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Transcript

**MEETING MINISTER
BOZKIR: REENERGIZING
THE TURKEY-EU DEBATE**

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SPEAKER:

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MODERATOR:

David Gardner, international affairs editor,
Financial Times

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JAN TECHAU: Good evening everybody. I hope the microphone is on and that you can hear me also all the way back down there. Those of you who have been with us before here at Carnegie, at the office, know that whenever we put this kind of set-up into the building it's very serious because we have more people lining up to attend than we have space to accommodate them but that, of course, is for a reason. The reason why it's so crammed and packed again and why we will very soon have a Turkish climate in this room, very warm and very humid, is that we have the Turkish EU Minister here with us today who, of course, is very much a known figure in this town and was the Ambassador to the EU, the Turkish Ambassador, is now the Turkish Minister and also the Chief Negotiator of his country in the accession process and that gives him a key role.

Among the many hotspots that Europe is so much concerned about at the moment, Turkey is certainly very high on the list for a number of reasons and it's great that we can have the discussion here today about the prospects of this very crucial relationship. At Carnegie Europe we have put Turkey very close to our heart and to our core activities. We have two eminent scholars here in the building, Sinan Ülgen and Marc Pierini, who have been working on this relentlessly and with much focus and with great success, as well, and so it's great that we can continue this very strong and deep and comprehensive approach to the Turkish debate, continue it here tonight with the Minister.

The Minister, of course, did a scary thing. He had a distinguished career as a diplomat that brought him all the way up to ambassador level here in Brussels, as well, and then he changed career path and became a politician himself which scares a lot of people to death because he's actually one of the politicians who knows what he's talking about which is kind of rare and can't just only make you friends. I'm sure, that you actually do know what you are talking about but we'll try to benefit from that tonight. It's out great honour. I will not list all of the great achievements and all of the great positions that you've held over the years but it's safe to say, I think, that over the last ten or 15 years there was not one single decision that Turkey made on its EU relationship that the Minister wasn't involved in in one way or another and so we try to really draw from the pool of expertise.

It's my great pleasure also that we have a distinguished moderator here today from the Financial Times who will guide us through the evening. I will now stop talking and hand it over. Let me welcome you. Final housekeeping announcement: after all of this we will have a reception in the back end of this building, all the way down there behind the blue screen which will be removed and then you will be treated to some drinks and to some nibblings, as well. So, stay with us also afterwards, enjoy the discussion and thank you very much for coming.

VOLKAN BOZKIR: It is a great pleasure, I was saying, to be here but the responsibility is also great. When I first Ştefan Füle under my new title he said we normally give 100 days to new politicians but for you we can't even afford ten days. That shows how much the pressure is on my shoulders but also, of course, addressing this distinguished gathering and having a very important personality here ready to ask very difficult questions also puts new responsibilities on my shoulders.

Actually, I think the important part, I will mention to you what we have done. We have now have a new Turkey where the President was elected for the first in the republican history by popular vote. So, we now have a new President, new Prime Minister, new Government and we call it a new Turkey. This new Turkey and the new European Union actually coincided because Europe also had a new Parliament election and there was new Commission, new Commission President, a new Council President. So, in a way, there is a vision towards five-ten years ahead in the European Union being

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written and being established while we also have really made strong statements and strong steps forward. Our hope is to meet with this new European Union structure as the new Turkey has decided.

After having been appointed I first wanted to have things not only on words but also paper and we wrote a new European Union strategy for Turkey. I'm sure you have seen the small booklet we have put on the table and I'm sure you have all read it. If not, promise that you will read it after I address you. I call it the constitution of our new relation. It has the vision in it, it has what we were targeting in it and how we will manage decisions. In principle, it has three pillars on how we should continue and the first pillar is we attach great importance to the political reforms.

The political reforms will be handled by an already existing body which is the Reform Monitoring Group which consists of the ministers of Interior, Justice, Foreign Minister and myself. But this will be not be a meeting group where ministers meet in their cities where they were elected and make nice statements, read their statements and then it's over. We have changed the structure to have this group as the admiralship of the political reforms, so they will prepare, discuss, enact, implement and put into the life the political reforms from now on. And to make it more visible, last Monday I proposed to the Ministerial Council that the name should be changed from a monitoring group to a reform action group which is accepted unanimously and now the group will not just monitor but also act for the political reforms.

Of course, having said the political reforms, we're not starting today to implement the political reforms. Turkey has made really very important political reforms in Turkey from 2002 onwards. We have changed half of the constitution. We have changed our penal code and civil code. We've changed 2000 legislations and we came to the point that the European Commission confirmed that Turkey sufficiently fulfilled the political criteria and what we are now is to fulfil the gap between sufficiently fulfilling the political criteria and totally fulfilling the political criteria. So, this group is aiming at achieving that with the newly added requirements according to the changes in the world and the European Union.

Second pillar is the adaptation to the European Union; a key part of it. We are now having two plans which are called national action plans. One is until mid 2015 which is when the elections will take place and the second will be in 2015-2019. This is going to be kind of a national plan which we didn't have since 2008. Under every chapter all the laws, all the secondary laws will be listed, who will be responsible, who will implement it will be listed as well. This will be a kind of a transparent list where all the institutions will see what they have to do and it will be a list for us for what they haven't done. It will bring a discipline so that surprise law and tax will not be seen as it will only be included in this type of a plan.

