

**CSIS Turkey Project Meeting  
“The JDP Government at Six Months”**

**Dr. Murat Mercan  
Vice Chairman of the Justice and Development Party  
May 22, 2003**

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On May 22, 2003, the CSIS Turkey Project hosted a meeting with Dr. Murat Mercan, Vice Chairman of the governing Justice and Development Party (JDP) to review the JDP government at six months.

Stating that “the JDP won the election simply because we are very close to the people”, Mercan said that the JDP’s clear majority in parliament provided a tremendous opportunity for Turkey to implement important structural reforms. “The intensity of developments” during this period, had provided the JDP with additional “experience in crisis management”.

“Turkey, with its great potential, with its natural and human resources, is capable of being in a much better position than it is right now”, Mercan said. To achieve this potential, Turkey needed “a westernized transformation.” With this transformation, “the rule of law would be more prevalent, the free market mechanisms deepened and human rights and democratic standards much improved”. He added, “this is our wish, this is our vision, this is our aim.” Mercan reaffirmed Turkey’s strong desire for membership in the European Union “because we know that membership can only increase our democratic standard and the standard of life of the Turkish people. There is no way out.”

Focusing on Turkey’s economic agenda, Mercan explained that Turkey was striving to reduce the real interest rates and to fight rampant inflation. Mercan continued, “we know that we can only achieve this by cooperating with the IMF.” He cautioned anyone against doubting Turkey’s continued relationship with the IMF. Mercan confirmed that the government was intent on improving the climate to attract Foreign Direct Investment as well as accelerated privatization. He added, “Privatization is very important, and we will privatize at any expense. We see privatization not only as revenue for the state, but also as a means of increasing productivity and efficiency.”

Arguing that, “one of the dynamics of international relations is to maintain security in the world”, Mercan stressed that Turkey, which had suffered dearly from terrorism for decades, fully backed the United States on this important issue. However, Mercan argued, maintaining security would be accomplished not only by directly fighting terrorism but also by promoting democracy and free markets all over the world. “An everlasting solution to terrorism is to maintain the dynamics of democracy. Only then is it possible that terrorism has less of a venue for growth.” While “democracy was a rooted solution to terrorism”, Mercan said that the flourishing of free markets would complement this phenomenon while increased levels of trade would also suppress violence. He claimed that there was “a new post September 11 era based on fighting terrorism, promoting democracy and encouraging the development of free markets

throughout the world”. Mercan said “Turkey shared this vision and would work to enhance these values...otherwise we would be killing ourselves.”

Mercan argued that Turkey, as a secular and democratic country with a Muslim population, would serve as a model to the Middle East region. He said that Turkey’s role was not one that would “impose” but instead “inspire change”. Insisting that secularism, democracy and the rule of law were essential principles Mercan continued, “We wholeheartedly believe that if these principles are maintained fully in a predominantly Islamic country, then that country will no longer be a threat to the free world.” For that reason, “Turks have a lot to contribute.”

Turkey’s role in democratizing Muslim countries, Mercan argued, would be further strengthened with Turkey’s accession to the European Union. Reiterating his government’s commitment to “satisfying all the required reforms”, Mercan said that he did not “think the westernization process is rejected by anyone in Turkey. The westernization process is the soul of the Turkish Republic. It’s the reason of its existence.” He acknowledged that there would be disagreements during the reform process, but refused to categorize the differences in opinion as “fundamental”. Although Cyprus did not “appear in EU-Turkish documents as a precondition”, Mercan said the JDP nevertheless recognized Cyprus as “an important problem ahead of the EU initiative”. Saying, “It has to be solved before 2004”, Mercan added that, “the people of Cyprus will develop a resolution to the conflict.”

Responding to questions on the future of the US-Turkish relationship after the March 1 TGNA decision, Mercan cautioned against dwelling on the past. “Of course I realize the tension in the Turkish-American relationship. But, it can’t go on forever. Turkey needs cooperation with the United States and vice versa. Enhancing democracy, expanding free markets and fighting terrorism must have cooperation and collaboration. The relations will improve.” On Turkey’s role in the Iraqi war, Mercan continued, “I think Turkey has contributed to a certain extent. It may not have satisfied the US fully, but Turkey has helped the United States carry out operations, such as providing overflight rights, logistical support, and humanitarian support.” Mercan added, “In the days to come there may be some critical moments where Turkish contribution will be needed and Turkey will provide that contribution.”

In the context of the new post-war dynamics in the Middle East, Mercan argued that Turkey could play “a facilitator role in resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict” and, through diplomatic engagement, in “encouraging countries such as Syria and Iran to rethink their positions on democracy and terrorism”. Mercan concluded, “Turkey would never support any country that is involved with or helps terrorism and Turkish governments would always side with the free world.”

