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Turkey and India are representatives of two very old civilizations that have interacted with each other for several centuries. These interactions throughout the history, provide us a solid pillar for further enhancing cooperation in various fields.

“Treaty of friendship between Turkey & India” signed in 1951 starts with the following sentence: “*Recognizing the ancient ties of friendship ... between Turkey and India*”. A similar reference exists in the Culture Agreement of the same year. Again the very first sentence: “*Conscious of many centuries of cultural relations between Turkey and India*”. These agreements are between two countries far away from each other geographically. Then, where does this “ancient ties” “of many centuries” stem from? Well, we all know the Baburid (Mughal) dynasty starting from early sixteenth century. One can even trace Turkish rule and settlements in parts of India back to Kushans in the first or second century B.C.. In between lies Hephtalites (Akhuns), Ilbari and Delhi Sultanates of Kalach and Tugluk (Qaraunahs) dynasties. Consequently, our nations have influenced each other culturally, socially and spiritually.

When we approach more modern times, we see a period that a strong support to Turkey existed among all sections of Indians during and after the First World War. Several Indian leaders, including Gandhi and Nehru, came to admire the revolutionary reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The Second World War, however, although it produced an independent India, brought about a different period in Turkish-Indian relations. Turkey’s NATO membership and India’s forerunning position within the Non-Alignment Movement, did not allow a higher level of bilateral relations between the two countries during the Cold War era.

With the end of the Cold War, both countries found themselves in a new international environment which provided unique opportunities. We both realized that our two countries share the same values of democracy, tolerance and secularism. We also realized that, sharing a system of common values may be more valuable than sharing a common border. With the ever-shrinking world, we now regard India a neighbor and a partner.

With the end of the Cold War, finding itself in the epicenter of Eurasia, Turkey endeavored to broaden her multi-dimensional foreign policy and economic relations through opening up to other regions of the world. In this process, India was considered an important partner for cooperation in South Asia.

Following the Cold War, India, too, felt the need to open up to other global players such as the U.S., EU and Japan. Thus India moved her foreign policy to a multi-dimensional axis. In this process, just like Turkey, India also decided to establish “new and contemporary” relations with Turkey.

Having said that, we also have to admit that there still is a mutual gap of awareness in the business, scientific and cultural communities of both countries. This gap needs to be bridged. We, in the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, strongly believe that Turkey can not afford to ignore India, a rising economic power with more and more political clout. In the same way, with her dynamic population, economic strength, pivotal regional role and solid position in the global system, Turkey is also an attractive country for India. Together with our Indian counterparts, we are now working on projects to promote our relations to a higher level. Both countries have the political will to further develop their bilateral relations.

At this point, I would like to briefly summarize some of the measures taken by the Turkish and Indian Governments in this process.

We have almost completed the legal basis for the bilateral political and economic relations through various agreements. Following the Turkish Prime Minister’s visit to India in 2000, Indian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister paid two separate and fruitful visits to Turkey in 2003. Considering the contribution of such visits to the momentum of the bilateral relations, similar visits are under-consideration for the near future by the Turkish side. For example, we are now planning a Foreign Ministerial visit for early 2008.

Bilateral political consultation mechanisms which was initially established in the 1980’s and formalized with an MoU in 2000 are continuing on a systematic basis. These meetings provide a better perspective for each country of the other, and also help to maintain the positive momentum of the relations.

In order to have a better access to economic and financial circles, Turkey decided to establish a resident Consulate General in Mumbai. We intend to make it fully operational in 2008. To better serve our purposes on the field, we are increasing the number of Turkish diplomatic staff, including foreign trade experts and consular officers, in our missions in India.

Initiation of Turkish airlines' direct flights to Delhi and later Mumbai played a major role in strengthening of economic and tourism relations between the two countries. We happily observe a remarkable increase in the number of people traveling for business and tourism purposes. For example, the number of visas issued for Indian citizens tripled within the last four years parallel to the establishment of the direct flights. Banking on this trend, Turkish Airlines is trying to increase the capacity, frequency and destinations of its flights to India. We are also in the final stages of opening a Culture & Promotion Office under our Embassy in New Delhi.

In September 2007, a "road-show" visit was conducted in India with the participation of high level Turkish economy bureaucrats, for introducing privatization and investment opportunities to prospective Indian investors. We intend to continue such projects.

These are all about the logistics and infrastructure. However, given the liberal market economies of both countries, we strongly believe that leadership of the private sectors of both countries is a must.

Both Governments are supporting the establishment of structural relations between the apex bodies of the business communities, such as TOBB, TÜSİAD, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). We welcome the "Joint Business Council" initiative, coordinated by DEİK and FICCI, as well as the "India-Turkey CEO Business Forum" which was established by an agreement between TÜSİAD and CII. TOBB and FICCI are now working on an MoU to establish a new cooperative scheme.

In addition to our private sectors, we try to encourage Turkish academic institutions and think-tanks to establish dialogue and cooperation with their Indian counterparts. Ongoing contacts between the TOBB Economy and Technology University of Turkey and the Technology Institute of New Delhi in India, is a recent example in this framework.

Our initiative to establish an Institute of Turkish Studies at the Nehru University is coming of age. We are also encouraging our Indian partners for a similar undertaking for the establishment of an Indian Studies program at a Turkish university.

Construction sector in India offers vast opportunities. India is planning to invest about 495 billion USD in the next decade for the infrastructure projects. For this, we are working on projects to bring together Turkish and Indian construction sectors to work on joint ventures.

In addition to the construction sector, Turkish business community needs to realize the substantial market the rising middle class of India provides, with sophisticated tastes for consumption goods and services.

As much as we wish to see Turkish projects in India, we also welcome Indian investments and ventures in Turkey. We are especially pleased with the activities that are going on in the energy sector. In this regard, we regard the Indian Oil Corporation's purchase of Samsun-Ceyhan Crude Oil By-Pass Pipeline Project's shares as one of the initial steps of cooperation in this field.

The steps taken by Turkey and India since the end of the cold war need to be sustained. Both Turkey and India are key players in their respective regions and each are to play more important roles in the near future. As religious extremism increasingly becomes a threat to our democratic structures, we the moderates too have to increase our cooperation to tackle this challenge. We look forward to a new partnership with India, based on our commonalities and mutual desire for development, peace and stability – not only in our regions, but also at the global level.