

Turkish Foreign Policy: Challenges and Opportunities

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Ms. Zeyno Baran:

Thank you for coming to what I believe is an extremely timely event, given that the election campaign is beginning in Turkey. There are many changes facing Turkish foreign policy—not only challenges, but, as our title suggests, opportunities. I am delighted that we have such a distinguished delegation here with us today. We have representatives from two political parties in Turkey. We will first start with ambassador and former foreign minister Yasar Yakis, who will be speaking on behalf the delegation of the Justice and Development Party. We will then hear from Ambassador Onur Oymen from the Republican People's Party.

Ambassador Yasar Yakis:

It is a great pleasure to address such a distinguished audience and I am grateful to Zeyno for arranging this meeting. Before I begin, I would like to correct one thing in your introductory remarks. In Turkey, on the subject of foreign policy, the ruling party and the opposition party are not two sides in a dispute. I believe that both parties endeavor to take Turkey in the same direction, particularly in the foreign policy realm.

At the present, Turkish foreign policy is preoccupied with three major issues. The first is Turkey's drive towards the European Union, the second is transatlantic relations, and the third is Turkey's role in the Middle East.

Turkey's drive towards the European Union is supported by both parties; when my colleague Ambassador Oymen speaks, you will see the extent to which the opposition is also committed to supporting the accession process. Several years ago, Greece also made an important decision to support Turkey's accession process. It did so in order to not be blamed for any difficulties that Turkey might encounter in the accession process, since Greece had been viewed in Turkey as a scapegoat that was preventing its neighbor from joining the EU. Greece did not want other EU countries who might oppose Turkish membership to "hide behind" the Greeks, claiming that it was Greece's opposition keeping Turkey out. Thus, Athens came out in support of Turkey, allowing us to see just which countries oppose Turkish membership.

However, Turkey does not want to become entangled with these obstacles, since we believe that they are only short-term in nature; we are focused most of all on Turkey's long-term

perspectives. Even among the countries that oppose Turkey's membership, such as Austria, France and Germany, at least one partner in the governing coalition is in favor of Turkish entry. It is true that the CDU party of German Chancellor Angela Merkel wants Turkey to be given a "privileged partnership" status instead of membership; Turkey does not accept this.

We do not know what the international landscape will be by the time Turkey reaches the threshold of EU membership. We do not know whether Merkel in Germany or Nicolas Sarkozy in France will still be leading their countries, and nor do we know whether at that time Turkey would still like to join the European Union. In light of these uncertainties, we do not want to become entangled in our present difficulties. We are looking at a distant target, and are preparing ourselves accordingly.

The second dimension of Turkish foreign policy is transatlantic relations. We believe that Europe cannot play a global role without cooperation with the United States. On December 17, 2004, when the decision was made to open negotiations with Turkey, President Jacques Chirac stated that "if the European Union is content to remain a free trade area, then we could do it without Turkey. But if the European Union in the long run plans, envisages, contemplates to assume global responsibilities, then we need Turkey." We see ourselves within this perspective, but we also believe that the American partnership is essential and that a global role is not possible without strengthened transatlantic relations.

As for the Middle East, the third major question of Turkish foreign policy, let me say that it is another universe altogether. This is especially true if you take a country such as Lebanon, which itself is a microcosm of the region; it has within its border several forces competing with each other. Turkey has sent its military forces both on land and on sea to contribute to establishing stability in Lebanon. With Syria we have very good relations, since Syria agreed to expel the leader of the PKK terrorist organization—who was later captured with the help of the United States in Africa. In Palestine, we have excellent relations with both the Palestinians and the Israelis, so we can communicate without any difficulties with both of them. In Iraq, we are very much in favor of the preservation of the territorial integrity of Iraq. One of the sensitive subjects at the present is the status of Kirkuk. We believe that the demographic composition of Kirkuk should not be changed or modified by artificial measures, and that the resources in the region of Kirkuk should not be given to one ethnic or sectarian group, as they belong to the entire Iraqi population. We have certain expectations of the United States on particular issues in Iraq. One is that we expect the United States to take a stronger position on, or at least to oppose more strongly, any attempt to change the demographic composition of Kirkuk. The second thing is that we expect stronger American assistance to dislodge the PKK terrorist organization from northern Iraq.

Ambassador Onur Oymen:

Thank you very much for giving us this opportunity. I will touch upon these subjects very briefly, since I expect questions afterwards.

Regarding the European Union, the main problem is that there was a change of leadership and of mentality in Europe in the last half of the twentieth century. Those who fought during the Second World War had a vision that included Turkey as part of the European family. They invited

Turkey to European institutions like the OECD and NATO. By contrast, Mr. Sarkozy, who may soon be elected president of France, said for instance that Turkey is an Asian country that has nothing to do with Europe. Mrs. Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, said that in 50 years' time the EU will be ready to discuss how best it can improve its relationship with Turkey. Thus, they are not at the moment ready to consider Turkey as a full member of the European family. Therefore, we believe that we have to pose an open question to the European Union as an institution: is it ready to accept Turkey as a full member in the event that we fulfill all conditions? If yes, let us continue on the way we have planned. If not, then of course we have to consider our own way out of the situation.

At their last summit meeting, EU leaders indicated that Cyprus is a major stumbling block in our relations; they linked our membership prospects to a resolution of this issue. However, none of the opponents of Turkish membership, whether Merkel, Sarkozy, Schüssel, or the others, has ever said that they would reconsider their position on Turkey in the event of progress on the Cyprus issue. So, while Cyprus is a stumbling block, a solution to it may not help open the door of Europe to us.

Regarding the situation in Iraq, which is an important issue for both our countries, we believe that we should address this issue with a constructive attitude. We should stop criticizing each other every other day and work instead to find a way out of this situation. We believe that there are two major options for Iraq. First, as a majority in Congress—and thus the majority of the American people—has suggested, US troops are going to be withdrawn. In the event that this takes place, how will things evolve? If the American troops leave a vacuum behind them, of course it will only create a bigger danger. Yet, if they are replaced by a UN peacekeeping force comprising troops from countries that do not border Iraq and have no direct interest in its energy reserves, then the security situation may improve. Such countries may include those such as India, Pakistan, Finland, Canada, or perhaps Indonesia, since they are experienced in international peacekeeping. Second, the best political solution would be the true democratization of Iraq.