The government meeting last Monday approved this plan and I will announce on the 30th, this first part until 2015, on 30th October but I wanted to deliver it to the Commission first so that they could check and give their opinion on this plan to act more transparent and also establish a new working style and I think this was very well accepted by the Commission today. The second part will come mid-November and, again, shared with the Commission and it will be announced end of November. Today, I announced the Turk pillar which is the communication strategy for the European Union. You have seen a copy also on the table. Please promise you will read it after I speak or, if you have read it already, I will make some additional statements.

The communication strategy is important because without communication whatever you do is lost; there will be wrong concepts, wrong images, wrong beliefs about an issue or a country. I think the image of Turkey in the European Union in the last three/four years has been damaged and also the

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image of the European Union in Turkey is also damaged. We have to correct this because some of this damage is because both sides are looking at wrong pictures, so we have to correct the concept coming out from the photograph or we have to correct the photograph, itself. It needs time but we have started. With this communications strategy we will be able to really make progress. We will use the European Union funds, as well.

The main pillar will be the civil society. Democracy is based on civil society; that's my belief and many people's belief in Turkey. In the beginning of the '80s we had less than 20 NGOs at that time – it was called NGOs, now it's called civil society organisations – and today we have over 90,000 civil society organisation which is a very incredible number; foundations, more than 20,000. We will first deal with the civil society, have them work with us, listen to them and get their contributions. Until 2020 we will spend €180 million from Stefano's money which was previously Pierini's money. It will be used for the civil society but until the end of 2015, €7 million will be used for civil society groups and, of course, another €11 million is there for business circles. Also, we will use the Erasmus+ Project which is really one of the success stories. Up to now about €600 million have been used there to give the possibility to children, to have better education, come here; 100,000 projects were produced, 26,000 projects were approved, 400,000 young students benefited, 300,000 had a chance to go to Europe to study there. Now, we have another €900 million which will come into the pipeline. That shows how much importance we are giving to young people, education, civil society, business circles, universities, bar associations, trade unions, whatever it is, to really be part of this communication strategy.

We have been successful to also get an instruction from the Prime Minister in a circular note – Prime Minister's circular – which instructed the institutions and ministries in Turkey to first consult with the EU Ministry and get their the Ministry's views on whether the new law or the draft law is in line with the European Union *acquis communautaire* or in line with the standards. I think this is also a revolutionary step. Nobody would have believed that these steps would have been made possible if these were mentioned to you six months ago. This is a proof that the political authority is with us, behind me, and that makes it very easy to put new steps forward.

The relation between the European Union and Turkey is based on mutual interest. Of course, it is a very long story. It's more than 50 years now. It shows how stubborn, how tolerant, how decided and how much Turkey wants to continue with this relation. Under all these circumstances when even we place the three years behind us where no chapters were opened or a lot of negative statements were made from both sides, the Turkish people's support never went to the wrong direction. The portion which is completely against the European Union in Turkey has never passed 10% – it's always below – but the undecided changes. If they become more then the supporters look less but now, even without seeing what we have done during the last one month, this year the support went up from 45% to 55%. So, with these positive moves we are expecting that it will go even higher and the undecided get smaller.

To give an example, as Turks are very sentimental although they look very unsentimental, Barroso came to Turkey and he made very good statements in 2008. In one day the support went up 17%. Next week a European leader made some difficult remarks, it went down 6%. That is good because it shows that we are sentimental. They want to see real progress. It's like inflation. Once upon a time we had 150% inflation and when the government announced that we had only 30% inflation people didn't believe it because they want to see it in their pockets. The EU progress also has to be seen in the pocket or felt in the body language or visibly that things are moving correctly.

So, that's where we are. Always what I believed was that people should talk, listen to each other, don't get nervous about criticisms, get the good part of the criticism and try to work on the bad part of the

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criticism to convince the other and that's why I think my style for 40 years will be the style of the EU Ministry for the coming days, months. How long I can be there will be depending on how good this is going on. But I think what has been done with the progress report is good evidence. What we have done has got a reply from the European Union circles. For the first time in 17 reports I have witnessed we were really able to talk to each other and instead of seeing the report after the Commissioner announced it we had a chance to know approximately what's in it. We made 26 requests and change demands. More than half of them were taken into consideration and I think this established a working climate and also some confidence. And nothing leaked; that was also important. And it gives a possibility for the future that we can exchange documents, we can exchange views but it will not be leaked.

When the progress report was announced, I was the brave person to face the cameras saying that this progress report is a balanced one, an objective one and we can live with it. There are criticisms. There should be criticisms. We are going to take note of some of them. We can't accept some of them. I will write and talk for the parts we will not be able to accept but I will not make a Turkish progress report anymore and I will not talk on matters which should be kept between the Commission and Turkey in front of the press. That made life easy for all sides because the progress report is there. Anybody can read it, it's not a secret. Anybody can make some comments from it but it shouldn't be me or Stefan Füle who makes the comments on which part is good, which part is bad. That is where we are. I have a long talking point but Serkan is making very strong eyes, so I got the message. I'll stop here and it might be much better to stop this monologue and make it a dialogue to answer your questions. Thank you very much for patiently listening to me.

