

Speech Delivered by H.E. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey at Africa-Turkey Partnership Ministerial Review Conference

Dear Colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is our distinct pleasure to welcome you again in the historic city of Istanbul. I would like to extend my cordial greetings to Their Excellencies Ministers, heads of delegations from the African nations, H.E. Eustaquio Nseng Esono, Minister Delegate for Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Francophonie of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, delegation of the African Union Commission, representatives of the African Economic Organizations, His Excellency Mr. Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, Secretary General of Organization of Islamic Conference, esteemed representatives of UN Secretary General, UN organizations and other observer delegations.

Firstly let me thank you all for having accepted our invitation to participate in this Conference. Your response and presence today is a strong testimony to the key importance that we attach to the Africa-Turkey partnership and to our policy of opening-up to Africa.

Our heads of States and Governments who gathered here three years ago had reiterated Turkey –Africa Partnership as “strategic”, laid down its ground principles as equality, mutual respect and reciprocal benefits and given us the task to come together in 2011 to review the progress and prepare the next Summit meeting to be held this time in an African country.

Allow me therefore to dwell at the beginning of my words on this “strategic” character of Turkey-Africa relations, and share briefly some of my ideas with you to explain how we approach Africa in our dealings and how we conceive the driving forces of our partnership with African nations and institutions.

Dear Colleagues,

Distinguished guests,

It is our strong belief and conviction that we share a common destiny with Africa and that we can shape this destiny together with our African friends.

This belief and conviction are founded firstly on the lessons of our common historical past. Stretching hundreds of years back, our history tells us that the well-being of Africa and Turkey cannot be separated from each other. Within a relationship based on equality, mutual respect, cooperation and common stance against adversaries, the rise of African and Turkish civilizations were always closely linked. At times when we were able to strengthen our interactions, cultural links, trade connections and political positions, we were triumphant and prosperous. However, when our ties and defenses were weakened due to many reasons including imperialism, colonialism, conflicts, or inner strife, we were both weakened and fell back behind other nations and groupings.

Geographically, we share an area of the world where seas, land routes economies and peoples are connected with each other. This is our wider neighborhood and we are immediately affected by the developments in every part of this geography. That is the reason we call this

geography Afro-Asia and we emphasize the importance of standing back from euro-centric definitions of the world and create more appropriate designations for our geostrategic positioning.

Economically, we have everything to gain from ever closer interaction. The most affluent nations in the world carry out most of their economic activities among themselves. We would not like to play the role of peripheral attachments to far away economic centers. Rather, we prefer to grow as strong economic entities in our core regions and negotiate with other partners from positions of strength.

Culturally, we possess an enormous amount of affinity and common parameters with African peoples and nations. The cultures and civilizations which have flourished on our territories have left us countless common words, religions, music, traditions and patterns of thinking. Africans are friendly nations in Turkey and I know from my experience, that the Turks are embraced in Africa with open arms, cordially and amicably. Thus, our peoples are easily able to connect with each other.

To sum up, our relationship with Africa is not ordinary, but unique and special. We do not regard Africa as another part of the world with which we can forge business and trade relations. Much more than that, Africa is our neighbor, partner and friend with whom our fortunes are closely linked.

It is with this spirit that we conduct our relations with African nations and organizations and it is this conception of "strategic approach" that pervades all our dealings with you.

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen

As befitting this Review Conference, we have the opportunity today to discuss what we have achieved since the 2008 Summit meeting and what we should do more to move forward an already flourishing relationship between Africa and Turkey. We will also exchange ideas as to how further to develop the intricate web of interaction between our public agencies, private institutions, non-governmental organizations and peoples.

The Senior Officials who met yesterday spent valuable time to take up the implementation of decisions taken in 2008 Summit and to revise the Joint Implementation Plan adopted last year. We are continuously developing, updating and enhancing this Plan taking into account the valuable views of African Union and our African partner nations.

When we look at the general picture of our developing relations, since we launched a new phase in Africa-Turkey relations with our policy of opening-up to Africa, it is possible to say that the achievements are indeed not few. Especially since the time Turkey declared 2005 as Africa year, an impressive amount of activity has happened in almost every field.

Firstly, an obvious point is about diplomatic representations between Africa and Turkey, which has almost tripled in the last years. The number of Turkish embassies in Africa will rise to 33 next year from 12 as it was in early 2009. Similarly, with the inauguration of 11 new embassies of sub-Saharan countries next year, the number of African representations in Ankara will rise to 25.