At the moment, Iraq merely has the title of democracy; it is quite far away from being a true democracy. The simple fact is that in a Muslim majority country, there cannot be democracy without secularism; religion must be separate from affairs of the state. So far, the only Muslim-majority country to successfully develop democracy is Turkey and this is because of our secular system. Immediately after independence, Bangladesh tried but only survived five years as a secular democracy. After five years, it yielded to the pressures of the Islamist groups. I know that our American friends believe that the way to combat radical Islam is to use moderate Islam; but this is not possible. After all, the radical countries of today were once moderate countries themselves. Thus, we do not believe that moderate Islam is a solution at all. The solution, as I have said, is secularism. If the Turkish model is applied to Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries, it may lead to peace and stability for the simple reason that, so far in history, there has never been any war among democratic countries. Thus, if we are able to export democracy to this area, it may prove to be an insurance policy for peace and stability.

There are two other points I would like to make regarding Iraq. First, in any country—particularly in those known as democracies—there is only one army. In both federal and unitary

states, the military is a single institution. Yet in Iraq, in addition to the terrorists and insurgents, there are three regular armies: the Iraqi Army and the armies of Barzani and Talabani. This situation is not sustainable, since it means that some ethnic groups can dictate policies to the central government and influence foreign countries using their armed forces. Either you have a united army or you have troubles—and the latter is what Iraq is facing today.

Second, the situation in Kirkuk has become very serious; it is one of the main reasons for the troubles we are facing in Iraq today. While I do not have the time to go into detail, I am expecting difficulties in the event of a referendum this year. The apparent aim is to make Kirkuk a part of Kurdistan, that is, the northern part of Iraq. This may lead to a very serious confrontation because Kirkuk was for more than one thousand years traditionally a Turkish city.

We also need to talk very honestly with our American friends about the PKK, since we believe that the actual situation in Northern Iraq is not similar or comparable to anywhere else in the world. Northern Iraq today is a safe haven for terrorists. I would like to repeat the words of President Bush, who said after 9/11 that “You are either with us, or you are with the terrorists, we have no gray area.” We are telling our American friends exactly the same thing: either you are with us or you are with the terrorists, and there is no gray area. Americans say that they cannot send troops to combat the PKK in Northern Iraq. It is understandable since they truly do not have the troops. What is not understandable is that the Americans also seek to prevent Turkey from doing the job. If the Iraqi government would eliminate the PKK, then we would be very happy and would not need to do anything. Similarly, if the Americans would do so, we would be again very happy since we would not need to send troops. Yet, if nobody does the job, someone has to secure the Turkish-Iraqi border. Who would do the job?

At this moment, there is no border security between Turkey and Iraq. One cannot secure this border from the Turkish side, since the frontier follows a line of mountains 3,000 meters high. Thus, the border must be defended from the Iraqi side. If Americans do not do it, we have to do it. Otherwise, these terrorists will go free. We have asked our American friends: Who is in charge regarding the PKK in Northern Iraq? The answer was simple: nobody. What is the rationale of these policies? Americans say that their main goal is to maintain stability in Northern Iraq. But how is stability served by managing terrorists? Is there anywhere else in the world that this US policy of stability has been based on the existence of a terrorist group? This is the main fault line in our relations. Two years ago, the level of support for the United States in Turkey was 51%. Now it stands at 7%. This is the absolutely lowest level in the world. Americans are our friends and our allies, and we need to have better relations with America.

Yet the core of the problem is this: terrorists are crossing the Iraqi border to Turkey, bringing with them explosives and weapons. They are killing our people and attacking economic targets. We simply cannot accept this situation. Our chief of staff said recently that Barzani and Talabani are supporting the PKK by arms and ammunition, and that they have abandoned the Turkish-Iraqi border to the PKK. This was an extremely serious statement—one, we have to take seriously. The best solution to this situation would be for Iraqi troops under command of the Iraqi government to control the border. The second-best alternative would be American control, and the third option would be Turkish control. Without any kind of control of the border, there will be a disaster. In this sense, the situation between Turkey and Iraq is a zero-sum game. If the

United States wants to preserve stability in Northern Iraq at this price, the end result will be instability in Turkey. I simply do not believe that our American friends will accept the creation of an unstable situation in Turkey for the sake of stability in Northern Iraq.

I would also like to add a word about Armenia. We are ready to discuss the Armenian problem in all its dimensions. Although the most urgent problem today is the ongoing occupation of 20 percent of Azerbaijani territory by Armenians, we cannot ignore the past. We are ready to face history and to discuss what happened in the past. Yet, we do not understand the policies or preferences of some of our American friends. I believe that the proposed resolution to Congress on the alleged Armenian genocide has been made for legal and political reasons. This proposal is legally unsound because an international treaty signed in 1948 by the United Nations held that only a competent international court could decide on charges of genocide. This procedure was upheld for the Nuremberg trial, the Tokyo trial, the Rwanda trial, the Milosevic trial and others. So legally speaking, no private political body should decide whether or not genocide has occurred.

Politically speaking, the US should reflect on the fact that the legislation refers only to what happened in Armenia. We deplore the killing of many Armenians during the First World War, but we also deplore the fact that many Turks were killed. In a book written by Professor Justin McCartney and published in the United States, one can read about how many Turks were killed by Armenians. In one province alone, as a result of an Armenian rebellion, 62% of the entire Turkish population was killed; 194,000 were killed in that area alone. Thus, if someone completely neglects this aspect of the story and talks only about the Armenian casualties, no scholar will take that person seriously. So if we want to study history, let us all do it together. We propose that the Armenian government bring together scholars and historians to discuss this matter, and to present their findings to us. We are ready to discuss this matter—after all, we have opened our archives, though they have not opened theirs. Ultimately, the people who investigate this issue should be experts and historians.

By the way, on Palestine, we have a slight disagreement with the government. It has been the policy of Turkey not to talk to terrorists; thus, since Turkey has recognized Hamas as a terrorist organization, we disagreed with the invitation issued to the leader of that organization to conduct talks in Turkey. Since we made this disagreement public in Turkey, we would like to repeat it here to avoid contradictions. Thank you very much.

Ms. Baran:

Thank you both very much. And now Mr. Dulger would like to add a few words.

Mr. Mehmet Dulger:

Thank you. I would also like to thank Minister Yakis and my dear friend Mr. Onur Oymen, who have both tackled the deep and broad subject of the challenges and opportunities in Turkey's foreign policy. Mr. Yakis has considered the geographical possibilities of Turkish foreign policy, while Mr. Oymen has reviewed the priorities of the Turkish foreign policy agenda. I would like to present another approach in the hope of giving rise to further questions.

