

Business Dinner of EU Delegation, Turkey and Commercial Counsellors of the Balkans and Eurasia

21 March 2019, İstanbul

Dear Director Sandler,
Dear Mr. Sourmelis Head of Unit at the DG Trade,
**Dear Officials from the European Commission and the EU
Delegations,**
Dear Representatives of Business Organizations,

It's my pleasure to welcome you all to this dinner organized jointly by DEİK and the EU Trade Delegation to Turkey. I would like to thank Ms. Yazıcı and Mr. Bartosz for the opportunity of exchange and dialogue between our members and the EU's Trade officials from all around the region.

Let me start with a brief introduction about DEİK.

DEİK is a voluntary-based business organization, aiming at strengthening the Turkish private sector since 1985.

With a primary focus on “**Business Diplomacy**”, we have been acting with 145 Business Councils, cooperating with the most effective business organizations in the respective countries to promote bilateral economic relations through specific working agendas, which also include

large scale and official meetings, CEO roundtables, and sector-oriented visits.

Dear Guests,

I would like to share some information about our bilateral trade with Balkans and Eurasia and express some considerations regarding our bilateral trade with the EU.

Our annual bilateral trade with the countries of Bosnia, Serbia, Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro reached 3,2 billion \$.

On the other hand, Eurasia as a neighboring region is of such an importance for us. We have exporter and investor companies in the region which are indeed a source of pride for us.

While Turkey's trade and investments has increased significantly in the region, it has been observed that there were diversification in sectorial and geographical terms as well as fluctuations on a country basis. The substantial increase in trade volume means increasing interdependence between our countries. However, there are still great opportunities for both Turkish and European companies to invest jointly in the region and also for the third countries, especially in tourism, real estate and construction, transportation and food production sectors since Turkish companies are strong in that field.

As for the EU – Turkey trade and economic relations, Turkey - with its growing and dynamic economy - is the EU's fifth trade partner and export

market (with 77,2 billion € EU exports of goods to Turkey in 2018), while the EU remains our primary export market (with a total of 76,1 billion € exports of goods to the EU in 2018). Our total trade exchange reached about 153,3 billion € last year despite all the global uncertainties and the climate of trade warfare.

As representatives of the Turkish private sector, we sincerely believe those figures should increase further.

In this regard, the establishment of conditions of equal opportunity for both business communities is essential. By that, I mean the lifting of quotas for Turkish truck drivers and also the visa liberalization for our business people. This is not the case for the business people from the EU countries who can travel freely and conduct their business in Turkey without encountering such restrictions or obstacles.

Moreover, the long-awaited EU – Turkey Customs Union Upgrade and Modernization would undoubtedly help in driving growth on both sides, improving our economic relations as well as our mutual foreign trade with all the regions I've mentioned above. However, no substantial progress has been made so far to unblock this issue, mainly for political reasons, while the EU continues FTA initiatives with various countries around the world.

In spite of recent calls for suspending or terminating the EU accession process of Turkey, we definitely believe that Europe is stronger with Turkey, and Turkey is stronger with Europe.

Dear Guests,

Before ending my speech, I would like to add a few words about a special day. Today is the Nevruz, the day which has been celebrated as the coming of the spring for centuries by the Turks and people living in Central Asia, Anatolia, Caucasus, Iran, and the Balkans. This day symbolizes a reawakening of nature together with people's desire to live in harmony and peace. Owing to the importance and meaning of the day, I also hope this year's Nevruz would bring more peace and stability in our region but also provide a positive impetus in Turkey – EU relations, as we are going to celebrate this year the twentieth anniversary of Turkey's recognition as a candidate country for EU membership.

Thank you for your attention.

Nail OLPAK**President of DEİK**