

**Address by Ömer Cihad Vardan - Chairman of DEİK
at 35th Annual Conference on U.S.-Turkey Relations
October 31, 2016 – Washington DC**

His Excellency; the Minister of Economy of Turkey,

Mr. Chairman; Esteemed Partners;

Distinguished Guests;

On behalf of the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey - DEİK, I am delighted to welcome you all to the 35th Annual Conference on US-Turkey relations.

I would like to extend my sincerest thanks and appreciation to American-Turkish Council and Turkey-the U.S. Business Council – TAIK of DEİK in bringing all of us here today.

I also would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Mr. Nihat Zeybekci, Minister of Economy of Turkey, for joining us, despite his busy schedule back in Turkey.

Distinguished Guests;

This year marks the 35th Annual Conference on US-Turkey relations.

This reminds me the Turkish poet Tarancı who once wrote back in 1946:

“The age is thirty-five! Half of the way!”

Dear Friends;

Obviously, I am not a poet. I am the Chairman of DEİK, our country’s leading business organization in charge of conducting Turkey’s foreign economic relations with the rest of the World.

On professional side, I am a businessman as well; having close and extensive business relations with American companies for decades.

And based on my knowledge and experience; I am confident to say that we are not on the half way; We have not even got the quarter.

This Conference is a perfect example of this long journey.

Realized 35th time, it is one of the and even the oldest regular platform to discuss bilateral relations between our nations.

And hopefully, this platform will continue to be present and play an important role forever.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

The theme of this year's Flagship Event is “**Shaping the Future**”.

Hopefully this Conference will provide us with 2 interesting days of discussions and exchange of ideas on how we can shape the future of Turkish-American relations.

The Conference might limit us to business, innovation and growth.

However;

I sincerely believe that shaping the future on these 3 areas will lead us to have stronger ties politically, strategically and culturally among our nations.

Esteemed Friends;

7 years ago, during the first bilateral overseas visit to Turkey in April 2009, President Obama, chose to use the term “model partnership” to identify Turkish-American relations.

Coming to the end of Mr. President's term, I believe it is a good time to make some elaborations and reflect some ideas.

But first; to better understand the term, we should look at the unique characteristics of two nations.

Turkey is a secular, predominately Muslim nation that has multiple regional identities with an increasingly vocal voice in global affairs.

The country has a unique standing, coming from her location and history.

Located at a point where three continents making up the old World: Asia, Africa and Europe are closest to each other, her rich history makes Turkey an actor that shares a common heritage with many different regions, countries and people. Plus, Turkey is the only country in her region having a stable economy within democracy.

The United States on the other hand, is a Western nation with a Christian majority that holds direct responsibility for global stability.

The country is a global actor, drawing not only on her military power but also from her economic and scientific capacity and core values like democracy, human rights, rule of law, pluralism and inclusiveness based on entrepreneurship.

To sustain this unique position of hers, the United States needs to put more emphasis on her soft power and needs alliances with regional powers:

Like Turkey.

Distinguished Guests;

Bringing these two unique countries together makes this relationship remarkable.

Therefore:

Turkey and the United States need to work closer to calm the cultural tension between the East and the West.

They need to work closer to calm the economic tension between the North and the South.

They need to work closer to maintain the regional and global peace and order.

This is what the “model partnership” means.

And it is important that this partnership is founded on shared values and principles.

But also on a complete sincerity and honesty; with a true desire and enthusiasm to work together; to cooperate together.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

As you all very well know, we have an ambitious agenda already set by our leaders aiming enhanced economic and commercial and scientific relations.

This is why the vision of “shaping the future” is important to follow.

The total trade between our nations was only 17.3 billion USD in 2015.

No need to say that these figure remain far from the potential.

Therefore my friends;

We have a long way to go...

This is why I said, we are not on the half way; and have not even got the quarter, despite the infamous “35-years poem”.

The main cooperation areas include, but are not only limited to, security, energy, enhancing B2B ties, joint initiatives in third countries, innovation and entrepreneurship.

We need to work together to enhance İstanbul as an international financial center.

We need to support each other on TTIP process, so Turkey also receives her well-deserved seat on or around the negotiation table.

We need to be real partners in difficult times we face.

Dear Friends;

Let me open a parenthesis at this point:

Any partnership, even good marriages, has bad times.

Shared goals, values, and vision clearly help keep a relationship alive and vital.

Turkey and the U.S. has a clear vision to follow; therefore we should not let any person, any group, any occasion to dissolve this partnership; especially on the aftermath of Turkey's failed coup attempt.

In this perspective, it is important to remember that mutual commitment at the highest level through decades can only provide business communities on both sides, the necessary umbrella and framework.

It is, however, mainly, up to the businesses to carry forward the existing economic and trade relations.

Therefore, I invite all businessmen, entrepreneurs, both in Turkey and the United States, to show more vigor to help us shape the future we all desire.

Thus my message today is very simple:

Turkey is open for business and our country is committed to support global business, innovation and growth.

So invest in Turkey. Partner with Turkey.

Our institution, DEİK, with its entire body of 134 Worldwide Business Councils is ready to help you.

And DEİK's TAİK is ready to be the point of entry to Turkish market.

His Excellency; Mr. Minister, Mr. Chairman; and Distinguished Guests;

It is my sincere hope that this years' Annual Conference paves the way for us to make real progress on this shared vision. So I wish you all a productive conference and fruitful discussions in the next two days.

And, in conclusion;

I would like to thank, for and foremost H.E. Mr. Nihat Zeybekci, Minister of Economy of Turkey; representatives of American and Turkish business community for their participation to the Conference.

And our warmest thanks go to our sponsors and all stakeholders, especially ATC and TAİK of DEİK for realizing this event.

Last but not the least, I wish the Presidential elections of next week would be the best for US and the World.

I also wish the new Presidency and the new American administration would be fully committed and enthusiastic to strengthen the bilateral relation among our nations. Good luck!