

“Turkey-Singapore Relations: Building a Smart Strategic Partnership”

“Singapore Lecture”, 21 August 2017, Monday

**Esteemed Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam,
Esteemed Chairman of the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute Professor Wang
Gungwu,**

**Honourable Ministers and Members of Parliament,
Dear Members of the Diplomatic Community,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am honoured to be the first Turkish leader delivering a “Singapore Lecture”. I extend my gratitude to the Government of Singapore and the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, the long-established think-tank of Singapore, for their kind invitation.

I think we can define our Strategic Partnership with Singapore as a new-generation partnership, to use a creative expression, as a **“Smart Strategic Partnership”**. Considering that we have just completed the domestic ratification process of an exceptionally advanced Free Trade Agreement this week, we can say that this Partnership sets forth an ideal example. I see that our Partnership, which also reflects the pragmatic vision of the founder of Singapore **Lee Kuan Yew**, also confirms the understanding underlying the **enterprising and humanitarian** concept of Turkish foreign policy.

Our foreign policy vision is based on the idea that “Developing Turkey will also enhance the development of its region”. Ideally, politics and economy constitute a whole. Turkey acts both as a bridge, a meeting point among various economic and strategic basins and as an engine of development for its neighbourhood. The bridge we build with Singapore forms an organic link between the last giant economy in the eastern axis of Europe and the gigantic trade hub at the center of Asia.

Considering the economic contributions of both countries to their respective neighbourhoods, the importance of this bridge we build between us becomes even more evident.

Therefore, I think that there are plenty of rewarding and fruitful works we could do together. We could work in cooperation for a more prosperous world. We could also contribute to our neighbourhood, while preparing our countries for the future.

Dear Friends,

One of the most important concepts of today is connectivity. We are aware of its importance also in the field of diplomatic representation. With our **236** missions abroad, we are the **sixth** country with the largest network of representation in the world, after the five permanent members of the UNSC. The number of our diplomatic missions is the most explicit indication of the increasing activity of our country in the international arena. The number of foreign missions in Turkey also increased likewise and rose to 264.

Turkey is a good business partner, a reliable friend, and an active collaborator. Today, Turkey is the **17th biggest economy in the world and 6th in Europe and also a G-20 member**. We are the 13th biggest economy with 2 trillion Dolar GDP at purchasing power parity. Located both in Europe and in Asia, our country is not confined to these regions and is pursuing a policy of opening up to all geographies, with an active global presence. **Our opening and partnership policies towards Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America-Caribbean** have an important place in our foreign policy agenda. Thanks to these policies, our trade with Africa has increased by nearly 6 fold in the last 14 years and by more than 7 fold with Latin America. In the same period, the increase in our trade volume with **ASEAN** countries is 6 fold and more than 9 fold with East Asia China, Japan, Republic of Korea.

Turkey's main foreign policy axes maintain their relevance. **EU membership** continues to be a strategic goal for our country. We have multi-dimensional and deep-rooted relations with the EU. We are the only candidate country having a Customs Union with the EU. Turkey is the 5th largest trading partner of the EU and our trade with the Union has reached **145.8 billion Dollars**. We are going to increase our trade volume to 300 billion Dolar by upgrading the Customs Union.

Turkey is also a prominent member of **NATO**, which is regarded as the cornerstone of Euro-Atlantic security and our national defense policy. Our country is playing a leading role in the adaptation of the Alliance in view of contemporary threats, including the fight against terrorism.

In the field of multilateral diplomacy, our country carries out active work in the **United Nations**, and leads various initiatives. The **Mediation For Peace initiative**, which we have launched and co-chair with Finland and the **Alliance of Civilizations**, which we have launched together with Spain at the UN are among outstanding examples of our global initiatives.

Turkey is pursuing principled and active policies that highlight cooperation in our geographies extending from the Balkans to the Mediterranean and the Middle East and from the Black Sea to Central Asia. As I have pointed out, we are conducting our foreign policy on the basis of an **enterprising and humanitarian** understanding. We are working to strengthen our existing friendships and make more friends both in our region and in further afield.

