkish companies in Bulgaria. Turkish investments spread all over Bulgaria, and make important contribution to the Bulgarian economy in terms of creating value added and employment in various fields, including banking, tourism, textile, chemical, electric parts, paper, aluminum, sugar and interconnection systems.

There are plenty of good examples of Turkish investments in Bulgaria, but since we are at the northern part of Bulgaria, let me mention some very related to your daily lives. The production plant founded by Şişecam in the town of Turgovishte has the capacity of 2 000 tons of flat glass, glassware, processed glass and glass mirror, and it is one of the largest investments made from scratch. The company employs approximately 1500 people. Our factory established in the city of Shumen, produces aluminum, and most of the factory's production is export oriented. Over 730 peoples are employed in this company.

But we believe that we can do much more together, because I will give you some numbers, which would make you understand Turkish economy and Turkish economic development better. The GDP in 2012 was close to 800 billion dollars. The grow rate of the last ten years is at average of 5%. The trade volume is very close to 400 billion dollars. The number of foreign companies operating in Turkey as of 2012 is 33 00.

So, as you see Bulgaria stays at a very good place in terms of bilateral trade, but we believe that there are many more things to do on bilateral basis, because Turkey provides as a successful economy very good ground for Bulgaria for further interactions and investments between the two countries. We have a population of 76 million, largest youth population within the European Union, half of the population is under the age of 30, we have a qualified and competitive labor force of over 27 million. Each year 600 000 citizens students are graduating from 170 universities in Turkey. More than 700 000 graduate from high schools, with more than half of them from vocational and technical high schools.

We have liberal and informant investments plants. We have new and highly developed technological infrastructure and transportation, communication and energy. We are, as Bulgaria does, centrally located as a natural bridge between East and West, North and South axis. Turkey is also energy corridor and terminal of Europe within the area of energy reserves. We have low taxes and incentives for businesses. We have a customs union with the EU since 1996. And we have a large domestic market for anybody, any third country willing to come and invest in Turkey. So, these are the numbers, which I found quite impressive and I would like to share with you.

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At the end of my presentation, since my time is almost up, I would like to say few words about the Bulgarian citizens with Turkish origins. Their existence, here in this country, constitutes an important dimension in our bilateral relations. We believe that they can contribute to the cultural diversity and economic welfare of Bulgarian society. They serve as a bridge between the two countries. We would like to see them as equal citizens of Bulgaria, enjoying fully their democratic rights. We believe that Bulgaria has the potential to present a model of multicultural coexistence, which can serve as an example for other countries in the region in dealing with the issues of multiculturalism. This concludes my presentation, but I will be more than happy to develop on some future prospective and some future work we can do together with Bulgaria and other European partners. Thank you very much!