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TURKEY AND NATO AT THE THRESHOLD OF A NEW CENTURY

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Anniversaries are appropriate occasions to evaluate the past as well as to look to the future. The fiftieth anniversary of NATO, which was founded out of the ashes of the Second World War, should be more than a mere celebration of the uniqueness of NATO and its past achievements. It should bring about a forward-looking vision of the new NATO and its key role in helping to preserve peace and security throughout the Euro-Atlantic area. It is an opportunity to communicate to the general public the dramatic changes which have taken place over the past decade, as NATO itself also has evolved from an Alliance designed to prevent aggression to an anchor of peace and stability in this part of the world. NATO was able to accomplish this because it remained faithful to its original commitment to protect and safeguard not only the territories and peoples of its members, but also the principles of democracy and freedom, as stipulated in the Washington Treaty. And it remains able to do so also today because the peoples of the member countries are as ever faithful and committed to the North Atlantic ideals assured by our past achievements. We can therefore look forward to the future with confidence. The fundamental principle of the Alliance is commitment to mutual co-operation among equal and sovereign states based on collective defence and the indivisibility of the security of its members. Solidarity within the Alliance ensures that no member country is forced to rely upon its own national efforts alone in dealing with any security challenge. The Alliance enables member states to achieve their essential national security objectives through a collective effort, thus preventing a renationalisation of defence without depriving them of their right and duty to assume their sovereign responsibilities in this field. As an expression of the resolve of free peoples and sovereign nations to unite in collective defence, this unique Alliance has been a major actor in preserving world peace, as any conflict in the region could easily have turned into a global confrontation. The meaning of fifty years of peace would probably be best understood by the unfortunate generations of the first half of the twentieth century and by historians. This peaceful period was undoubtedly an opportunity that was not presented to us on a silver plate but was rather the result of determined efforts and hard work. Were there no differences of views? Of course there were. But the common belief in peace was always predominant as a catalyst which led perhaps not always to the best, but to joint action against forces that were ready to destroy us and every single value that we jointly cherish. On 18 February 1952 Turkey became a member of NATO. Turkey was not only compelled by her anxieties emanating from Soviet claims concerning her territorial integrity and sovereignty, but also by her strong belief in the common values of the Alliance. By deciding to join NATO, the Turkish nation anchored its destiny in the West. This was not a choice without hardships and sacrifices. In fact, Turkey has always been ready to exert uncompromising efforts to shoulder her responsibilities. Furthermore, Turkey's membership of NATO also constituted a reconfirmation of Turkey's Western orientation. Turkey, with the second largest armed forces in the Alliance, has played a crucial role in the defence of the West even in the most delicate moments. Her will and determination for a brighter future and her courage to stand for our jointly cherished values

always constituted a solid example for people aspiring to be free. Ever since its foundation in 1923, the Republic of Turkey pursued a foreign policy based on Atatürk's simple, yet powerful, principle of "Peace at home, peace in the world." Besides being based on a national consensus, our foreign policy is characterised by realism, reliability, consistency and continuity. Establishing and maintaining friendly and mutually beneficial relations with all countries, promoting regional and international co-operation, resolving conflicts only through peaceful means, and contributing to regional and international peace, stability, security and prosperity have always been the primary objectives of Turkish foreign policy. Surrounded by three seas and connecting two continents, Turkey occupies a unique and strategic geographical position. By virtue of her location, Turkey belongs to many regions at the same time. She is a European, Balkan, Caucasian, Middle Eastern, Mediterranean and Black Sea country all at once. She is a member not only of the Western community, but also of the Islamic world. She takes her roots from Central Asia, the Middle East, Anatolia and Europe. Today, she is the very epicentre of the new political geography that is called Eurasia, spanning from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Turkey is also at the centre of crosscurrents: as the meeting point of various civilisations, this land witnessed the birth of various rich cultures from the East and the West, which flourished and became intermingled over time. Our orientation as a nation points in both directions. To deny either orientation is to deny the essence of who we are as a nation and people. We seek to explore opportunities for political, economic, commercial, social and cultural joint initiatives in meeting daunting challenges by pursuing a multi-dimensional foreign policy. Turkey is a member of a number of diverse organisations, not only of NATO, but also of the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the OECD, the Black Sea Economic Co-operation, the Islamic Conference Organisation and the Economic Co-operation Organisation. We are very well aware of our regional role that history and geography have brought forth in the pursuit of peace, prosperity and stability. In the wake of the Cold War, Turkey found herself at the very centre of a most turbulent region where ultra-nationalist, hegemonic, aggressive and irredentist tendencies had caused a number of regional wars in the past. Our policy in this regard has been to help reduce tensions and contain conflicts, and to promote democracy and the rule of law with a view to creating a peaceful and a stable environment around us. For this purpose, Turkey has been actively involved in international peace-related operations and peacekeeping efforts in Iraq, Kuwait, Somalia, Georgia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Hebron, Albania and now in Kosovo. In keeping with our Western orientation, which goes back to the Ottoman period, we have fostered close relations with the European countries and the US. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey proceeded to base her political and legal systems on modern, secular European models. Her commitment to values such as democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and the free market economy testifies to Turkey's irrevocable Western orientation. Democratic ideals and principles will continue to guide our actions at home, in our region and in the world. Turkey's strategic relevance in the post-Cold War era lies in her very ability to look both to the West and the East; to remain firmly committed to her Western orientation while simultaneously recognising the complexities of her geography as well as the harsh realities of her immediate neighbourhood. By her very existence, Turkey can be a model for her neighbours to plant the seeds of secular democracy. Through her actions, fostering economic and political interdependence and co-operation, Turkey will not only remain central to the security and prosperity of the West, but will also be the key state in the containment and resolution of a host of problems of our era. Over the past decade, the world has changed, the European security landscape has been altered and NATO has gone through a process of adaptation. We now feel confident enough of our process of transformation and adaptation to the new circumstances to speak of a "new NATO." But we do this of course without giving up collective defence as the Alliance's core function. Collective defence should stay, for it not only underpins our