DAVID GARDNER: Thank you very much indeed, Minister. It looks like my microphone has now gone off but never mind. I'll begin, if I may, with a few questions before throwing it open to the floor. You mentioned quite rightly the recent rise in pro-EU sentiment which from highs near the eighties maybe a decade ago went to somewhere in the thirties, now went up last year, according to the German Marshall Fund, 45% to 53%. Isn't that partly because Turkish foreign policy which had ostensibly turned eastwards, partly in response to a number of reasons – apparent blockage in Europe, apparent opportunities in the neighbourhood – but that that policy has turned to be, broadly speaking – not totally but broadly speaking – a failure; that turn eastwards. And the point is, you underlined quite rightly that there's a new team here and a new team in Turkey but the Prime Minister in question, Mr Davutoğlu, is actually the author and main inspirer of that turn eastward, that allegedly neo-Ottoman policy. So, why should we believe that there is now going to be relaunch, a real emphasis on working through the problems that have arisen between Turkey and the EU and that this is going to go forward on the basis that you hope?

VOLKAN BOZKIR: Of course, your question could have been worded differently there.

DAVID GARDNER: No doubt.

VOLKAN BOZKIR: So, let me word it according to my understanding. First, Turkey didn't turn its direction to the east. This is a wrong concept. Turkey was seen as a country which was negotiating with the European Union and then our leaders were in the family photos signing the European Union constitution, having friends, attending the wedding ceremony of the Presidents, their Prime Ministers' sons wedding and then suddenly there was something wrong here. So, we didn't have a chance to really show that we are continuing because chapters were not opened. We couldn't have chance to be have the accession conferences or be in the family photos. You thought that we escaped but actually we were not allowed in your system to show that we are continuing. First this.

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Secondly, until you open the negotiations there are very colourful stories; political criteria is colourful. You abolish the death penalty, you change your penal code, you decrease your detention and pre-detention periods, you reform the police, you reform this and that. And everybody is more knowledgeable in those events. But then you open the negotiations and you talk about the environment chapter which is important, of course but when you talk about the 27 secondary laws it only concerns a very small portion of the public. Even though you work, nobody cares much. So, under these circumstances I was in the Parliament and the head of the Foreign Relations Committee and I was giving interviews. I was given interviews on Syria, Iraq and the EU but the newspapers, most of the time, didn't have enough space to add my EU remarks but they concentrated on Syria and Iraq more than the European Union. Now, nobody asks me – I hope that you will ask me either – any question on Syria.

DAVID GARDNER: I think we can leave that to the floor.

VOLKAN BOZKIR: But whatever I say on the EU is on the press and that's good news. Secondly, your criticism about Turkish policies. Our policy – you didn't mention that part – was to have good relations with all our neighbours and I don't think there's anything wrong with it. Unfortunately, the impression which was given was that Turkey has no neighbours. Some said Turkey doesn't have any neighbours. Turkey doesn't have good relations with any neighbours but a zero problem policy with neighbours. Some said zero neighbours with problems. There were all wrong. I have colleagues in the opposition party, as well, so when they said you don't have any good relations with neighbours I said I respect your diplomatic skills but your mathematic skills are not as good as your diplomatic skills.

The reason I said that is we have Turkey neighbours and it's one of the big countries having more neighbours than any other; fourth in the world. Look at our relations with Greece, best relations ever; Bulgaria, best relations; Romania, Moldavia, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Iraq, Iran. Thirteen neighbours; we have only difficulty with Syria and we didn't cause it. Iraq, we didn't cause it. What happened in Syria gave the impression that Turkish policies were wrong but now you can understand that our policies were not wrong. We were trying to avoid this to happen. If you go back to when I was ambassador here... let me go even further back. With Syria we are neighbours and with Syria we never had good relations until Bashar replaced his father. The problem was coming out from the Hatay Region which chose to be a part of Turkey with a UN referendum. And Syria never accepted this because in the maps, even today, if you look at Syrian maps, Hatay is part of Syria. And the water frightened them so they've taught that Turkey will cut all the water. We had a period where the terrorists were in Damascus 20 years and killings were continuing.

When Bashar came to power we turned a page and showed goodwill and tried to make good relations with Syria, as well. When we had good relations with Syria I was called to the Council many times criticising Turkey for having good relations with Syria. They said you are a negotiating country, we are suspending the association agreement. Why are you doing this? And I said, look, we want to show you some new images. And afterwards when things were moving well they said, okay, we will also check what you are doing and what you will do but unfortunately the Arab Spring fell as a nuclear bomb to our region and it changed all the structures. If the Arab Spring didn't happen we would have very good relations with Syria, we would have very good countries with any country in the region but unfortunately Bashar al-Assad couldn't deliver at the crucial moment.

He would have perhaps been a beloved President if he acted like Yeltsin who jumped on a tank and stopped the flow of history. He couldn't do that. He couldn't say no to his mother, not to his father's family. So, we still continued to show him the correct way. If he had behaved like the Jordanian king, for example, saying that, okay, let's make the changes, I'm your king. Even if he didn't deliver

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everything he has still the trust. At that moment, when he started killing his own people we had to make a choice. It's our neighbour and we have invested in the future. If everything is settled and if Syria will become a democratic country with the rule of law. If we hadn't chosen the people, instead we chose Bashar, they would have turned to us and said, look, you were not with us when we were killed and you were with this leader so now how can you talk about friendship. But, now, after receiving two million people at their difficult moment and really treating them as our own population, if things settle in Syria they will look at Turkey as a good neighbour.

