



Speech by Mustafa Sarigül, leader of Turkey's Change Movement, to the Foreign Policy Centre's *A new politics for Turkey? Sarigül's challenge to the Turkish political establishment* event held at the UK Houses of Parliament on Monday 22nd March 6.30pm

Good evening ladies and gentlemen.

I will start off by stating unequivocally that Turkey is in a state of flux and uncertainty.

Let me briefly summarize the situation.

Under AK Party's administration, Turkey made some progress on key issues. Turkey reenergized its economy and conducted reforms that helped open EU membership negotiations in 2005. These reforms included the reform of the National Security Council, removal of discriminatory regulations against women, and most recently, the "Kurdish opening". Internationally, Turkey has worked more closely with neighbors—for example, by thawing relations with Armenia, mediating the Syrian-Israeli dispute, and strengthening relations with Iraq. Turkey's regional activism and its contributions to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations around the world improved its international stature and earned it broad support for its current UN Security Council seat.

But its work has been insufficient.

Domestically, the political landscape is grappling with an unprecedented twist in civilian-military relations. Our judicial system is under strain. Our institutions have been put under great pressure to fulfill the task that would usually fall on the shoulders of a healthy, strong opposition.

Under AKP rule, Turkey has taken some steps forward but is still lagging in critical areas of economic, human and democratic development. Unemployment is rampant. Too many youth either drop out or leave school without adequate skills. Even though women's university graduation rates have risen, their labor force participation rates have declined. Human rights and individual liberties still do not receive adequate protection and minorities lack equal opportunities to learn, work, and participate in government and society.

Internationally, observers note that Turkey is drifting from the West. Turkey's cultivation of regional "strategic depth" and its aim of "zero problems with neighbors" have produced questionable results. While Turkey decried the suffering in Gaza, it defended a Sudanese president indicted for war crimes in Darfur. While it scuttled military exercises with Israel, it celebrated military cooperation with Syria. While it rushed into a landmark accord with Armenia, it rushed out of favor with Azerbaijan, a long-time friend. And while it breaks up allegedly anti-democratic behavior at home, it broke with the West to quickly congratulate Ahmedinejad after an election where political opposition was violently



suppressed. The strategy of “zero problems” is coming at the expense of old allies.

It’s not surprising therefore that a large segment of the public is left wondering whether the country’s leadership will—or even can— address the real issues affecting their daily lives.

I do not intend to stand here and censure any of my opponents. I can state with a clear conscience and in no uncertain terms, however, that Turkey deserves better.

Make no mistake: we are truly at a turning point in Turkey’s history. It is an opportunity to become a new Turkey, to shed outdated ideologies, reconfigure inefficient institutions and draft forward-looking laws appropriate to a strong 21st century democracy.

The AKP has paved the way for this kind of reconstruction. They have completed the important task of demolition: they have torn down taboos and questioned old truths.

But now it’s time for a different team to build a new Turkey.

What Turkey needs is firm, progressive leadership which can create a common, shared language for a society splintered by religion, ethnicity and gaps in income and opportunity. Leadership which unabashedly declares that it has “no other.”

Turkey needs a new movement that can bring stability to politics and accelerate democratic development.

Turkey’s Change Movement, or TDH, was founded to address this need, this necessity.

Our movement is not just about saving Turkey from “the other guys.” It’s about creating a totally different Turkey.

Our purpose is to ensure a change movement built on a lasting foundation to guarantee a better quality of life for our citizens. This foundation is our political philosophy and our values.

Our political philosophy is one based on social justice and total democracy. We aim to forge a Turkey that goes beyond meeting the minimum needs of its people; that gives each citizen a say and ensures that their say is legally protected and freely voiced; that provides them with opportunities to achieve, invent, create, explore; a Turkey that is self-confident and peaceful.

We aspire to a social order based on pluralism and solidarity. TDH sees every individual and every group in society simultaneously as the agent, the subject and the owner of change.



We regard secularism, one respectful of all beliefs, as the basis of our democracy and the source of social harmony and an individual's true freedom. We will never, however, use secularism or religion for political ends.

Unlike any other party in Turkey, the centerpiece of our political philosophy is the individual citizen. Our government will rest on the principle of respect and trust in our citizens and we believe that our citizens should be directly involved in the making, implementation and oversight of the decisions affecting their lives.

Our judicial, executive and legislative branches of government will be independent of each other.

We consider the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary as the foundation of the political regime and of social order.

To bring true democracy to Turkey, we intend to focus on four pillars of prosperity: participatory democracy, respect for human rights and freedoms, a free market economy and universal social services.

Turkey lags in major areas of democratic development. Turkey ranks 87th in the Democracy Index¹—recognized not as a “flawed democracy” but as a “hybrid regime” between authoritarianism and full democracy. Several areas of particular importance include Turkey's flagging secularism, human rights and liberties, and political participation. With regard to secularism, the Turkish government increasingly promotes Islamic education without providing equal opportunities to other faiths, as evidenced by its failure to open the Halki Seminary that trained Patriarch Bartholomew I, a Turkish citizen. It also does not officially recognize Alevi houses of prayer.

