Romano Prodi

President of the European Commission

Official visit in Turkey

Turkish Grand National Assembly

Ankara, 15 January 2004

President of the Turkish Grand National Assembly,
Members of Parliament,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentleman,

I would like to share with you some thoughts about Turkey's European aspirations. The Copenhagen European Council in December 2002 gave a clear political roadmap for Turkey. In October this year, my Commission will present its recommendation on whether Turkey fulfills the Copenhagen political criteria. This will be one of the most important decisions to be taken by the Commission. Let me assure you that our recommendation will be based on an objective assessment. We will use the same criteria and methodology that so successfully has been used for all the other candidate countries. Our track record in this context is excellent. No one has ever contested the objectivity in our assessment. There should be no doubts that our assessment of Turkey and our recommendation will maintain the same standard. Credit will be given where credit is due, but at the same time there will be no room for complacency. The European Council has made it clear that, if at the end of this year it decides that Turkey meets the Copenhagen political criteria, accession negotiations will be opened without delay.

If the European Council decides to open negotiations with Turkey, I should remind you that accession is not a formality, and not for the immediate future. The negotiations will take time, reflecting the scale of the difficulties in many sectors faced by such a large and complex country. I should also recall that the task of adopting and implementing the *acquis communautaire* is enormous, and has important implications for the legislation of Member States. Community legislation takes precedence over national legislation. The European integration process, which incorporates a growing number of common policies, involves a loss of national autonomy for Member States. But the process of joint decision- and law-making, and the sharing of sovereignty that this implies, brings considerable benefits to Member States by participating in policy fields such as economic integration, foreign and security policy, justice and home affairs.

Let me now turn to Cyprus. Let there be no doubt that the European Union is aware of the significance that this island represents for Turkey and its people. Many in Turkey still remember bitter historical events causing suffering and grievance. The awareness of history allows us to move ahead. It was precisely the strength of the Franco-German reconciliation, which made fifty years of European integration possible.
Why should the people of Cyprus not benefit from the same experience and pursue an irreversible process of reconciliation which would lead them to live a future of peace and prosperity?

It is high time to end the outdated division of Cyprus and its capital city. The spontaneous, emotional and brotherly reunions of Turkish and Greek Cypriots after the opening of the divide between north and south have erased the myth that peaceful coexistence between the communities in Cyprus is not possible.

Cyprus will join the EU on 1 May 2004. It would be a source of inspiration for us all if Turkish and Greek Cypriots were able to enter the EU together. We therefore call upon all parties to reengage in the UN-led talks without delay. The objective should be to reach a settlement on the basis of the Annan plan in time for a united Cyprus to accede to the European Union on 1 May 2004. Let me assure you that we on our part are ready to assist in finding a speedy settlement.

I am convinced that securing a comprehensive settlement by 1 May would be in the best interest not only of all Cypriots but for all of the Eastern Mediterranean. A settlement would also greatly facilitate Turkey's membership aspirations and will clearly influence decisions to be taken in the second half of this year. Let me be clear, this is not a formal condition, but a political reality. This Assembly and Your Government have since the last elections shown an impressive sense of recognition of Turkey's historic responsibilities. I am confident that the same degree of wisdom will guide you on this particularly sensitive issue.

Turkey now has a unique opportunity to achieve its goal, and to consolidate its position as a free and democratic society in the community of European nations.

Let me stress that the European Union is, above all, a community of shared values based on the principles of liberty, democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. All these values are enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

In November of last year, the Commission noted that Turkey has made further impressive efforts, which constitute significant progress towards achieving compliance with the Copenhagen political criteria. The European Council in Brussels on 12-13 December last has confirmed that this progress has brought Turkey closer to the Union.

Turkey's prospects for moving even closer to the EU depend, above all, on its own capacity to fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria, not only in law, but also in practice. These criteria were not invented for Turkey, but apply equally to all candidates. For our report next October, as in previous years, the Commission will apply the same principles to Turkey as to all other candidate countries. There should be no doubts that the report will be fair and objective.