So, the policy wasn't wrong but I think the events were out of control and the warnings we made that this will happen if you don't be with us now is coming to us with a different concept. It was, in the beginning, al-Assad versus the opposition forces. Now, it's al-Assad with Hezbollah or whatever it is. Al-Nuusra is there. Al-Qaeda is there. ISIS is there. Nobody knows who is who; very complex; now the Kobani, etc, refugees. I think it would have been so very easy in the beginning but now it became a question where nobody has an answer to it. Iraq the same. We made attempts to even make positive our relations with Armenia. We signed protocols to open borders is what we did there. So, all the countries I have mentioned we have good relations. That's why I said your question wasn't the good worded question. You should have asked how did you manage to have very good relations with your neighbours?

DAVID GARDNER: Can I try another question and I'll try to do better? Going back to the substance of the relationship between Turkey and the EU it seems to me, and I don't think what you said contradicts this, that so much of the many things that Turkey has achieved over the last ten-12 years, the economic rise, the reforms and so on and so forth have been associated with partnerships, with the IMF, with obviously the European Union as a driver of that but when that machine started to shut down there was much talk that, well, it doesn't really matter, the Copenhagen Criteria can be replaced by the Ankara Criteria. It doesn't seem to many people that that's happened, particularly over the last couple of years. There are serious questions about the rollback of the rule of law, the independence of institutions such as the judiciary, the interference in various kinds of freedoms of expression of social media and so on, the direct interference in questions like public procurement and so on and so forth. How can you convince us that a third wave of reform is now really on the cards and that this was just a blip that no doubt we paid far too much attention to?

VOLKAN BOZKIR: Again, we'll divert your question. I have to explain what the Ankara Criteria is and why it was mentioned. Ankara Criteria has never been used for political criteria. When it was used eight chapters were suspended in 2006 because of an irrelevant political issue and then one of the countries came out, I will add six to that, another country came out, I will add three to that. All said three chapters were blocked, so we were facing a picture having opened something like ten chapters and then having 18 chapters blocked. I was here. It was my proposal when the Prime Minister was flying from New York, I think, to Turkey, he made an escale here in the private airport and he said what are we going to do? Babacan [?] was there. He said what are we going to do? Eight chapters are suspended and I feared that he was going to really stop and make statements saying that, okay, you go to your direction, I go to my direction.

So, I said Prime Minister, we can really continue this process. I said we can open the chapters in Turkey. We call it the Ankara Criteria. So, practically, Ankara Criteria, leaving aside the political reforms, etc, is for opening chapters which have not been opened. Technically, it is possible. People who are here who have some knowledge about how the system works know that it is possible because normally when you have a screening process you have European *acquis communautaire* versus the country's *acquis* and then there's a Commissions report which says that, well, Turkey has fulfilled 62% of the 100%. So, when you open the chapter normally you deal with that part which is missing; and

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they're opening benchmarks, closing benchmarks. It is on paper. Even though it's not registered officially, we have all the papers one way or another. So, that's why we didn't lose the eight years. It would have been a disaster.

We opened the chapters means that we continued as if the chapters were opened and today the real story is – not the official one which says 14 to one – we have opened 28 chapters in Turkey and closed 14 chapters. When you read the progress report you will see that there is a reference saying that out of 30 chapters in 26 there was progress. It is also a confirmation that our work is seen as a positive one and actually the three chapters, which is not mentioned there, doesn't have to do in it. The first chapter we opened there is no *acquis*. So, we are talking to the Commission saying that you should write no progress has been made, you should write no progress was possible to be made. Actually, we made progress in 33 chapters and because of this positive agenda we have on paper the confirmation from the Commission that some three or five chapters we have fulfilled our duty. So, this is the situation.

Having done that, every move we make for the chapters is increasing our capacity – the people's level, the people's standards – and we didn't lose the energy of the people who are working on the chapters. If we didn't do this and if the Cyprus problem, for example, is solved; if tomorrow you will say we have solved the Cyprus problem so let us open 14 chapters, we can open it in one month/two months' time. If we didn't do this Ankara Criteria deal then we would five years, perhaps so this is good for both sides. I think the reheating of the engine is more difficult. So, in practice, we haven't lost anything. Even during the period where we didn't open chapters, we had six reform packages. Last year, only, we had 170 packages, new laws, secondary laws so we never stopped. But unfortunately that's why our communication strategy is there. You are looking at a wrong picture. Because we haven't been able to talk to you, it's not your fault. We didn't come and talk to you, perhaps. Well, now we're having the chance. You are giving a chance to people like me or other ministers, other people. You're listening and you have to make your own conclusions but it's good that we're talking.

We have nothing against continuing with the political reforms and I don't think any reform has gone backwards. We have made changes but anything against the European standards or the European Union *acquis* will be changed. It will not be allowed and we will continue within the line of the European Union *acquis* and the country. If there is no *acquis* then we look at the country performances, to the elderly countries in the European Union and then we will make life equivalent to life here. It is already like that.

DAVID GARDNER: In terms of your communication strategy, just set everybody's minds at ease about these rule of law issues, about the independence of the judiciary, about the freedom of the press in a context when literally dozens upon dozens of journalists keep on getting kicked out of their jobs because of what they write and broadcast. Set everybody's minds at rest about this.

