

Turkey:

A Role Model at Turbulent Crossroads

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Suleyman Demirel served as the 9th President of Turkey from 1993 to 2000.



Brief Analysis

On April 27, 1999, Turkish president Suleyman Demirel addressed The Washington Institute's Special Policy Forum. The following are excerpts from his comments during the forum's question-and-answer session. [Read his opening remarks. \(/policy-analysis/view/turkey-a-role-model-at-turbulent-crossroads-full-transcript\)](/policy-analysis/view/turkey-a-role-model-at-turbulent-crossroads-full-transcript)

On Turkey's Recent Elections

The important question is whether the elections have been free and fair. And they were definitely free and fair . . . Eighty-seven percent of Turkish people have gone to the polls on April 18. The results clearly show the Turkish people's willpower . . . In the past, Turkey has had a lot of difficulties with multiparty democracy . . . For 624 years, Turks have been ruled by the Ottoman dynasty. With the founding of the Turkish Republic, power changed hands . . . Turkey has [had a] multiparty democracy since 1946, which is not very easy to implement in such a young republic."

"The Turkish parliament will convene on May 2, and the new government will be set up by May 20. Once the government gets a vote of confidence from the parliament, it should start deciding on how it would handle the country's problems."

On Future Relations with the European Union (EU)

The resolution the EU has taken at the Luxembourg Summit of December 1997 was not a good decision . . . The European Union can't close its doors to Turkey. In 1963 Turkey and the EU came to a mutual agreement that Turkey would one day become a full member. Then, in accordance with that agreement, in late 1995, Turkey has become a full member of the Customs Union . . . We understand that the EU does not reject Turkey's membership, but offers a list of criteria as presented in the Copenhagen and Maastricht Declarations . . . We know that we have to satisfy these criteria, so that the EU can register us as a full member."

"The EU named eleven countries that they will negotiate the prospects of membership with. In terms of democratic and economic institutions, Turkey [which is not one of the eleven] is at least fifty years ahead of all these countries. We don't say they shouldn't be EU members . . . We would like them to be; they are our friends . . . What we say to the

EU members is that they should compare these eleven countries with Turkey . . . Turkey should be patient. One day she will become a part of the EU . . . Europe today is not a geography, but a set of humanitarian and democratic values. Turkey can be a bridge between Europe and Eurasia . . . Europe can get great benefits from the contribution that Turkey can make . . . On the other hand, for Turkey membership means better democracy and administration, and more economic prosperity . . . We can't simply tell the EU 'Alright, we don't want you, if you don't want us.'"

On the NATO and the Kosovo Crisis

"What is happening in Kosovo is a crime against humanity. It is an ethnic cleansing, a genocide . . . NATO's action in Kosovo is a humanitarian emergency. NATO has one and only one option, which is not to fail but to be successful. The organization can't afford to be unsuccessful."

"If sending ground troops is the only way leading to success, then NATO should do so . . . There is no such thing as a half-way war. This is a war, and NATO should finish it. Turkey is a bona fide and persona grata member of NATO. If NATO decides ground forces are needed, then Turkey would send them . . . As a matter of fact, the Turkish parliament has already passed a law which gives the government the authority to send troops in case of necessity . . . In such a partnership a member should not only share the profit, but also pay the cost when necessary."

On Comparing Ethnic Albanian Kosovars and Kurdish Turks

"Kosovars are being killed by the state itself which labels them as a minority . . . Kosovars live in one large area and are not protected by the state's institutions . . . Whereas in Turkey, Kurdish Turks live all over the country, and are not called minority . . . Turkey protects and considers all of its citizens as first-class citizens . . . Out of 550 members of the Turkish Parliament, 150 are of Kurdish origin . . . They are representing the whole country, not any minority group. My deputy, Hikmet Cetin, who is now the acting president when I am here at an official visit, is of Kurdish origin. In Turkey, people of Kurdish origin can become prime minister, president, high judges, generals . . . We are trying to keep the unity of the country . . . The comparisons drawn between Kosovo and southeastern Turkey are just provocations. There is no resemblance at all."

On the Cyprus Problem

"It is a very difficult problem to solve to begin with. If it was an easy issue it would have been already solved by now . . . There are two nations living together on the island, which had been an Ottoman territory for more than three hundred years . . . Turkish and Greek Cypriots used to live together up until Greek ethnic cleansing started in 1963. According to an agreement made among Greece, Turkey, and Great Britain, these three countries should have intervened to put things in order. Yet neither Greece nor Great Britain did anything to stop the killings . . . As a result of this, the Turkish army intervened in 1974. Since then, there has not been a single killing on Cyprus . . . The security and safety of the Turks on the island are very important for us . . . Turkey is not happy with how things are on Cyprus . . . It costs Turkey financially and also politically in the international arena . . . We believe that, first, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus should be recognized. And then, the two states of the island should work together to find a solution to the problems they are having."

"The Cyprus issue has given some hardship to our relations with the United States. At times, Turkey has been forced to do what the United States asked her to do . . . We told our American friends that they are worsening the problem because a forced solution may take Greece and Turkey to confrontation . . . Bilateral relations between Turkey and United States are much more important than Cyprus . . . Why should our relations suffer because of Cyprus, which is not a part of Turkish-American relations in the first place?"

On the President's Future Plans

"I will quote Harold Wilson, the former British prime minister. He said 'One week in politics is a long time.' . . . I can't tell you what will happen in the coming year [Demirel's last year as president]. What I can tell you is that I won't accept any amendment of the constitution which will give me a second term, unless the Turkish people are behind me . . . Whenever I have come to serve Turkey, I have come through elections . . . First, I have to finish this current term with success, then we'll see what will happen next."

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Sulay Ozturk. ❖

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