I think it is possible to view the challenges and opportunities in Turkish foreign policy in terms of security, economic development, and social development. Concerning security, the strategic geographical situation of Turkey is a complex one. Yet, Turkey still says that it would like to participate in the process of European integration. At the same time, there are groups and nations with claims on the territory of Turkey. This is one of the most interesting aspects of Turkish foreign policy. Of course, many of these claims date from Turkey's imperial history; after all, Turkey is considered to be the “ashes of the Ottoman Empire.” After the fall of the empire, 26 separate states were left behind, but the debts of empire have been paid. After the foundation of what would become the European Union, the fighting of World War II officially came to an end. Yet, in the current situation in the Middle East, the fighting of World War I is not yet over. The Armenian problem is one prominent example. In addition to these problems, the security situation offers Turkey some opportunities as well. Now, no state in the region can take any effective action without the consent of Turkey.

Regarding economic development, in recent years, Turkey has experienced robust improvement on a number of indicators such as trade volume and interconnectivity with the rest of the world. At the same time, Turkey has succeeded in quelling the inflation rate. Nevertheless, it continues to face economic challenges. The Turks are a very skillful people and personal initiative is very strong among them. There are so many obstacles to accession to the EU, yet we still believe that we will overcome them.

Concerning social development, I think that the most important problem is the increasing growth rate of the population. It is good to have an increased population, but we need to have enough money to address social problems. We also have the huge advantage of a relatively young population. If we are able to ensure that our young people receive sufficient education, we will have overcome one of our principal challenges. Second, one of the challenges which remain for Turkey is the fact that we have a huge percentage of people working in agriculture. Industry and services are lacking. And I think that their increase would have a positive impact on Turkish foreign policy.

There are other possibilities to be considered that are very much related to what happens inside Turkey. Currently, we are having major discussions about democracy and secularism. It is a very interesting question to which we are continuing to try and find an answer. I believe that democracy and secularism are the two things that have to go together. I would like to say something to you that is only my opinion, and which does not reflect those of my party or my friends. Who is democratic and secular? What is secular is not necessarily democratic. We have experienced precisely this phenomenon in the life of our country. We have seen the civilian bureaucracy weigh heavily in Turkish public life, and we have seen some aspects of extreme nationalism. Considering that extreme radicalism is a problem within secularism, I think that these radicals should not be allowed to have such influence in public life—though we should certainly be tolerant towards them.

I think that Turkey first and foremost has the capability of creating a dynamic space in the broader Middle East, Caucasus, and Central Asian region. However, the possibility of EU membership is different. In ten years, perhaps less, Turkey will have adopted the *acquis communautaire* and met the standards of the European Union. At that point, it will have the

choice of whether or not to join. Thank you very much for your attention; I hope that my remarks will lead you to debate these kinds of questions.

Ms. Baran:

Thank you very much. Since some of our speakers must leave early, we will now take questions for Mehmet Dulger. But before opening up the discussion, I would like to note that, as someone based in Washington, I was struck by the lack of mention of Iran in any of the remarks so far. The second issue particularly relevant to the DC audience is Turkey's relations with Syria, which are currently very good; I am sure that there will be questions on this topic. I am also glad that Mr. Dulger mentioned the Central Asian-Caucasus region, since another opportunity, and at the same time a challenge, for Turkish foreign policy, is the relations with Russia and Eurasia on energy and other issues. Let us now open the discussion with specific questions for Mr. Dulger.

Questioner:

I would like to follow up on what Mr. Dulger said regarding extreme nationalism in Turkey. On the issue of the Hrant Dink investigation, the prime minister, the foreign minister, and everybody else have said that the state was involved in it. Could you please give me an update as to what has been going on in the investigation? Did people order this murder as has been said? I would also like to ask about the Armenia genocide resolution. Ambassador Oymen mentioned it, and I am sure you have all discussed this issue. What have you heard from Congress?

Mr. Dulger:

I will answer you very briefly. To me, it also shows how Turkey is fed up with all these allegations concerning its behavior towards Armenians. I think we considered him [Hrant Dink] as one of our own. And that is why these people were protesting this murder. I brought with me Turkish newspapers from the day of the funeral; the huge crowds that turned out to mourn Hrant Dink's murder and denounce the actions of his killer are proof enough of how Turkey feels. It also shows me that Turkey is fed up with all these allegations concerning its behavior towards Armenians. I think Turks considered Hrant Dink to be one their own and that is why so many people were protesting this murder—immediately after which, by the way, the Turkish authorities caught the criminal.

Ms. Baran:

I believe the question was specifically about the investigation into the murder.

Mr. Dulger:

The investigation is continuing, I believe, though I do not know for sure, because it is being conducted mainly in secret. Eventually, the accused would come before a court and then we will see what happened and we will get all the details. That would be an open trial in which everybody could participate.

Ambassador Oymen:

Regarding the Armenian resolution, we are talking with the administration and with the members of Congress. We believe that Congress will come to realize that adopting such a resolution would not be in America's interests, not least because of the damage it would inflict upon Turkish-American relations. Who will gain from such a resolution? As I mentioned during my

presentation, I do not believe that the content of the resolution reflects the historical realities. For instance, there is absolutely no reference to the Turks that were killed by Armenians. As I have told you, according to the official statistics, over 500,000 Turks were killed by the Armenians. Yet, there is not a single reference to this fact in the resolution. This is only one of the missing points. I believe that we are better off focusing on the positive things in Turkish-American relations instead of searching for facts that skew perceptions and create a negative climate in our mutual relationship.

As regards to Zeyno's comment on Syria and Iran, I would like to tell you about an experience that we had with Syria. When Syria was hosting a terrorist organization, the PKK, we cut all high-level diplomatic talks. We sent a strong note and made very strong statements. They were then forced to hand over this terrorist leader or force him to leave the country. This was at the time when our American friends were talking to Syria to persuade them; if I remember correctly, Secretary Christopher visited Syria 32 times—without result. One must be firm with countries and organizations that support terrorism.

There is a very serious problem regarding Iran. Aside from its nuclear program—something which we should spare no efforts to stop—there is also the fact that Iran uses religion as a tool in its foreign policy. Specifically, Iran looks to exacerbate the Shia-Sunni split. Let us not forget that 60% of the population of Iraq is composed of Shia Muslims, the vast majority of which are concentrated in the south. Thus, in the event that Iraq is divided into three, then the Shia republic or Shia entity in the south will have a 95% Shia population. We can add to that the large Shia populations in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, 70% of Bahrainis are Shia. Thus, we face the possibility of Shia domination of the Gulf region. Coupled with this, we have the Shia government in Syria and the Shia Hezbollah organization operating in Lebanon. So a Shia belt could conceivably arise between Iran and the Mediterranean. This is the danger.