We have focused on the opportunities for **cooperation** to improve our dialogue with our neighbours and the countries in our neighbourhood, and we have initiated efforts to solve problems through **dialogue**.

Within this framework, we have established **High-Level and Strategic Cooperation Council mechanisms** which are meetings between our Councils of Ministers. These enable political dialogue at the highest level and comprehensive cooperation in every field. We are currently aiming to deepen our relations with the 19 countries in our immediate neighbourhood within the framework of these mechanisms.

While our trade volume with these countries was 14,3 billion Dollars in 2002, it reached 74,5 billion Dollars in 2016, increasing more than fivefold. Our trade with the neighbouring countries increased by 4,5 fold from 13 billion Dollars to 60 billion Dollars between 2002-2016, while our Party was in office.

As a result of economic and commercial cooperation our country has developed in various geographies, **19 Free Trade Agreements (18 countries and EFTA)** have entered into force. Last week, we concluded the domestic ratification process of our Free Trade Agreement with Singapore. Thus, let me share with you that I did not come "empty handed". I am sure we will see concrete positive results of this FTA in our trade relations very soon.

I would like to raise your attention to the fact that this Free Trade Agreement we have signed is a "new generation" free trade agreement. It includes for the first time also public procurement, services and agriculture. This shows the value we attach on Singapore.

Dear Participants,

Turkey has historical ties with this region of the world. We intend to further strengthen the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States the Turkic Council and its affiliated institutions.

Furthermore, the establishment of the "**Middle Corridor**", which will begin from Turkey, reach Georgia and Azerbaijan, cross the Caspian Sea and reach Central Asian Republics, Afghanistan, Pakistan and China, in the context of the "**New Silk Road**" linking Asia and Europe, will strengthen the strategic importance of our country in the East-West connection.

We observe that Asia, which is located at the center of the political, economic, commercial and cultural interaction between the East and the West, becomes today once again the focus of economic and commercial relations through **the revival of the historical Silk Road**. It is a correct assertion that the **21st Century is characterized as the "Century of Asia"**.

Turkey is located on the **Middle Corridor through which the European-Chinese trade flows, which currently amounts to 600 billion US dollars annually** and is expected to increase gradually in the coming period.

Also at the **Belt and Road Forum** organized in **Beijing** on **14-15 May 2017**, the strategic location of the Middle Corridor Initiative was highlighted, the initiative was also mentioned in the Joint Declaration of Leaders, and its importance was underlined before the international community.

With its unique position on the transportation and trade routes in the Eurasian geography, Turkey has a key importance in the successful accomplishment of the projects for the creation of **integrated multi-modal** infrastructure, transportation, investment, energy and trade networks within the scope of the "**Belt and Road**" initiative. In this framework, we see that the "**Silk Road Economic Corridor**" project is in line with our "**Trans Caspian/Middle Corridor initiative**", aiming at connecting our country towards China through the Caucasus and Central Asia. This **initiative** will contribute to both regional and global prosperity.

In this context, the important investment of Singapore in our country, the Mersin Port with an annual 2,6 million container capacity, has become more relevant and important.

Esteemed Friends,

Turkey is making efforts to overcome **global** vulnerabilities and assumes important roles in the field of **global development**. Our humanitarian and development aid is not limited only to the geographies, with which we are linked by kinship and neighbourhood; but has reached the people in need in many places from Somalia to Myanmar. According to the Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2016, our country is the **world's second largest donor country** after the United States **in humanitarian aid**. Based on national income, our country is "**the most generous country in the world**". According to the estimated figures for 2016, our total development assistance amounted to 6.18 billion Dollars, of which 5.7 billion Dollars constituted our humanitarian aid.

Our competence in humanitarian diplomacy has been crowned with the first ever World Humanitarian Summit that we have hosted on 23-24 May 2016. The Summit, attended by 180 countries and 9000 participants, has become the **largest UN Summit outside the UN headquarters in New York**.

The "**open door policy**" which we have been pursuing since the beginning of the **Syrian** conflict for seven years, and the support we have provided to the Syrians in our country has been appreciated by the international community. We are currently hosting more than 3 million Syrians. Turkey is the country which hosts most refugees on the world. Turkey has spent almost 30 billion Dollars including municipalities and Turkish NGOs for the Syrians in Turkey. With the exception of the assistance of 826 million Euros by the EU to the Syrians in our country on a

bilateral basis within its commitment of 3 billion Euros, the contribution of the international community remained at only around 526 million Dollars.