VOLKAN BOZKIR: Okay. This is good question. This time you made it correct in the term of words.

DAVID GARDNER: While you're setting everybody's minds at rest, also your predecessor in this job pointed out, perhaps in a fit of petulance, that actually Turkey didn't need the EU, it was the EU that needed Turkey and the then Prime Minister and current President...

VOLKAN BOZKIR: Was it the Foreign Minister?

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DAVID GARDNER: No, Mr Bagis. And the President still retains, as he did as Prime Minister, an economic advisor who suggests breaking off all these negotiations because they're a complete waste of time.

VOLKAN BOZKIR: Good question.

DAVID GARDNER: Thank you. I'm happy that I finally got one. Please.

VOLKAN BOZKIR: It's a good question but a difficult question to be answered, many people think, but it's not a difficult question at all. We attach priority to the judiciary independence and also the strength of the judiciary, the credibility of the judiciary from the beginning; that's why we had six reform packages where always the judiciary system was improved. I think if you don't have a credible judiciary system nothing will go the correct direction. It will affect investments coming to your country. It will affect everyday life.

DAVID GARDNER: Absolutely.

VOLKAN BOZKIR: If you lose the trust in the judiciary system then it will be a disaster. Last Sunday, for example, 14,000 judges and public prosecutors voted to elect, out of 22, 12 High Court members and I think this is more than democratic. I don't think any country can do this with 14,000 judges voting. It's like an election with election supervisors and everything. And I think the situation calmed down. Now, the trust is coming back and I don't see any difficulty to make this go to other direction. And, as I mentioned, the six reform packages were there. We have a 2009 judiciary reform strategy which is under implementation. We are trying to make it even look better. But you can't see anybody in the country who would say I don't want a good judiciary system. Everybody would vote 100%, yes you will get to achieve that.

And the press freedoms you have also mentioned. I think what's wrong in Turkey is that in Western countries normally a holding boss or somebody who has economic interests in the country will not be allowed to have TV channels or newspapers. This is, I think, against the competition rules and also it's the main reason of the problem. I wouldn't personally like to see a businessman in order to get a tender using his newspaper to make attacks on the government and threatening. This happened in Turkey many years ago and then because of that blackmail it's getting or not but there was an abuse of this power and most of the newspapers were belonging to one or two persons which was, in a way, not a democratic one. So, if that media group had an idea they were using it in the front page and they were even putting the government into a difficult situation. Governments resigned, Prime Minister's changed just because of that. Now, I think there's a more balanced picture where you have representatives of different opinions but the problem is, again, the image. Because of the thing I have mentioned to you, some owners of newspapers because of their economic interests are frightened with what the journalists are writing. It's not any pressure or what the government is saying to them.

DAVID GARDNER: No phone calls? Nothing like that?

VOLKAN BOZKIR: No. I haven't received any phone calls. I don't talk on the phone either. But, in principle, if an owner of a media group doesn't have any economic interest he can resist, if there is any, to these kind of pressures but now, normally, they say why should I put my interests into difficulty just because of this. But he goes to another newspaper, continues to write there. You've seen many people doing that but this can't be considered as a pressure. We had one TV channel and one radio station in Turkey. When you had a military coup d'état it was very easy. You need one tank, ten soldiers and a colonel or major with a wonderful voice to enter in the radio station; there was no TV.

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He made a statement that the military has taken over and there was a military coup d'état. Now, you have thousands of radio stations, hundreds of TV channels and newspapers everywhere. So, when talking about pressure on the press you can't really have it. You have the Internet. 35 million people are using the Internet in Turkey. I may be wrong, it might be 36 million but you can't stop the Internet.

DAVID GARDNER: Even despite the efforts of the government to try?

VOLKAN BOZKIR: No. You can't. I made a statement saying that closing Twitter was a mistake and I'm still the Minister. Many people said you might have difficulty but saying the truth, brave enough to say the truth, is nothing wrong because when you closed Twitter nobody actually was away from Twitter; we all entered Twitter from other ways. You can't stop the Internet. Internet is the main source of the banking system. Internet is the main source of the birth certificates, passports, your identity. Everything is in an e state. You can't stop the Internet. But I think that was perhaps, especially the last internet law, I would have explained my view on it but as it is cancelled by the Constitutional Court I don't think it is necessary.

DAVID GARDNER: Let's just take that moment to throw this open to the floor. Could I ask those of you who ask questions to tell us who you are, please? There is somebody at the back that I really can't see. Could you identify yourself, please?

BAHADIR KALEAĞASI: Yes. My name is Kaleağası. I'm from TÜSİAD, Turkish Business Association. Minister, first of all, thank you very much for shifting from the language of observation and reaction to the language of action and transformation, I think this opens a new era in Turkey-EU relations. From a business point of view, of course, it's always important to see the feasibility of a project. We have to believe in a project to re-energise it, to invest in it, so I think in the EU-Turkey relations as well the feasibility of the membership process is very important. We know the easiest part is Turkey.