Moreover, if Iran makes religion a tool of foreign policy, the other side will do so as well. And this will create an extremely dangerous situation. When I visited Iran some years ago with our prime minister, we met with the Ayatollah and his colleagues. He presented his colleagues to us and introduced one of them as the person in charge of spreading the Iranian revolution to Turkey. Can you imagine this? He told us this openly. This is how they use religion in their foreign policy. We thus have to be extremely careful about eliminating all options that use religious elements—after all, look what has happened in Afghanistan and Iraq. That is why we urge you to cooperate with us. We will definitely help you to use Turkey as a springboard of democracy and secularism in the Middle East.

Ms. Baran:

Before you go, may I ask you to talk a little more about Iran and Syria? As you know, the current position of the US administration is that there is no point in talking to Syria. You have just explained how the Turkish position of not talking to Syria worked very well. Yet this is no longer the position of Turkey. I know that this is a source of potential confusion, so could address this issue before you leave?

Mr. Dulger:

Concerning Iran, I will say two things. First, it is very good that a few countries are talking with Iran. It is a big advantage for Turkey that it is holding talks with Iran. For example, I was there when the Organization of the Islamic Conference chose its new secretary general—for the first time in an election. Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, a Turkish citizen, was the successful candidate. During the election, one of those cooperating most closely with us was the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs. During the election process I was sitting quite close to the Iranian minister and I asked him why he was so supportive of Ihsanoglu's election rather than an Iranian. He said to me, "We will never be able to sit at the table with Western countries, but Turkey can. Professor Ihsanoglu will help us to bring the problems of the Islamic world—with a population of 1.4 billion people—to the forefront of world attention." Let me add that these people are suffering very much from the widespread opinion that Islam is considered as a source of terrorism, which it is not at all. Like all religions, Islam is deeply respectful of human life.

Second, it may be impossible to dissuade the Iranians from their goal of acquiring nuclear power. Here I am not speaking of just the leadership in Tehran; everyone down to last shepherd in Iran would be committed to the goal of nuclear energy if the US attacks. Maybe the people of the world should prepare for the day when Iran will be in the nuclear club. Iran has signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and India has not—yet, India was invited by President Bush to become a nuclear power. It is a very difficult game, but I think that the possibility of negotiations still exists, and Turkey will have a very important role to play in that. Instead of forcing the issue, maybe it is sometimes better to try dialogue. We are a very old neighbor of Iran, and we know it is not easy to have debates or negotiations with the Iranians, but it is still possible. And even if we have only a remote possibility of success, we have to use this opportunity. Otherwise, Iran will become a nuclear power—and we are absolutely aware that this is a very serious threat for Turkey as well. There is a delicate balance to be obtained, and it will be the job of politicians and diplomats to obtain it. But it will be obtained. After all, it is more difficult to act militarily in the aftermath of the intervention in Iraq.

Concerning energy security, Turkey is becoming a key energy corridor. It is the place where gas lines from Egypt, Iraq, and Russia meet those going to Europe. From this point of view, Turkey is a strategically important country, though this fact is not well-known by the general public here. Yet, Turkey will play a key role in this issue, and will in fact contribute to peace—since no one would like to destroy this infrastructure. Turkey will also present a secure possibility of providing energy to the Western world. We have upcoming the huge Nabucco energy project, as well as another project connecting Greece and Italy. These will both provide gas to international markets. Thank you very much for your attention today.

Mr. Zekeriya Akcam:

Regarding Iran, I would like to note that before the British-Iranian crisis of two weeks ago, everybody had been expecting some kind of US intervention, including a possible attack on Iran. Suddenly, the British and Iranian crisis changed the whole concept, and it delayed and postponed everything. So right now, Iran wants to confirm whether it is in fact true, as [former Secretary of State] Donald Rumsfeld famously said, that "the coalition does not determine the mission; the mission determines the coalition." At the moment, Iran is trying to ascertain how many troops or

coalition members the US can gather together—and whether the West will be divided in two, as happened during the 2003 intervention in Iraq. Thus, it might be more helpful to consider this issue not solely from the perspective of bilateral relations with Iran, or of terrorist group operations, but from the standpoint of transatlantic relations. Why? We know that there is a strong need for natural gas, especially in Europe. Now, Europe wants to have a second choice in addition to Russia—and that choice could be Iran. Mr. Dulger just showed you a map of the Nabucco pipeline. Since natural gas is not as easily transportable as gasoline or oil, a pipeline is a virtual necessity. It is particularly important since even after the Cold War the United States wants to control all Western interests in the Middle East and in other parts of the world.

Regarding Turkish foreign policy, we would like to engage constructively toward the Middle East. This is the key concept for our foreign policy towards the region. We would like to encourage peaceful solutions. As Ambassador Oymen mentioned, we would like to become a democratic center of gravity in the Middle East. Thank you very much.

Ms. Baran:

Thank you. Ambassador Elekdag, would you like to say a few words as well?

Ambassador Sukru Elekdag:

Yes. Good afternoon. It is a great pleasure to be back in Washington and to see familiar faces and good friends. It is a true privilege to be able to address you. Now I will dwell for a few minutes on one aspect of Turkish-US relations that my colleagues have not yet touched upon, and this is the fight against international terrorism. But before that, I would like to say a few words about Iran and nuclear weapons. My party, the People's Republican Party, very strongly supports the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Allowing Iran to acquire nuclear weapons would be tantamount to opening Pandora's Box in the area. Many other countries in the area will follow suit, and the already-explosive environment in the Middle East will become even more dangerous. So, Iran should by all means be prevented from having nuclear weapons. I don't mean that force should be used; instead, this should be done by diplomacy and international pressure. Thus, Iran should by all means be prevented from having nuclear weapons. On this matter, I do not think that the European Union has done enough. It should work more closely with the United States on this issue. Through diplomacy and different kinds of pressure, I believe that Iran can be contained.