Strengthening human rights and liberties in Turkey will require sweeping legal and judicial reforms. For example, despite the recent revision of Article 301 of the criminal code, leading Turkish thinkers still face prosecution for voicing opinions that “insult Turkishness.” Under Article 318, Turks may face trial for expressing conscientious objection to military service. To address problems like these, Turkey needs swift and comprehensive legal and judiciary reforms, including reforming appointment procedures for the high court, judges and counsel to ensure the independence, representativeness, objectiveness, impartiality and transparency of Turkey's justice system.

The days of a top-down imposed order in which the state dictated to its citizens their duties are over. Our government and state will be compassionate, transparent, social and accountable.

¹ “The Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy 2008,” *Economist Intelligence Unit*, www.eiu.com, accessed 1 February 2010.



Turkey must also provide more avenues for political participation. At nine percent, female representation in Parliament is abysmally low. The ten percent threshold to enter Parliament obstructs democracy and keeps political representation out of reach for many citizen groups. Kurds constitute about 15 percent of Turkey's population—almost one in seven—and yet they still struggle to participate in government. The recent closure of the Democratic Society Party (DTP) was legally correct as per the 1982 constitution, but questionable politically and inconsistent with democracy. Turkey urgently needs a new constitution and new legislation on banning parties: all voices must be sought and heard in Turkey's democracy.

Change must start at the most basic levels of the electoral process.

We will change the political language to be constructive, not destructive.

Our political parties must not simply preach democratic participation; they must practice it: party chairpersons and parliamentarians should be elected directly by registered party members; women and youth must be given a strong voice.

We intend to "be the change" not just as individuals but as a party.

We will exercise democracy within our own movement and our political party from the outset.

It saddens me that there is a serious gender gap throughout Turkish society. The realization of gender equality in politics, education and business is one of our fundamental principles. As such, we will ensure that women occupy no less than 30% of all positions in the party. For a country that led Europe in enfranchising women and empowering them to serve in Parliament, Turkey's persistent gender inequality is not just startling but inexcusable.

Likewise, we need to engage our youth in the political process. They say the youth in Turkey are apolitical since the 1980 coup. I find however that across Turkey, wherever I go—in cities and villages alike—young people are clamoring to be heard.

They care deeply about the kind of society they are inheriting. Will it be one which provides them with sufficient education? Adequate healthcare? Will they have unfettered internet access? Speak freely on the phone without fear of being surveilled? Will they be able to get a job? Or will they have to delay marriage and children because they just can't afford it?

Yes, the youth especially have a lot at stake. They know it and they are doing something about it. Our movement works with young people to actively solicit their opinions and engage in the political process.



Our economy should be competitive, dynamic and promote sustainable development. In particular, the priority of our economic policies will be resolution of the unemployment problem, with a special focus on youth.

While Turkey's 12.4 million youth can potentially catapult Turkey into a highly productive knowledge economy, the youth unemployment rate—roughly 24 percent, nearly twice the overall rate²—means the global economy is marching past many of Turkey's next generation.

We have other serious structural issues too: we need to eliminate monopolies, regional imbalances and inequalities in income distribution.

Our policies will strive to protect workers and minimize social injustice but we support free enterprise. It is the best way to create employment. We will actively engage with the business community. Private enterprises should be able to engage in commercial activities easily and efficiently. Investors must know that their investments will not be subject to sudden and arbitrary legislative changes or court rulings.

We will create a forward-looking economy promoting research and development and value-added, technology-based sectors. We will strive to guarantee that economic activity does not damage the environment but does further foster green jobs and alternative energy sources. We aim to be the first Turkish party with a serious, actionable environmental protection strategy.

Our foreign policy will reflect these changes in domestic policy.

It will be consistent with Turkey's democratic makeup; one aimed at not just being a bridge between East and West, but one which reaches beyond that and aspires to uphold and enhance universal values in its relations with the rest of the world.

Under Turkey's new foreign policy Turkey has generally maintained strong bonds with Europe and the region and strived to improve its relations with its neighbors. But its foreign policy has lacked focus. Certainly, Turkey faces the daunting diplomatic challenge of balancing the interests of all players in the region, many who are at odds with each other. Nonetheless, Turkey's foreign policy needs firmer priorities, more measured approaches, and, above all, stronger principles and norms.

First, Turkey must better prioritize the steps required to properly establish its international leadership credentials. For example, Turkey is now dedicating energy to Bosnia's cause to enter NATO even though other more pressing issues for Turkey's regional leadership—like the Cyprus dispute and stalled EU accession negotiations—demand sustained attention. In short, Turkey needs to get its priorities straight.

² TurkStat (2010).



Second, Turkey must adopt calibrated, low-profile approaches to regional reconciliation, rather than racing for quick but incomplete solutions. It must also connect its efforts with those of its allies and friends. For example, Turkey signed an “historic” accord with Armenia in October 2009. However, the Armenian-Azerbaijani dispute over the occupied territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenian territorial claims, and the controversy over the Armenian deaths in 1915 all remain unresolved. To be sure, creating a truly independent commission to examine the 1915 events is an important step forward. But the Armenian Constitutional Court’s recent ruling that tightly restricts the accord has severely handicapped the normalization process. The cost of hastiness is high: neglecting to first resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute is pushing Azerbaijan closer to Russia and threatening the Nabucco Pipeline project—effectively striking a blow against the energy security of Turkey and Europe.