We observe that with each representation opened, our bilateral relations gain a considerable momentum. High level visits, visits between our ministries, contacts and acquaintances between our business communities as well as collaboration between our non-governmental organizations dramatically increase. Therefore, we aim to extend our web of representations to every country in Africa in the coming years. We are glad to see that our African partners share a similar approach and prefer to be represented directly in our country.

Allow me to quote at this point some brief statistics concerning official contacts only in the past three years to refresh our memories;

There have been 37 high level visits from Turkey to Africa and 76 high level visits from Africa to Turkey at the level of presidents, prime ministers, chairmen of parliaments and ministers of foreign affairs;

In addition, 72 high level meetings took place on the margins of international conferences;
118 visits at the level of Ministers of Trade,
30 visits at the level of ministers of agriculture and rural development,
36 visits of ministers of defense,
17 bilateral visits of ministers of energy, natural resources and infrastructure.
347 agreements concluded or currently negotiated,
17 high level economic and 12 political consultation meetings;

The 4th UN Conference on LDCs, held in Istanbul on 9-13 May 2011, created another opportunity for us to discuss our cooperation with our African counterparts, in the margins of the Conference.

As the host country of this Conference on LDCs of which 33 are from Africa, Turkey will allocate to the LDCs, 200 million Dollars annually, starting in 2012, for technical cooperation projects and programs as well as scholarships.

Turkey has undertaken 113 development assistance projects, implemented 37 humanitarian aid campaigns and granted 2500 state scholarships to African students mostly at graduate and postgraduate levels. 30 Turkish high schools provide quality education in different parts of the African Continent. In this instance, TIKA deserves sincere appreciation for its dedicated work.

Now, if we turn our attention to economic relations, despite the negative effect of the world economic crisis, global financial difficulties as well as conflicts and internal difficulties in some African countries, our trade volume has dramatically increased in 2011.

We expect to reach the 17 billion dollars figure by the end of this year, while this figure was 14 billion dollars in 2010. This amounts to nearly 20 % increase in one year.

This spectacular figure is another indication that our cooperation and partnership is finding a strong response on the ground. What is interesting to observe is that not only Turkish exports but also the imports from Africa are on the rise. Therefore our commercial relations are not working to the advantage of one side or the other exclusively.

Moreover, our commercial relations cover an immense spectrum of goods and productions. We are not buying and selling just certain commodities or raw materials. Turkish and African businessmen who are traditionally trade-minded and culturally close to each other discover each other's diverse opportunities and benefit widely from them.

Our relations are intensifying and developing. We would like to see African Institutions stronger and more influential. For that purpose, I am very glad to announce today that we have decided to contribute 1 million Dollars to the 2012-2013 budget of the African Union to support this valuable institution.

The rapidly increasing transport connections; the fact that THY now flies directly to 17 African destinations. (Addis Ababa, Achhra, Benghazi, Tripoli, Cape Town, Algiers, Dakar, Darussalam, Entebbe, Khartoum, Alexandria, Johannesburg, Cairo, Casablanca, Lagos, Nairobi, Tunis); and simple visa facilities in Turkey assist contacts and transactions. THY has promised to add more destinations to its schedule in 2012.

These figures and observations also give us a critical message for the future. Definitely, we cannot be satisfied with these levels. Africa is now home to six of the ten fastest-growing economies in the world and is predicted to have the world's highest average GDP growth over the next 40 years, with its dynamic population and natural resources. Turkey has become one of the fastest growing and emerging economies as well. In comparison to our global trade volumes, though, our bilateral trade still represents a small amount.

However, the trend is clear and promising. The private sectors are instrumental in creating sustainable economic growth and employment. Without private sector-driven growth, without economic and commercial interactions, we will not be successful in eradicating poverty or mobilizing the necessary domestic resources for education, health and other social services.

As we dismantle the barriers in front of our trade flows and businessmen, our commercial relations will grow for our mutual benefit. And, our private sectors are leading our economic and commercial relations.

Turkey will therefore continue to offer the fruits of its vibrant industry, technology, market know-how and its unique reach to international markets to the emerging business community of our African partners.