Regarding the fight against international terrorism, it is important to note that during the Cold War years, Turkey was a close ally of the United States as a member of NATO. It had very important duties and responsibilities for the defense of the Western world, and thus contributed substantially to world peace and security. With its strong army and its strategic location, Turkey was a dam that obstructed the spread of communism and the expansion of the Soviet Union. This is all in the past. Yet today, Turkey contributes to world peace and security in a different way. Of all the countries of predominantly Muslim faith, Turkey is the only secular democracy with a free market economy. As such, Turkey serves as proof that Islam can successfully coexist with a pluralistic democratic society. Turkey's continued success is vital to the future of democracy and human rights in the Middle East and critical in furthering understanding between the East and the West. Let us also not forget that the Turkish model is also the best recipe against radical Islam and Islamic fundamentalism.

Let me elaborate a little bit on these points. First, Turkey is the only country in the world which has succeeded in reconciling Islam with a functioning multi-party democracy and with secular state governance. As such, Turkey has all the characteristics of a unique example of modernization and democratization for the Islamic countries. Consequently, Turkey presents an example that is a model of inspiration for the Islamic world. I think that Turkey's experience also shatters the historical prejudice advocated by pundits like Max Weber or Samuel Huntington, a prejudice which essentially holds that Islam cannot accommodate democratic ideals, modernization, or secularism. Turkey is a living example that it can. I think that these accomplishments of Turkey should be closely investigated by the United States and the Western world. It should also be taken into consideration that the Turkish path constitutes an alternative to the political conception of radical Islam that espouses a hateful vision—such as that of al-Qaeda. This religious, ideological rage, which has caused enormous damage and sorrow to the United States, is also a serious threat to Turkey. Indeed, it is our worst enemy, since it threatens everything that Turkey stands for—democracy, modernization, secularism, and the supremacy of law. This shared threat is why Turkey is a valuable ally for the US in fighting international terrorism. In this context, I should also mention to you that Turkey has a military contingent serving in Afghanistan. Recently, Turkey has recently assumed command—for the third time—of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Without exaggeration, I say that Turkey's contribution to the struggle against international terrorism is quite substantial. So, in concluding, I would like to say that the commonality of interests between Turkey and the United States is genuine in that regard, the threats that we face are common, and the necessity to cooperate is imperative. Our two countries have a vested interest in each other's welfare and security. Thank you.

Ms. Baran:

Now that everyone else in the panel has spoken, I will give a few minutes to Mr. Cebeci as well.

Mr. Erol Aslan Cebeci:

Thank you very much. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I will try to be as brief as I can be before opening up the floor to some questions. I have to start where Ambassador Elekdag left off—on terrorism. This activity, in all its forms, shapes, circumstances, and dynamics, must be condemned—regardless of which nation, group, or religious fanatic does it. I need to remind my American friends that this is not an issue on which any country has the luxury of holding double standards. We cannot think that a terrorist group is bad if it threatens my interests, and not so bad if it only threatens others. Recent American administrations have taken a very firm line in this regard. Yet, when I look at northern Iraq while remembering the statements of the secretary of state or the president about harboring terrorists, I do not know how I or anyone else could explain this situation to our constituents. I need you to understand that I am not speaking on behalf of the Turkish government. I am just speaking on behalf of myself and of the district and province that I represent. Yet, it is very important for me that no one has the luxury of double standards in fighting terrorism.

The Armenian resolution is one of main things that our delegation has discussed during our visit here. Even before my trip, I have heard that Turkey must face its past. I understand that argument perfectly, but there are a few fundamental points I must make. First, Turks and the Turkish

Republic have come a long way on this issue in the last 10 to 15 years. Unfortunately, this is not really appreciated in Washington. Fifteen years ago, Turks would maintain that no Armenians died at all; that such claims were complete fabrication. Now, it is admitted that atrocities were committed—yes there were massacres—but they were carried out by both sides. Again, unfortunately, here in Washington, the bulk of information on the subject is incredibly one-sided. So, at this point, Turks admit their regret and sorrow that such activities were committed. We have appointed committees on the subject and would fully accept the findings of any other independent committee.

This issue remains an extremely sensitive and emotional issue for Turks, and I do not think that Turkey or the Turkish people will ever accept that there was, in fact, genocide. This is because they and I genuinely do not believe that what happened was genocide, and I can give you thousands of reasons for this. A few years down the road, if Armenia solves its problem with Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan, then we will probably—in three to five years—normalize relations between our two countries. The activities of third parties—the US Congress, the French Parliament, etc—in this issue will only make it more difficult for the Turkish people to make progress on this issue. But believe me, if various third parties pass resolutions, then we will not see any normalization between Armenia and Turkey in my lifetime. So, states must ask just who these resolutions would help. What purpose will they achieve? Let's leave these issues to those who have expertise. Again, Turkey has very openly said that it will accept the findings of any independent committee.

The last thing I would like to say is about Iran; it is very important and I do not want to be misunderstood. The Turkish Republic is against Iran possessing any type of nuclear weapon. In fact, we are against any country in the region acquiring nuclear weapons. Turkey is right there. I personally believe that it is naïve to think that Iran will use that nuclear war in some distant country. But it is not rational to expect that we will be ready to use exactly the same tools that the United States would use at some point either. I am not going to prolong my remarks; thank you very much.

Ms. Baran:

Thank you. Now that we have heard from all the panelists, let us return to questions

Questioner:

I would like to return to the question of the PKK. How concerned are you with the so-called Kurdish Diaspora and the propaganda and fundraising activities of the PKK in Europe and North America?

Ambassador Elekdag:

Actually, certain European countries demonstrate a certain degree of frankness by telling us that such activities are indeed being conducted within their borders, but that they are legal under local laws. Yet, they all know that the money raised is being used to kill people. We should thus not hide behind the limits—or words—of the law. Countries should toughen their laws on terrorist financing, as the United States has done to combat al Qaeda. We expect closer cooperation from our Western allies and friends. They should not hide behind excuses in order to tolerate the

presence of terrorists. We expect them to back up their verbal rejection of terrorism with stronger actions.

Ambassador Oymen:

You should know that, unfortunately, the reason for the tolerance shown by some European countries to the PKK is the fact that the PKK also threatens their economic interests. Second, the way in which the PKK raises money is via human trafficking—sending people to Europe for €2-3,000 per person. They are making millions of euro per year from this practice, all while presenting these people as “political refugees.” In Germany, only 14 percent are accepted by the courts, but those who are rejected are not deported; the government there claims that there will be risks for those sent back. The end result is thus that 100 percent of the individuals transported to Europe by the PKK stay there—while the terrorist group itself makes money. What is the solution? We told the Germans that it is a simple one—Germany should no longer accept political refugees from Turkey, just as it does not from India, Mali, or from Eastern European countries. Why does Germany make an exception for Turkey? It is because the PKK has gained a certain level of tolerance from threatening Germans and others.