We are also doing our best to solve the Syrian War. Upon the initiative of Turkey and the Russian Federation, a ceasefire was declared throughout Syria as of 30 December 2016, and talks on Syria began in **Astana** on January 2017, to strengthen the ceasefire, with the participation of Iran. The **triple ceasefire monitoring mechanism** was established with the participation of the three countries. Furthermore, the regime and the opposition could gather around the same table for the first time. Thanks to this, the Geneva process for a political solution could re-start again.

Turkey is an active member of the **Global Coalition Against DEASH**. With the Operation Euphrates Shield, we have cleared an area of more than 2.000 km² from DEASH and **completely cleared our border from DEASH**. In Syria, we have deactivated around 3.800 DEASH elements. In Iraq, we have deactivated 800 DEASH terrorists. Today no country equals the sacrifices we have made in the fight against DEASH.

Terrorism poses a serious threat to national, regional and global security. The fight against terrorism should be based on international cooperation. Turkey, steadfastly takes necessary efforts for the elimination of threats from terrorist organizations against the world, FETO, PKK/PYD, DEASH, in which ever form they arise. We are expecting the support of our partners in these efforts.

On July 15th last year, we experienced a heinous and bloody coup attempt. Our people stood against the coup and protected their democracy. **The target of the FETO terrorist organization is not limited to Turkey**. We are facing a global criminal network.

Brain-washed members of this criminal network are active in many countries around the world under the cover of charity and educational work and they aim to infiltrate the countries they live in. We call on our friends to be alert and not to give credit to the dark propaganda of these groups.

Turkey emerged even stronger from this heinous coup attempt. Our state and institutions are being cleared of these people. Our strong economy, political will and the vigilance of our people have enabled us to successfully overcome this difficult test.

Distinguished Participants,

For the last 15 years, Turkey has gone through one of the most successful periods of its history in terms of the economy. Between 2002-2016 we had an average growth of % 5,7; after the crisis, which means the period between 2010-2016 we had an averaged growth of % 6,7. In this period, significant progress has been made in our foreign economic relations. In this context, while deepening our relations with our traditional foreign trade partners, such as

Europe and the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, we also aimed to diversify our economic and commercial relations with the opening and partnership policies we have put into practice towards Africa, Latin America and Asia. In this framework, our trade volume, which was 87.6 billion Dollars in 2002, reached **341.1 billion Dollars in 2016**.

Turkey, in line with its economic objectives, aims to increase growth and make it more inclusive through structural reforms in an environment where macroeconomic stability is maintained and current account deficit and inflation are gradually reduced. Turkey is a centre of attraction for foreign direct investments, which we prioritize in line with our objectives. **Foreign direct investments between 2003-2016 amounted to 178.1 billion Dollars.**

Turkey has shown a great resistance to domestic and external shocks. We will continue our reforms. Within the next year we will do a tax reform to further strengthen public finance, to spread the tax base and to simplify the tax legislation. Within the next year we will make a tax reform to further strengthen public finance, to spread the tax base and to simplify the tax legislation. We will make the labor market more flexible in order to increase employment and accelerate participation of the female labor force. In order to increase investment and attract more global direct investment we will further improve investment environment. In order to increase the quality of judicial procedures and speed up the jurisdiction we will realize remaining judicial reforms. We will accelerate reforms to increase the quality of education and to respond to the need of a qualified labor force working for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. While making progress in all those fields we do not have to re-invent the wheel. We will take all best practices of the world as a base. At that point, I would like to stress the importance of our visit to Singapore, because this country is a source of inspiration for us.

In this framework, Turkey offers broad opportunities for cooperation. Favorable factors are:

- Strong growth
- our successful economy;
- qualified and competitive workforce;
- investment environment that is liberal and open to innovation;
- infrastructure;
- central position in terms of access to markets;
- acting as an energy corridor and energy hub of Europe;
- low taxes and incentive policies;
- Customs Union with the EU;
- big internal market and a young, dynamic and educated population.