We know that Turkey will be ready and the European Commission will have prepared an accession treaty for Turkey to be submitted to the Council of Ministers when all these actions required for Turkey are accomplished; for democracy, for rule of law, for freedoms, for alignment with the acquis. On the other hand, the European Union also has to be ready. Would you please elaborate on your vision of the future of the EU evolving towards a variable geometry maybe of different circles, a Euro area as core and then a larger EU with all others including UK, Sweden and maybe, who knows, Norway and the Balkans. And also there is analysis of a third circle, kind of satellite countries where some people in Brussels would like to see Turkey rather than being a full member. So, the future of the EU is part of the equation probably for what we are discussing here and my question is on that. Thank you.

VOLKAN BOZKIR: May I answer?

DAVID GARDNER: Why don't you and if there are other questions we might accumulate them? Yes, please.

VOLKAN BOZKIR: I'm very democratic tonight, as you see Martin. I think the European Union is an important project, a very visionary one and it has caused the desire in many countries to join it because it replaced the American dream of the '50s with new visionary projects; welfare, giving new values to newcomers or expected newcomers. And it produced European Union first and then Schengen or euro and agriculture policies and many visionary projects and whoever became a

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member, until the last 12 ones, reached enormous contributions and became really a welfare state; Portugal, Spain, Greece, many other countries. But with the new expansion there has been some difficulties because, first, the political decision-making system still maintained as if it was six countries. With 28 countries, decisions were taken slowly. The United States of America economic crisis, they make the decision in one hour or one month, whatever it is, and United States of Europe needs a year or so. When they make the decision the problem is gone so they have to make another decision. So, the slow motion of the decision-making actually was one of the causes of the economic difficulties or some different tendencies and we haven't seen any visionary projects from the European Union in the last years after the new enlargement was made. So, that is the facts.

What Turkey is after was, in 1963, to run for the welfare. A country with \$320 per capita income and \$8 million tourism revenues, seven universities, \$1 billion of trade volume and \$11 billion of a country. It was absolutely necessary to become a member to enjoy the welfare, to make Turkey a better country economically and socially. The European Economic Community at that time had some concerns so they said you can't become a member now with these figures. You have to another 11 years transition period, etc.

But now, if you look at Turkey, Turkey is in a better economic situation than 22 countries – member countries – and I don't want to name any country but I can argue in another room that Turkey has better democratic rules and political reforms than some countries, member countries in Europe, as well. So, where Turkey now is heading with \$11,000 per capita income, \$300 billion of trade volume, \$820 billion of a national income, 180 universities, tourism revenues over \$30 billion, heading to double it in 2020. It's not reaching money anymore. We don't need the money anymore. But what we are doing is, with the Ankara criteria, as I defined later, we are trying to bring Turkey to the level of the European Union, to increase the standards in democracy, human rights, in environment, in food security, in education – whatever the chapters are – and to really run towards those new standards. If we reach them and if Turkey is not made a member it wouldn't be a big loss but the process should continue so that we can reach that level and I'm sure that if Turkey is at that level the European Union doesn't have the luxury to say no.

What Europe has in mind is, of course, still a legend that there will be a nucleus, a periphery and then another periphery. I don't know if it is valid or not. It has been talked in the last 30 years or so. But if Turkey becomes a member and if there's a nucleus and periphery, Turkey will be in the nucleus. It has to be there. And thirdly, the European Union is trying to play a superpower game without a military force, without having its own energy resources, without having a young population, without having strong economic markets. I'm counting these four issues because Turkey can provide these and the European Union is only a soft power and interfering into international crises it doesn't have the end game because it doesn't have these important elements.

So, I made a statement two days ago saying that if Turkey was a member, the European Union army of 60,000 which doesn't exist, we could have provided that 60,000 strong army and the European Union could have been coming out from a soft power status to a smart power or a real power status. So, this is a win-win station. It is a mutual interest situation. We need Europe more than ever. Europe will understand that they are needing Turkey more than ever. If Turkey wasn't there and didn't accept these two million Syrian refugees, if we didn't stop them they would be swimming or flying or running to reach the European Union and only from that perspective one should really caress Turkey more than really criticising.

DAVID GARDNER: More questions. Please. Sorry, I can't see who it is.

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SERTAÇ AKTAN: Sertaç Aktan. Mr Minister, could you please a bit more elaborate on the last statement you had about the European army. We read the statements of two days ago. We would like to hear a bit more details. I would like to know more clearly, are you referring to that Turkish soldiers being directly European soldiers in a European army where there are other soldiers also from other countries or is it just going to be 60,000 Turkish soldiers under European command where Turkey is a member; which one thank you?

VOLKAN BOZKIR: What I have said is what I have said. I don't go into details anything more than what I have said. You take your messages out of what I have said.

DAVID GARDNER: There was somebody else. Yes, please.

VOLKAN BOZKIR: Karen, how are you?

KAREN FOGG: As a friend of Turkey one is always concerned about the image of Turkey abroad and you know perhaps the three things which are in the public eye are, as has already been mentioned, a number of journalists in prison and the way demonstrators are dealt with and now whether the public is well informed or not of the situation in Kobani, in Southern Turkey, and the way a number of constraints on the way those who wish to defend Kobani are able to defend it. Now, without going into the detail of any of those important issues, I just wanted to take up your words about correcting the image. Do you think that in those three cases, the Western public is misinformed and therefore needs a better attempt by Turkey or do you think that the realities need to be changed and will be changed. These are the things which concern the friends of Turkey.