Questioner:

Regarding the bilateral relationship between Turkey and the United States, I would like to point out that in the last 5 years Turkey has probably been one of the most successful growing economies in the world. Meanwhile, as Ambassador Oymen pointed out in his presentation, the United States has reached bottom in Turkish public opinion, with a 7 percent approval rating. At the same time, there is profound ignorance in America about anything that is going on in Turkey. We are at this stage still talking at cross-purposes. A lot of the issues that are terribly sensitive to Turks are below or beyond the radar screen of anybody here; we simply do not understand these things. My question is: given all of this, and given the real need to have mutual political will to reconstruct our relations, do you think that a) there exists that will and b) if there is, what type of confidence-building moves can take place here that will reconstruct this very important relationship?

Ambassador Elekdag:

The results of the poll you mentioned are extremely embarrassing for people like me, who have worked for years to strengthen Turkish-American relations. We have to ask why such a situation exists. In large part, this disfavor has arisen because of the PKK. In general, the Turkish people believe that the Kurdish regional government sponsors the PKK and is behind PKK attacks. They are further convinced that the United States is not only reluctant to undertake anti-PKK activities, but also does not put proper pressure on the Kurds in northern Iraq. People believe that if the US were to put the requisite pressure on the northern Iraqis, they would not have the luxury of saying no to the United States. Additionally, there have been many reports in the Turkish newspapers that the PKK logistics pipeline goes through an area that could be regarded as under de facto US control. The US could cut off this vital lifeline and stifle the PKK.

We in the Turkish Parliament cannot satisfy our people when they put questions to us on this issue. They see a “culprit” in the United States. You see, when we go to our districts, we are in a very difficult position relative to our constituents. We cannot answer their questions. As my colleague Ambassador Oymen has indicated, the PKK is Turkey’s number one problem, and

something has to be done about it. For the last three years, Turkey has, if you will excuse me for using such a word, been fooled around with on this issue. We have reached the end of our patience on this matter. We have to solve this.

A little while ago, I spoke of the Turkish example—the Turkish paradigm—and how it can be useful in fighting terrorism. This is very important because even when the Iraq War comes to an end, the US struggle against international terrorism, against al Qaeda, is not going to stop. And in this struggle, the United States needs Turkey on its side. Turkey is still a key NATO ally and a very important player in its region. This should be taken into consideration and Turkish-American relations should not be put at risk.

Questioner:

You suggested that the patience of Turkey is limited on European integration. I am wondering what the alternatives would be if Turkey does not join the EU. Would Turkey become part of another constellation of countries, or would it become a country like Singapore?

Ambassador Oymen:

Turkey's preference is to join the EU, but our accession does not depend on us. Until recently, the message that the EU gave Turkey was that membership was simply contingent upon Turkey fulfilling all the conditions and prerequisites of membership—the *acquis communautaire*. However, the EU has recently said that even this is not enough. Membership will depend on their "digestion capability." More and more, Europeans are saying that we will never be a full member, and will be limited only to second-class status in Europe. This is not acceptable, and no political party in Turkey has agreed to this. So what can we do? We have told the EU that if they are not willing to ever admit Turkey for membership, we certainly will have to reconsider our own commitments with Europe. Today, for instance, we have a customs union with the EU, which means that in our trade with the United States, Canada, Japan, and China, we are obliged to implement the EU's tariff levels. If the EU is not going to accept us as a member, why should we do this? It is in our interest to have different tariffs if, for instance, we want to improve our trade relations with the US. Thus it is extremely important for us to hear officially from the EU whether or not it will permit Turkish accession in the event that we fulfill all conditions.

What are the alternatives? The world is the alternative. We can deepen our relations with the United States or with Canada or Japan. States like India, China, or Russia are all alternatives as well. Why not? For the moment, we accept the EU customs rules and other EU requirements because we still think that Turkey can become a member in a reasonable amount of time. But if the EU rejects the prospect of Turkish membership, we have to be ready to reconsider our policies. For sure, however, we will not join an Islamic common market.

Questioner:

How do you assess the prospect of Prime Minister Erdogan becoming the next president of the Republic of Turkey?

Ambassador Yakis:

My answer is very short: We would welcome it wholeheartedly.

Ambassador Oymen:

My answer will also be very short: It would be a very bad situation. The majority of the Turkish people are against his presidency for the simple reason that he has stated on the record views that are not compatible with the basic structures and basic philosophy of our constitution and of our Republic about secularism, democracy, and many other things. His past is on the record. I am not going to elaborate more, but we believe that the president of Turkey should be a person who would observe the basic philosophy of our constitution regarding secularism, democracy, and human rights, so on and so forth. He has made so many statements against these principles that for the first time over one million Turks participated in a public demonstration—in Ankara, a few days ago. Why? The Turkish people are not without reason in their rejection of Erdogan as president. We fully respect the feelings of our people.

Ambassador Elekdag:

I concur with my colleague, Ambassador Oymen. I believe that we are going to get over this problem very smoothly.

Mr. Cebeci:

Can I please say something on this subject? First of all, everyone needs to understand that the rules of the game are still the same. Throughout the first ten presidencies of our country, no one altered the rules. The Turkish constitution and the traditions of Turkish political life define how this election should proceed. We understand the logic of what the opposition party has said. But the statistic of a million people does not matter. If the party of the prime minister wanted to bring all those who supported his presidency to Ankara, there would be more than a few million.

Questioner: I would like to ask this question to both sides of the aisle. Do you feel that inclusion in the European community would, in any way, fundamentally challenge the safeguards within the secular system? Are the terms of accession to the European Union in any way too great a price to pay on the issue of how you preserve secularism?

Mr. Cebeci:

First of all, I take issue with the premise that secularism in Turkey needs safeguards. Common sense tells me that if something has been tested for this long and worked, then that same thing does not need to be tested over and over again. I can understand if one is saying that Turkish secularism should be better understood and better practiced. But I take issue with the word “safeguard.” Regarding the European Union, I would like to add my opinion to those already expressed. For most Turks, the European Union is a civilizational project; we see no other path but to join the EU. I personally believe that it will be our decision when the time comes whether or not to enter the EU. But as a government, at this point, we have to do everything possible to keep the process open and moving. So far, all 27 countries have entered when they fulfilled the requirements. I do not think that the EU will change the rules for Turkey.