On this basis, we invite foreign investors to Turkey to make use of the great opportunities in the sectors of information and communication technologies; energy; finance; real estate; business services; chemistry; mining and metallurgy; machinery; automotive; agriculture and food; transportation and logistics; tourism

and medicine. We believe that together we can succeed well and shape a more prosperous future.

We attach great importance to the development of our relations with ASEAN, a leading regional organization. We have been attending the meetings of Foreign Ministers of the ASEAN Regional Forum. Our trade with ASEAN countries has increased 6 fold over the past 14 years, reaching 8.7 billion Dollars at the end of 2016. We see Singapore as a main partner in our opening to the region.

We applied for Sectoral Dialogue Partnership with ASEAN in 2015. Our Sectoral Dialogue Partnership, foresees more concrete cooperation with ASEAN in various areas, including sectors such as e-commerce, tourism and transportation, public-private partnerships, mines, research and development, construction, small and medium scale enterprises, natural disaster management, food security and energy security.

Finally, Turkey **has established a Sectoral Dialogue Partnership with ASEAN** with the decision adopted at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting held at the beginning of this month; on 5th August. It is significant that this decision was adopted during the visit of our Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Philippines, the term president of ASEAN and in 2017, during the 50th anniversary of ASEAN.

Within this overall picture, our current **Strategic Partnership** with Singapore constitutes a smart partnership in line with the features and requirements of the twenty-first century. **The history of our relations with Singapore** date back to the Ottoman period.

We are especially pleased that our relations, as we attach particular importance, are evolving rapidly in recent years. **We will celebrate the 50th Anniversary of our diplomatic relations in 2019.**

Turkey and Singapore are two countries that have achieved extraordinary successes in their respective regions and have produced added value through their dynamic, creative and well-educated populations. Singapore's success is a source of content for us. It is well known that the principles of equal opportunity and development through intense work brought success to Singapore. Your success story is a source of inspiration for many countries. I would like to emphasize that as a shipbuilding engineer msc and a Minister of Transport for many years, I am very much impressed by the infrastructure and transportation technology of your country.

Lee Kuan Yew, the Founding Prime Minister of Singapore, is well-known and highly respected for his great services to his country. The achievements of the Government of Singapore under the leadership of Prime Minister Lee, his goals and the determination to develop the country even further, deserves admiration.

While Turkey and Singapore are located in different geographies of the world,

they share **common core values** and highlight **similar principles in foreign policy** and inspire each other.

Today, the importance of distances is decreasing and **our cooperation opportunities are increasing due to enhanced technologies and rapid transportation**. We are also glad that our tourism has been developing mutually. On the cultural field, we have also rich cultural heritage we can offer each other.

We have enhanced our bilateral relations to the level of **Strategic Partnership in 2014**. We are pleased that Singapore will assume the **ASEAN Presidency in 2018**. We believe that we will be able to develop the **Sectoral Dialogue Partnership** that we have established recently with ASEAN **in all its dimensions** during your Presidency.

It is important that our excellent political relations and cooperation are crowned with success in the economic field. We think that we have the opportunity to develop our **economic cooperation** even further. I believe that by means of the **Free Trade Agreement** our mutual trade and investments will gain significant momentum and we will have a leap forward in our economic relations. This agreement is a historic window of opportunity in our bilateral and regional cooperation. I believe that we have to make best of this opportunity for the prosperity and brotherhood of our future generations.

We have the necessary infrastructure needed to **promote investments**. Besides mutual investments, Turkish companies can be suitable partners for Singaporean investors in third countries, especially in Central Asia and Africa.

We have the necessary will and basis to move our relations forward in both bilateral and multilateral platforms and in all fields. We have to build our further work on this. **We must mobilize our common wisdom for the welfare of our countries, as well as the global prosperity, peace and development**. We can work together on many issues that we can learn from each other and develop together and we must be **diligent and innovative**. We can be pioneers in transition to new economies. Our moves today will shape our future.

While concluding my remarks, with these thoughts and beliefs, I salute all of you with affection and respect, and wish all the best success for our joint efforts.

Thank you.