VOLKAN BOZKIR: Thank you, Karen. It's good to see you. We worked together with Karen in Bucharest first. She then went to Turkey. We had long talks. I made some suggestions about Turkey to her and we had a very good connection there. I think we started the political dialogue and she was very helpful. She's my good friend and it's her style, as you have seen, to really make direct criticisms and it's good that you opened this issue. The answer to your two questions; I would reply that I accept the first one. First, because start from the three examples you have given. Why is Turkey blamed because of Kobani, I can't understand. Kobani is a village in the Syrian territories and we opened the border. 138,000 people came the first day to Turkey and now we have 200,000 people from Kobani living in Turkey and we didn't ask which group are you from, which ethnic background are you from, which sect are you from? We just opened the doors because they were under the pressure of being killed and now they're in Turkey.

I'm coming from Germany. I've heard the same remarks there. The blame is why isn't Turkey saving Kobani? Why isn't Turkey attacking ISIS? How can Turkey become a member of the European Union while putting in danger the European Union's security? Look, what we have done, 200,000 people is seven times more than what Germany is discussing. 16,000 people they're trying to get into Germany and it's under discussion. We have two million people. And, to Kobani, Turkey doesn't have any intention to send military troops. We are dealing with unconventional forces there. Kobani is a mosquito and the swamp is ISIS captured more than half of Iraq. If we kill the mosquito the swamp will be there. We're saying that whoever talks should be with us. If we are going to enter militarily we have to use conventional forces against these terrorists; a different type of terrorist.

Normally, terrorists explode bombs or attack and escape, these are guerrillas there and they have captured Mosul with 1,800 people and the 55,000-strong Iraqi army escaped; conventional forces. So, you should be with us if we are going to enter into Syria. To do that we will need a UN Security Council decision; to do that we have to have a NATO decision; to do that we have to convince

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Russia. Saying these things is easy, you can do it in two seconds, but to reply to me you will need to consider all these realities. What we are proposing is we passed an authorisation from the Parliament allowing Turkish troops to be used in Syria or Iraq to fight with ISIS or to have foreign troops in Turkey to help the situation there but I think it should be read correctly.

What we have in mind to fight with unconventional guerrillas or terrorists you have to use also unconventional forces. We're proposing there are trained unconventional forces in Syria other than the al-Nusra, al-Qaeda, Hezbollah or ISIS troops. Let us bring them to Turkey. Let us train them together – that's where we have got the authorisation for foreign troops – and let's also equip them and send them back and they will be able, more than any conventional force, to get rid of this terrorist group there. And, of course, we will need a no-fly zone because the ISIS forces will use the air force might to prevent the trained and equipped new forces which will fight against ISIS. And we would like to, afterwards, see a secure zone – not a buffer zone – so that we can, perhaps, move some of the refugees in Turkey to that secure area. This is a proposal and we haven't heard any other proposals. People are just blaming Turkey because we got two million people. We have made proposals. We are ready to join the coalition. When we don't join the coalition, Turkey is blamed. When we said okay to the coalition, there is no coalition. It is like the pipeline, the Nabucco Project, which didn't have gas in it and the coalition doesn't have military troops in it. So, we're talking about realities here.

Secondly, you mentioned about press freedoms. I think anybody under any title should be prone to be judged or prosecuted or go to jail. If it an ambassador, if it is a minister, if it is a journalist, if it is a general. If you look at the list we can exchange views on that. The number of journalists in prison might be true but it's not because they have written anything. There are many of them who have other allegations. It's because of those allegations, nothing to do with what they have written or said that they're in prison. We haven't seen each other or talked to each other, you might have developed this wrong image.

That's why my communication strategy is there. You will read it, I am sure. We should talk. You should listen. I will listen to you. Check if anything wrong we are doing and you should also check if there is any misunderstanding there. What I was told in Germany and here in our fed meeting, many people said you are treating equally ISIS and PKK. And I said, look, PKK is a terrorist organisation. ISIS is also a terrorist organisation. PKK is in the list of the European Union as a terrorist organisation. It's in the list of NATO as a terrorist organisation. It's in the list of the United States as a terrorist organisation. We can't say these terrorists are good, these are bad; you can't differentiate. What we are doing in Turkey is...

KAREN FOGG: You're negotiating with them.

VOLKAN BOZKIR: Exactly. That's what the Brits have done to come out from the Irish problem. You know very well they have around the table the IRA and the Sinn Féin, the political group. Bombs exploded; many British people were killed in London but they didn't divert from the process and they reached a success. What we are doing in Turkey, there is a political party representing the Kurdish extreme group, if I may say so, and they are the ones who are making the conversations with the terrorist leader in prison but it doesn't mean that PKK is not a terrorist organisation.

We are doing that the same way UK did in order to reach a settlement and nobody will be able to prevent us from achieving a result in the peace process. It's the biggest project we have achieved. Do you know how difficult it was? Even we discussed having a Kurdish language broadcasting every week for 45 minutes with subtitles. It was a surprise achievement at that time. We're going on well and we want to continue with it but PKK is a terrorist organisation, talking to them doesn't change this. We

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put them in the same basket. So, the wrong concept is Turkey being blamed as making this difference. Thank you for asking the question Karen.

DAVID GARDNER: More questions. Sinan.