Ambassador Oymen:

With or without the EU, we will keep Turkey secular. If we do not, we will no longer be a democracy; it is thus important for us to keep secularism as an underlying principle of our state. There are so many rules of Islamic life that are not compatible with a democratic society. For instance, if Sharia law is instituted in Turkey, there would no longer have gender equality. Can

democracy truly exist without gender equality? Turkey does, of course, respect the religious feelings of its people, but the country should not be governed according to religious rules. We already had this revolution in the 1920s and have no intention of stepping back.

Ambassador Elekdag:

I would like to clarify one thing. There are two parties represented on this panel today, with regards to secularism we have the same approach. Neither my friend to the right nor my friend to the left is against the secular system. Secularism is an important dimension of our state governance. That is what makes us different, and that is why we have to maintain it.

Questioner:

Turkey imports about 72 percent of its energy. Since Turkey depends on foreign countries so much, what is its energy policy?

Ambassador Yakis:

While Turkey currently imports 70-72 percent of its energy needs, it is trying to develop its own sources of energy. There are tremendous possibilities of cheap energy in Turkey; for example, we are using at present only 36 percent of our hydro-electric power potential. We are also planning to introduce nuclear energy for generating electricity. Domestic consumption, however, is only one aspect of energy policy; another is our goal of becoming an energy hub. Turkey's geographic location means that it can contribute to Europe's energy diversification strategy by adding new routes as well as new sources. At present, Europe relies heavily on Russia for its natural gas. Yet, as happens from time to time, disputes between Russia and transit countries like Ukraine result in disruption of the energy supply for EU countries. If there is an alternative route, even from the same source, then this question may not arise again.

Second, as far as the source of energy is concerned, an important part of the Russian gas supplied to European countries originates in Turkmenistan. If the question of the international status of the Caspian Sea could be resolved, then a pipeline could be built across the Caspian and connect to the already-existing South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP), which terminates in Erzurum. From there, this gas would travel to Europe through two different channels. One, which is nearing completion, is a connection between Turkey, Greece, and Italy. The second, which is still being planned, is a project called Nabucco that would extend from Turkey, through Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and into Austria. This infrastructure would be used to transport Turkmen gas, but it could also be used for gas from Iran. There is another pipeline that is on its way from Egypt. It has already crossed Jordan and reached Syria; only 230 kilometers remain to be constructed before it reaches the Turkish national grid. From there, it will go to the European countries. This is for gas.

There are also several oil pipeline projects in the works. First, there are already two parallel oil pipelines from Kirkuk to Turkey with a capacity of 1.5 million barrels per day. Another pipeline was completed last year. Next month, a third project, Samsun-Ceyhan, will be initiated; the ground-breaking ceremony will be held next month. This project will bypass the crowded Turkish Straits, carrying oil from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean over land. It will then continue offshore to Israel and perhaps onward to the Red Sea. All these combinations reflect

another dimension of Turkey's role in the energy field—that of a hub for the international oil trade.

Ambassador Oymen:

I want to make one point. The previous government signed an agreement with Russia on natural gas imports that committed Turkey to paying the price of gas whether we import it or not; thus, irrespective of need, we are going to pay the same price. That is why Turkey's policy has been to import Russian gas instead of developing our own energy resources. Were it not for that agreement, Turkey could be much more self-sufficient than it currently is. My colleague Ambassador Yakis has already mentioned the underutilized capacity of our hydroelectric sector. Turkey's lignite coal reserves are sufficient to provide 24 percent Turkey's energy, yet currently they provide only 6 percent. Turkey was once producing 5 million tons of oil from our fields per year; today, that level stands at only 1.5 million. Turkey needs to reconsider its agreements with other countries so it can use its local energy potential.

Questioner:

This is a related question: I would be interested in a bipartisan assessment of the prospects for relations with Russia. How do the panelists see the evolution of Turkish-Russian relations, particularly given your energy dependence and your differing interests both in the Black Sea and in the Caucasus and Central Asia?

Ambassador Yakis:

Challenges always offer the possibility of transforming them into opportunities, which is what we are going to do here. We have never had a policy of regarding Russia as a competitor or rival in the ex-Soviet countries, that is to say, primarily in the Caucasus and in Central Asia. We are determined to become a partner with Russia, which we have so far achieved. The activities of Turkish contractors in the Russian Federation itself as well as in other former Soviet countries have proved this. In the field of energy, reliance on the Russian sources is again an opportunity because Russians themselves may prefer to reach the market not only through one channel, but through different routes—especially after what happened in Ukraine last year revealed the risks of relying on one export corridor. We do not compete with Russia; we recognize its importance in Central Asia and the Caucasus. We are trying to develop further cooperation with Russia, including in the political area.

Ambassador Elekdag:

This is a tough question, but one thing is very clear. Regarding energy policy, our interests coincide with those of the US. We would like to open up Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan to the world. We want them to sell their energy to European countries, which can be done only via Turkey. We have to look to the future from the perspective of common American and Turkish interests. Yet this does not mean that we are going to turn our backs on the Russians, since our trade is continuing to increase with Russia; there are also other fields in which we are going to cooperate. We are going to balance these interests, but again the US-Turkish relationship and US-Turkish interests in the field of energy predominate.

Questioner:

What sort of plans and programs are there for economic development in the Kurdish areas of Turkey?

Ambassador Yakis:

Actually, the Kurdish areas of Turkey include Istanbul as well, since there are more Kurds in Istanbul than in eastern Turkey. We do not divide the country according to where each ethnic group lives. For example, I represent a small constituency with three seats in the parliament, located halfway between Istanbul and Ankara. In this constituency alone, 23 different languages are spoken. Thus, if you think of Turkey in terms of ethnic division, you do not arrive at anything. Yet, there are less-developed and more-developed parts of Turkey; we have tried to avoid and eliminate these regional imbalances. Money is attracted by a combination of factors, which are present more in western Turkey around Istanbul and less in the East. Such situations exist in other countries: for example, the Italians have poured billions of dollars into the south of the country, but the north is much still wealthier, because its economy has its own unique dynamics. Turkey is taking all measures possible in order to eliminate these imbalances, including in the area to which you are referring.

Ambassador Elekdag:

We have shortcomings in this field, and have not done our best.