fundamental security but it is also the basis on which our commitment rests. NATO is right now passing through a transition period and an enormous opportunity lies before it: to create a Europe that is undivided, democratic, prosperous and at peace with itself for the first time in its history. This is a decisive phase in shaping our future. This is our clear message on the eve of a new millennium. The transformation of the security environment since the beginning of 1990s had a profound impact. We have witnessed the collapse of communism, the end of the East-West confrontation and the liberation of Central and Eastern Europe as well as the Caucasus and Central Asia and the emergence of new independent states. Thus, our Alliance has embarked on a journey that still continues. NATO acted as a pioneer in adapting itself to the new environment and established new forms of co-operation with its former adversaries. Creation of the North Atlantic Co-operation Council and the Partnership for Peace were concrete steps in this process, in which Turkey was a key instrument. Turkey, as a staunch member of NATO and an integral element of the Western security system, has played and will continue to play her constructive role in this crucial period. Practical co-operation and not confrontation should be the key strategic instrument in shaping this new security environment. In this context, tangible contributions of my country are worth mentioning. A nationally sponsored Partnership for Peace (PfP) Training Centre started operating in Ankara in June 1998 and our project to establish a multinational peace force in south-eastern Europe has been finalised with the participation of all regional NATO and PfP nations. This in fact constitutes a first for a region that is unfortunately known with the negative connotation of the concept of 'Balkanisation'. Our proposal to establish a Black Sea Naval Co-operation Task Group to include the littoral countries of the Black Sea is another promising security and confidence-building project, and one to which we attach utmost importance. Looking forward to new millennium, we must not forget the objectives of our Alliance nor lose sight of the underlying reasons of our success. This is one of our major challenges. Moreover, we must try to preserve public support for our policies. Such support has been instrumental in our achievements. NATO must remain the main forum for consultations among the Allies on issues concerning the security and defence of Europe: this is required not only because the transatlantic link is vital for European security, but also since NATO is the only forum where all European allies enjoy equal opportunities and rights on matters of common concern. NATO throughout its existence has displayed a remarkable ability to adapt to a changing international environment. We must maintain this dynamism. We proved our wisdom by establishing the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council as a forum for consultation and co-operation with partner countries throughout the Euro-Atlantic area. We have created new structures reflecting intensified consultation and co-operation with some Mediterranean countries. We have achieved far-reaching internal and external reform. We have made our Alliance the instrument of peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area as it enters a new age. The enlargement of NATO is part of Europe's post-Cold War consolidation. Its goal is to enhance stability and well being throughout Europe. NATO enlargement remains a process, not a single event. Therefore, the new members should not be the last. The Washington Summit will convey a clear message that all these elements have now become a permanent feature of the new NATO. They are expressions of a new, wider approach to managing security. Above all, they are expressions of the strength of the transatlantic partnership. Recent events in the Balkans demonstrate that the strategic interests of the NATO nations can easily be upset by such developments. This is certainly a reason underlining the importance of our tradition of working in harmony and by consensus to arrive at common understandings and attitudes. Consequently, even if our points of departure may be different and even if our thinking on the same goals may vary, we must not abandon our efforts to reach common understandings. NATO is applying its experience and its capabilities to the full in leading the stabilisation force at work in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which is charged with laying the basis for a lasting peace settlement in that

troubled area and preventing the conflict spilling over and threatening peace elsewhere. This in itself is an unprecedented approach to the resolution of conflict situations in Europe. A unified NATO-led multinational force working to secure peace under the United Nations mandate, with the political support and military backing of many nations, is a unique undertaking. Nevertheless, although the mechanisms we have are working, they are not perfect. The process of building a comprehensive structure for the future is far from over. With the threat of a massive attack in Europe gone, our security is linked increasingly to the risk of conflicts arising outside our territories. Instabilities stemming from violent ethnic conflicts, terrorism, mass migration, civil break downs, the spread of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems have become the new transnational risks and challenges that we need to jointly address in the future. Our future security and prosperity will depend upon our success on these issues. Turkey will remain committed to our common endeavours in NATO for a better future as well as to similar efforts in all Euro-Atlantic institutions. We will continue to be a strong and reliable member of NATO, which undoubtedly is the most successful Alliance that humankind has ever witnessed. Our common objective remains the same: permanent security for all.
