



AVRUPA BÜYÜKELÇİLERİ TOPLANTISI KONUŞMA METNİ

Address by DEİK's President Ömer Cihad Vardan
on EU HOMs Luncheon organized by
the Embassy of Slovak Republic to Turkey
September 29, 2016

Excellences;

Ladies and Gentlemen. Good afternoon.

I like to start by thanking her Excellency, Ambassador Anna Turenicova for inviting us to this very lovely and important luncheon.

I believe this would be a great opportunity for all of us to discuss and elaborate on Turkey's relations with the EU, before the Council's Presidency of Slovakia ends at the end of this year.

Having this chance, I also would like to congratulate the Slovak Republic for their successful term Presidency; so far.

Excellences;

I don't see the need to explain what DEİK is and what we do. We had been together with you for several occasions in the last, and have established a good working relations with each and every one of you.

But let me highlight one critical point, once again;

30-years old DEİK, has always been a reliable business actor in Turkish business world and will always be.

With our 133 Business Councils, stretched all over the world;

With our strong and large base of representation embracing all major Turkish business actors;

And with the expertise and know-how accumulated through decades,

DEİK has always been and will continue to be a strong partner of yours.

Excellences;

This week, has been a full EU week for us.

Early on Monday, we started our 2.5 days visit in Brussels.

We were back from Belgium yesterday evening, and now I have the chance to speak to you and convey the 'latest' and 'fresh' gossips from the heart of Europe as well as our stand as DEİK.

My colleague Ms. Ebru Özdemir, who is one of our Board Members as well as the Chairperson of DEİK's Communication Committee, is with us today. She has also been a member of our Delegation to Brussels.

I am also delighted with the company of Mr. İsmet Güral, who is the Chairman of Turkey-the Slovak Republic Business Council.

The last but not the least, Mr. Rona Yırcalı, who was the former Chairman of the Executive Board of DEİK. With his dedication specifically to DEİK, but foreign economic relations of Turkey, in general, he keeps being one of our valuable Board Members.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Last 2.5 days in Brussels has been quiet busy but very interesting experience for all of us.

We have met with a great number of people from different EU institutions; as well as Belgian authorities. Here I need to underline that we have been warmly welcomed by our counterparts.

Just to name a few of those;

We have organized a panel discussion in the European Parliament together with 'Friends of Turkey Group' with the participation of 4 Members of the Parliament and more than 30 EU officials.

We had a closed meeting bringing together Bruegel' members, one of world's leading economic think-tanks together with our delegation.

We met with senior Commission officials, from the Cabinets of Commissioner Hahn and Katainen at Berlaymont Building.

We came together with EP's Turkey Rapporteur Ms. Kati Piri and Dutch MEP Ms. Marietje Schaake and discuss the political situation in Turkey.

We had two separate sessions with journalists based in Brussels; one with Turkish, and another with European.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium, Mr. Didier Reinders; The President of the Economic and Social Committee Mr. Georges Dassis were also among the contacts we had in the last 2 days.

We had very fruitful discussion with Mr.Stefano Manservisi for international development programs to be implemented in the 3rd and developing countries with the collaboration of TİKA and DEİK.

Last but not the least, we also had the great chance to meet with Mr. Christian Berger yesterday morning, the new head of EU's Delegation to Turkey, before he arrives to Ankara.

Excellences;

As said, it has been a full-compact programme with exactly 20 different appointments.

We were tired but we were also very happy to be there and hold the pulse in Brussels, especially after the failed coup attempt in Turkey.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Today I do not want you to miss the lunch; therefore I will try to summarize the impression we got in Brussels in 7 simple points.

Number one;

We were extremely happy to see the EU's firm commitment towards Turkey's EU membership. With no exception, all the persons we have contacted have conveyed a unique message to us: Turkey is important for the EU and the EU is important to Turkey.

Two;

From very different contacts we heard Ms. Mogherini's message given few weeks ago during her visit in Ankara: Turkey and the EU need to talk more to each other and a less about each other. As DEİK, I want to say that, we also stand behind this statement and we are willing to keep communication channels open with Europe.

Number three;

We were happy to see that bilateral trade, business and investments continue to be the engine behind Turkey's EU membership prospect as it has always been.

Four;

We were impressed with the positive climate in Brussels with regards to the potential revision of the Customs Union. We clearly saw the EU's willingness to take further steps on the 20-years old Turkey-EU Customs Union and the fruitful work on both sides in order to accelerate and speed up the process.

Number five: On Cyprus issue.

We were happy to observe the constructive atmosphere surrounding the talks on bringing a durable solution to decades-old Cyprus problem. As DEİK, we also fully support these efforts and deeply wish the Island becomes an Island of Peace, instead of an Island of Conflict and Separation.

Six: on enhanced cooperation and dialogue.

Yes this is what we need. Enhanced cooperation and dialogue on economy, trade, investment, politics and energy. These are the areas where we can further our relations quickly. And we are happy to see that Brussels is also convinced on that.

Last but not the least;

We were extremely impressed to see that the failed coup attempt in Turkey has now been better understood in Brussels, and the EU is much more open to listen, observe and understand what has really happened in İstanbul and Ankara, on the night of July the 15th. Here, I would like to thank you for your continuing support for better understating of the issue, directly from Ankara.

On this last point, I also need to emphasize that we also took note of the concerns raised by our counterparts; especially on rule-of-law and the mass arrests after the failed coup attempt.

Excellences;

These were the positive impressions we gathered in the last 3 days. But of course, there were some issues that disappointed us, as well.

Among them, prospect for a visa-free travel for Turkish nationals comes on the forefront.

We are convinced that different EU institutions, the Parliament, the Commission, European business world and Belgium is highly in favor for our nationals visa-free travel; but we are sad to observe how this technical issue, turned out to be a humanitarian following the migration crisis; then a political tool between Turkey and the EU.

As DEİK, our stance of visa-free travel, especially for business people, has always been the same. We want visa freedom for our nationals and our business people, cause this is what plus 50-years of economic and strategic partnership deserves.

A Second point of disappointment is on accession talks.

Unfortunately during these 3 days, we have not heard so much about the accession negotiations, which set the fundamental of candidacy to the EU. We wished to hear more about opening up new chapters, closing down some more chapters, lifting existing blockages... but sadly to admit that we have not.

Excellences;

Coming to the end:

Turkey's importance in global matters is expanding and its leadership is valued; yet still is not a member of the EU.

Europe raises concerns about Turkey on the human rights situation, on migration crisis, on fundamental rights....

Europe asks concession from Turkey on foreign and domestic politics... Europe demands from Turkey to accept 10s and 1000s of pages of the acquis, with a vague mentioning of full membership.

This is not a way to treat an ally-nation my friends.

Unfortunately it paves the way for the rise of anti-West sentiments among the people who have been long your friends.

On that front, you, as the Ambassadors of EU Member States in Turkey have a critical role to play; as we do.

It is to bring closer Turkey to your countries; as well as to Europe.

Closing, I would like to thank once again for inviting me to this Luncheon and salute you with my deepest gratitude.

Thank you.