Third, Turkey must harmonize its domestic and foreign policies with liberal democratic principles fundamental to its progress. For example, while the government has been attacking anti-democratic conspiracies domestically through its ever-expanding Ergenekon investigation, it has not shied away from warming to undemocratic neighbors. Turkey was one of the first nations to congratulate Mahmoud Ahmedinejad after a contested Iranian election where the opposition was violently suppressed and persecuted.

An even more egregious case is Turkey’s attitude toward Israel. Turkey is rightly concerned about Israel’s treatment of Palestinians. Israel’s operation against the Gaza strip last year killed hundreds of Palestinian civilians—one-third of them children.³ In the aftermath, the international community failed to extend sufficient humanitarian aid to the Gaza population. Turkish leaders helped voice the Palestinians’ suffering, yet while doing so they deeply offended the people and leaders of Israel. This severely undermined trust between Turkey and Israel, stripping Turkey of its potential role as an intermediary between Israelis and Arabs.

Finally, as mentioned above, Turkey must take a strategic approach to major areas of its foreign policy, particularly energy security and EU accession. With respect to energy policy, Turkey needs to develop an integrated future-oriented energy strategy, one it currently lacks. Given Turkey’s own projected growth and development, it must both manage its energy demand and diversify its energy sources, focusing not just on fossil fuels but renewable and nuclear energy, and counterbalancing its dependence on Russian energy. Furthermore, Turkey must become a reliable energy transit state that can provide much needed energy diversity and security to Europe, an area where the EU places great hope in Turkey.

³ “Israel ‘understated’ Gaza deaths,” *BBC*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8245433.stm, 9 September 2009.



Turkey needs to develop and manage foreign policy and energy policy together to ensure its long-term energy security.

With respect to EU accession, Turkey must treat it as a core part of its overall development strategy—foreign and domestic—and not just as an element of foreign policy.

Enhancing Turkey's "strategic depth" in the Middle East should not come at the expense of its rapport with the West. Turkey's leadership role in the Middle East will be much stronger if Turkey is a member of the EU. Without the EU, however, Turkey's influence would greatly diminish—not just in Europe, but in the Middle East as well

We envision that Turkey will participate as an equal member of the Euro-Atlantic community and the European Union while forging and developing relations with countries to our North, East and South. We will emphasize international cooperation and playing a pioneering role within international organizations and give priority to economic and commercial relations and to cooperation in the field of science and technology.

Unfortunately, Turkey's lack of consistency in domestic and foreign policy reinforces the perception that it is not fully committed to liberal democracy. The pre-2005 "virtuous circle"—by which reforms improved the economy and in turn increased support in Europe and Turkey for membership—has been replaced by a "vicious circle"—by which lack of reform has lowered support in Europe, in turn diminishing the Turkish government's Europeanization effort.⁴

We must reestablish the virtuous circle by reminding ourselves at home of the principles of and arguments for reform.

Without urgently resolving issues of democratic development at home, Turkey's EU accession and growing leadership role in the world are at risk. As the recent report of the Independent Commission on Turkey concluded, "progress has stalled in strengthening democracy, broadening respect for human rights and building up a free and vibrant civil society."⁵ From one of the most supportive voices of Turkey's EU accession, this is grave criticism indeed.

In conclusion, we Turks must shore up the commitment to liberal democracy at home. We must provide a dynamic economy and universal social services that give opportunities to all Turks and close the gap between rich and poor. We must uphold the equality of every human being irrespective of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. We must protect freedom of

⁴ Independent Commission on Turkey (2009), p7.

⁵ Independent Commission on Turkey, *Turkey in Europe: Breaking the vicious circle* (September 2009), p7.



expression—the life-blood of participatory democracy—and maintain zero tolerance for corruption and torture.

None of these can happen without the full social, political, and economic participation of women, youth and minorities. To achieve these changes, we want, need, and intend to write a new constitution. A new constitution –which should come after the next elections—will be the foundation upon which we rebuild Turkey.

We must also reaffirm our liberal democratic principles in our relationships abroad.

We must fully commit to aligning Turkey with the EU. We must commit to the rousing European idea of “unity within diversity”. We should strive for closer cooperation with Europe extending beyond membership negotiations. But the EU must hold up its end of the bargain as well: calls for a “privileged partnership” rather than full membership are not acceptable.

Having listened thus far, I am sure you have fathomed the magnitude of the task which lies before us. Perhaps you are even wondering how we will fulfill such an ambitious agenda.

Willpower.

The magnitude of change we envision will require many difficult decisions and sacrifices by the Turkish people.

It will require their faith and courage that the long-term results will be worth short-term inconveniences. It will require willpower to look beyond today.

But we believe that by embracing our people as a whole, by stating unequivocally that we have “no other,” we will have taken the first step to building that collective will which as a nation we lack today.

Thank you.