SINAN ÜLGEN: Can we expect a political decision any time soon until June 2015, that is to say on a new round of negotiations for deepening and modernising the customs union? We've heard this from the Economy Minister. We know that there has been a number of exploratory talks. We know that on the TTIP side that's also a dynamic pushing for a new round of negotiations. The business community is pretty much supportive of it but what is currently the political environment about a new round of negotiations.

VOLKAN BOZKIR: We are the only country who entered into a customs union without becoming a member, before becoming a member and it had really costs for the Turkish economy but every cost has a benefit, as well. We restructured our industry so that we're talking about €150 billion of trade volume where 45% is Turkish exports and 55% EU exports. This shows that this is a good project. Also, 72% of the investments in Turkey are coming from European Union countries and 90% from Western countries but unfortunately this doesn't include agricultural services and public procurement. There has been a World Bank report saying that it should be re-discussed to see if it is possible to include these three areas into the customs union and we have no objection to that. We are ready to go along with it and, of course, it needs a careful negotiation because those areas are not easy areas. It should be an upgrading of the customs union beneficial for both sides. It should be something which comes out in the end ruining industries or economic values.

But also we have a problem with a missing article in our customs union agreement which had to be there saying that if anybody signs a free trade agreement with the European Union it should be applied immediately to the Turks or the customs union members. The European Union now started a tendency to sign third country agreements. Once they sign our markets are open because of our customs union loyalty, if I may say so. We didn't do it while we were offered to do the same thing with other countries, US or Russia. We didn't do it. We remained loyal to the customs union. But EU now is signing agreements with Korea, South Korea. We lost 8% of our market but the Koreans were gentlemen so they didn't really push us, wait for another year or two years, they signed it immediately so we didn't lose. Mexico showed the same positive behaviour. But Algeria we couldn't sign so we lost the Algeria market. But with the United States it is dangerous. It is not like any other country.

So, once the EU signs the agreement we will be opening our markets to the US products without any protection. We can't do that so we will perhaps have to suspend the customs union, not because we want it but we can't afford it. Or we will have to have a special agreement with the US saying that until we sign an agreement with you it will not be implemented at that time. But the easiest way is to add an article to the agreement to be signed between the EU and the US – the TTIP – one article saying that this agreement will immediately come into effect for countries who are in a customs union relation – you don't have to even write Turkey there – so that the problem will be solved. We have to do it. We are talking to our EU friends. We are talking to the United States. There is no political objective. It's not a technical matter but it's a very big concern for us. I'm not blackmailing or threatening anybody. I'm just saying that Turkey cannot afford such kind of a development, so it has to be prevented. That's where we are and I can't say if we will finalise the customs union upgrading until 2015 or not because it's a matter of negotiation, it's a matter of EU's speed and Turkey's replying to that speed. If it doesn't have that much of a speed we might perhaps be prolonged for a while but we are ready to discuss.

DAVID GARDNER: But negotiations on this are currently underway?

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VOLKAN BOZKIR: No, not yet because there was a World Bank report which suggested this. We read it, we considered it and we said we can go along with it. But the TTIP negotiations are underway. It might be finished end of next year so the danger is more on a short-term issue. Upgrading our customs union relation could be done in a more medium-term. It's not an urgency but that is an urgency. We have to make sure that Turkey is not negatively affected from the results.

DAVID GARDNER: The extra article?

VOLKAN BOZKIR: Yes.

DAVID GARDNER: Yes. Okay, fine. Sir.

SERDAR YESILYURT: My name is Serdar Yesilyurt. I'm the representative of TUSKON, Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey in Brussels. I would like to welcome our dear Ambassador, now our new Minister to Brussels once more. When I first came to Brussels, I really learned a lot from his experience and I'm looking forward to learn a lot from his ministry too. I will not the hard questions, as expected, because I would like to not just keep in line with Mr Füle's 100 days policy but also I would like to salute your bravery to get into an open question here which is very rare in Turkish Government members nowadays. But while I was listening to you you mentioned the judiciary reform and your exchanges with the Commission and we checked the Commission report there are more than 11 pages which criticises heavily changes in the judicial laws and procedures in the last one year.

Just in line with that, this week, after Mr Bozdağ's visit to Brussels and promises for exchanges before the laws change, now a new law is being introduced to the Grand National Assembly which is all over the papers and headlines which gives the judges to be able to wiretap the telephones all over the country; a single judge can have such a decision and also the police to search whichever place they find suspicious by themselves without any court order. And to make a long story short, with Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç's wording, we are not going backwards, we are changing the situation in 2004. So, the question is I don't want you to evaluate this, I just want to know is this circular in the Diet [?] now? Have you been consulted about these laws before being introduced to the Assembly or not? Will this continue this way or are you going to take a position against such laws being introduced totally against the *acquis communautaire*? Thank you.

VOLKAN BOZKIR: Thank you. You have made your statement. I have replied to this in many other areas. I would suggest you read or listen to what I have said today or elsewhere.

DAVID GARDNER: We have a little bit of time left then for more questions. Are there any more questions? Do you have an appetite for more questions?

VOLKAN BOZKIR: Well, I think fair enough. We've spent our time and thank you very much.

DAVID GARDNER: Okay. All right. Well, I invite you therefore to thank the Minister for, as you pointed out, submitting to this grilling which, I think he has a fair point, is comparatively rare these days in public. Anyway, thank you very, very much indeed. It was most informative. Thank you.