Ms. Baran:

Now that we have heard very comprehensive views on Turkish foreign policy on a whole set of issues, I would like to close where I began. Turkey is beginning a fairly intense election period, with presidential elections to be closely followed by parliamentary elections. People here in Washington will be following and trying to make sense of what is going on in Turkey and what events mean for America and for Turkey's neighbors. So I would like to ask our panelists to give any concluding thoughts and then provide any insights they might have on the upcoming election season as we will be following its developments very closely.

Mr. Cebeci:

Thank you very much for your time, ladies and gentleman. I will be using my concluding remarks to discuss four different areas. During the preceding today we have discussed Islam, radical Islam, secularism, and the tension among these three in Turkey. I am a practicing Muslim, and I proudly exhibit this in my private life. But when it comes to affairs of the state, I am as secular as anyone else. My understanding of those who use Islam as a political tool or for terrorism is that they do so no differently than Christians, Jews, Hindus, or anyone else seeking to exploit a faith or ideology for their own cause.

Regarding northern Iraq and the southeastern and eastern parts of Turkey, I do not see the situation as a zero-sum game, since this assumes that one party wins and the other loses. We should not see it this way. We can come up with policies so that everyone—from the masses in northern Iraq to those in every part of my country, Turkey—can live happily and prosperously. The only thing is that we and our allies in the US and in the Kurdish leadership in northern Iraq have to agree on properly combating terrorism. Once we isolate the terrorists, then we will have no grudges against anyone.

The next point is this: In dealing with PKK terrorism, I try to be patient and give the benefit of the doubt to the American administration. I understand that the leaders in Washington have larger issues to deal with in Iraq; they have problems that for them are a higher priority, problems for which they are accountable to their constituents. On this issue, I do not have that much left to explain, nor do I have time to be patient.

And the last issue, the Armenian bill, HR 106. If it passes, the pressure from the Turkish public will be so enormous and I will have to act in accordance with my constituency's wishes.

Thank you very much; I really appreciate the opportunity to speak today.

Ambassador Elekdag:

I did not have the opportunity previously to speak about the resolution currently before the US Congress, so I will allocate my two minutes to that.

First, House Resolution 106 has a very grave defect: the events of 1915 are characterized as genocide, exactly like the crimes committed in WWII by Nazi Germany against the Jews. Yet, the Holocaust is established as a fact, and identified as a crime against humanity by the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal. No such valid judicial finding has so far been made on the so-called Armenian genocide. Therefore it is clear that the passage of the resolution in question would constitute a contravention of the principle of due process, which is a sacrosanct principle in both American and international law. Due process is guaranteed by the 5th Amendment to the US Constitution, which prescribes that no person shall be held to answer for a capital crime unless tried fairly and incriminated by a court of law. To pass this resolution would be to convict Turkey of a crime without use of due process. Thus, to conclude my first point, this resolution is absolutely wrong.

My second point is this: there is a seemingly irresolvable problem in that Armenians insist that Turks committed genocide against them, while Turks think that there is an international conspiracy against them. How are we going to resolve this problem? There is only one way: Unearth the truth. Conduct scientific research. We made the proposal that Armenian and Turkish scholars should come together and try to bring to light the events of 1915. Our Turkish archives are open. They should also open up their own archives, though they will not. We also have tried to ask third countries for help, but they will not accept this either. I believe that our position is very reasonable; I hope that you will remember our proposal the next time that this issue comes up.

Ms. Baran:

Now that we have had final comments from each party, I am sure that both representatives would like to further discuss the Congressional resolution and the issue of PKK terrorism; I believe that we all understand that these are two very sensitive issues. But if I may possibly ask you to again help us understand what is ahead of us in the elections; again, how should people in the US understand this campaign in terms not of domestic politics but of bilateral relations? As you know, people read events such as the demonstrations of April 15 in very different ways. Again,

please help us understand—especially since, as we have heard, tomorrow Prime Minister Erdogan may declare whether or not he is a Presidential candidate.

Ambassador Oymen:

Thank you very much. This is an election year, and by the end of 2007, we will have a different Turkey. What is certain is that whoever is in charge in Turkey will be a friend of the United States. We consider your country as a reliable friend, as a young friend, to tell the truth because when the American continent was discovered, we were a 192 year-old state, so we have an old history, we have an old culture. We believe that the key of the story in our relations with the US is that we should respect each other, we should learn about each other, and we should give priority to our common interests.

After serving 5 years as ambassador to NATO, I can tell you that I have not seen two country whose security interests coincided more than the US and Turkey. So it would be a pity to antagonize one other. It would be a pity to pass a resolution that would create unnecessary tension in our relations, and damaging our mutual interests. It would be a pity for one partner to tolerate an organization that terrorizes the other. Therefore, I would suggest to you to focus on our common interests, to value our friendship, and to respect the full independence and sovereignty of each other. 2007 will be a crucial year, and at the end I am pretty sure that the winner will be democracy, human rights, secularism, republic, and the Republican People's Party.

Ambassador Yakis:

Thank you very much. I will start with the demonstrations on April 14th. I don't know whether or not there is an equivalent term in English, but in Turkish we would call those who are brought to a demonstration by organizations “mounted brigades.” Some newspapers used this term for the demonstrators. We do not know whether they were people who were transported in this way, or whether they came of their own volition. We do not know, and will know only when the general elections are held at the end of the year.

As for the presidential elections, the constitution has provided the legal framework. It is not the present ruling party that has established these rules. They were established long before, and since then have functioned very well. We do not see any reason why they will not continue to function as well as they have in the past. Since Parliament is authorized to elect the president, and in view of the fact that the ruling party controls almost two-thirds of the seats, most likely the candidate designated by the ruling party will be elected president. My impression is that Erdogan has not decided whether or not he will run for the presidency. When he was consulting the members of the parliament, I suggested to him that he remain at the head of the party, rather than go to the presidential palace. Out of 30 members, I was the only one to suggest to him not to run. I felt that most of my colleagues were encouraging him to stand as a candidate since they must have felt that deep in his heart, Mr. Erdogan wants to be a candidate. Whether my colleagues' diagnosis was true or not I do not know but most probably Erdogan will watch developments and make his own decision at the last moment. If he stands as a candidate, there is no doubt that he will be elected—if not in the first round, then certainly in the third round.

As for the general elections, present indicators show that the ruling party is far ahead of the other parties. If it does not make any mistakes between now and the date of the general elections, then most probably it will be again the ruling party in the next term. Thank you very much.

Ms. Baran:

Thank you all very much. Please join me in thanking the panel for their time.