Let me thank here also to our business associations and especially TUSKON for their continuous efforts to strengthen Turkish-African business cooperation. In fact TUSKON has played a very influential and constructive role in further enhancing the economic and trade ties between Turkey and Africa. I would like to thank TUSKON and comment this efficient work in boosting our relations with many African nations. The parallel activity that they organize today is another contribution to boost our economic relations.

I am sure that such vibrant commercial relations will rapidly evolve into mutual investments and joint productions in time. In fact, Turkish investments in Africa are already estimated to be around 1 billion dollars at the moment. And, this is only the beginning.

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have seen radical changes in our region in the preceding years. Many friendly African countries have passed through successful elections, reformed their institutions and taken great strides towards stability, democracy and prosperity. Elections in Tunisia, Egypt, Liberia, Guinea or many others have shown that good governance is not only for certain group of

countries. People are eager and willing to use their democratic rights and they use them sensibly. We have seen also that elections play a crucial role for social and political stability.

However, we have also seen poverty, hunger, diseases, conflicts, wars and terrible effects of terrorism. The situation in the Horn of Africa, Somalia and Libya are some glaring examples. We deeply share the concerns for growing terrorism especially in the Sahel region. We are aware of destabilizing results of organized crime, illicit trafficking of narcotics, weapons and piracy off the coast of Somalia and the Gulf of Guinea.

In the face of such problems, our motto "peace at home, peace in the world" or its reflection today; the principle of "zero problems with our neighbors" have been our guiding light. These principles have one primary objective: to establish a belt of stability, security and prosperity around our region.

Democratic regimes where the will of the people matters rather than those of the autocrats would no doubt contribute to this objective. This is why Turkey has been promoting universal values such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law in our neighborhood for years.

Today, our region is going through an awakening process. We are witnessing the release of a huge pressure accumulated for more than quarter century between tectonic plates of social and economic frustration and aspirations of the peoples for the rights which they have been denied but have been available to others.

The Arab Spring was inevitable. The only way to keep power in this region from now on will be to share it. The process will take time. It won't be linear and it will undergo many seasons. But it is irreversible.

At this process, the place of Turkey is with the peoples of the region. Turkey will stand side by side with the peoples, their legitimate aspirations and work tirelessly for the realization of these aspirations in a stable and peaceful fashion.

Excellencies,

Dear Colleagues,

We believe that Turkey and Africa share a similar vision and similar approach for the future. We regard the African Union as a major actor in the 21st century and desire to see a stronger African influence in world affairs. I would like to stress that Turkey is also desirous of harmonizing our policies on crucial matters of interest to both Turkey and Africa. A case in point was the Libya crisis. We had an intense dialogue and coordination with the African Union, Mr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union and our African partners on this issue. This is our region and we should work together to produce our own solutions.

At this point, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Libya for its successful transition to democracy and stability. I am glad to announce that President Mustafa Abdelcelil will join us today and be our guest at dinner.

The past three years have also seen many instances of our common efforts for common purposes to this end. In Somalia, Darfur or North Africa, Turkey has, on the one hand activated its own national resources and on the other tried to awaken the world's attention to ongoing problems and to remind them of their responsibilities.

Our cooperation and dialogue on international fora has also been exemplary. Allow me to thank you all African nations who supported our candidacy in international organizations including the UN and UN Security Council . During our candidacy for the UN Security Council, Turkey was the voice of African concerns, views and positions on many issues. We will continue in this way if we are re-elected to the Security Council for the term 2015-2016.

I would like to also express my appreciation for and thank the African Union and African Organizations. They are the embodiment and driving force for all- African efforts. We regard them as vitally instrumental to coordinate and channel our synergies. Therefore we are determined to enhance our cooperation and coordination with them.

Dear colleagues,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

What we have achieved until now in Africa-Turkey strategic partnership is considerable, but not at all satisfactory. As emerging powers in the world, we have to do a tremendous amount of diligent work to realize an equally tremendous amount of potential that our nations and peoples possess in every field. We have to talk, organize visits, negotiate and enact agreements, coordinate with and assist each other.

Turkey is ready, with its state institutions, representatives, organizations, people, economic and social potential to embrace and cooperate with its African partners. In this way we believe we can prepare a common future for the prosperity of our nations.

I welcome you once again in İstanbul, which is not only ours, but also your city and I thank you all for your valuable presence.

Thank you for your attention.