

**The acceptance speech by 11th President of Turkey Abdullah Gül at the Parliament
August 28th, 2007**

We are passing through a period when we have once again found the chance to prove to both ourselves and the world at large just how mature our country's democracy has become. A short while ago, we held general elections that were met with widespread praise across the globe. And just now, we have completed the Presidential election in the most commendable way.

I offer my most sincere appreciation to this noble chamber for having elected me the 11th President of our country.

We, as the Turkish people, are the heirs of both a proud history and a nation that has established many great states and empires that have spanned the globe. Starting from those who hold varying positions in our state and government, we must all work hand in hand to further strengthen the Republic of Turkey whose eternal existence we will resolutely ensure. The goal, laid forth by the great Atatürk, founder of our Republic, of “raising the Republic of Turkey higher than the level of contemporary civilizations” must always be borne in mind.

Since its inception to where we are today, the Republic of Turkey has continually consolidated both its existence and its standing. This Republic was not established effortlessly and we did not get to where we are without hardships. The fact that every stretch of soil on our sacred homeland has been flooded with the blood of our martyrs is testament to this. The cadres that founded our Republic had to exert an extraordinary effort to first wage a War of Independence against relentless adversaries and then to make our country a respectable member of the community of modern nations. We all know full well the hardships that had to be endured during that period. This honorable chamber is the gift of that cadre of selfless individuals to us all.

The Turkish Grand National Assembly which is based on the will of our people and which, with its very existence, is the embodiment of that will is the sole setting where decisions regarding the present and the future of our country are taken. Established by the recent elections which witnessed a very high turnout, your presence here represents the will of our people in the most comprehensive and able way. The inclusive and representative nature of our democracy has been further enhanced with these past elections. It is for me a great honor to be worthy of the appreciation of this chamber that is so broad in its representation. It is only natural that as I fulfill the obligations of the high office that you have entrusted in me, I will always seek your support.

Taking this opportunity, let me pay tribute with the utmost respect to the first President of our Republic Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and all the other Presidents who have assumed the same high office; may the grace of God be on those that are not with us. In the name of our people, I offer them our heartfelt feelings of gratitude.

I will embrace all our citizens without any bias

I am fully aware of the difficulty of my task. "The President of the Republic is the Head of the State. In this capacity he or she shall represent the Republic of Turkey and the unity of the Turkish Nation; he or she shall ensure the implementation of the Constitution and the regular and harmonious functioning of the organs of State". To ensure this is a constitutional requirement. As long as I am in office, I will embrace all our citizens without any bias. I will preserve my impartiality with the greatest of care and will do all that I can to ensure the harmonious functioning of the organs of State.

The Turkish Republic is a "democratic", "secular", "social" state "governed by the rule of law". These qualities stipulated by the unalterable Articles of our Constitution are inseparable and each one is undoubtedly a core principle of our Republic. I will always be determined and resolved to advocate, without discrimination, each of these principles and to further strengthen them at every opportunity.

In democracy which is a system of rights and liberties, secularism, one of the core principles of our Republic, is as much a model that underpins freedom for different life styles as it is a rule of social harmony. Not only that; commitment to the principle of secularism is also the most expedient way of eliminating from the outset conflicts and elements of altercation that from time to time manifest themselves in every society. When we think about the realities and sensitivities inherent to our geography, we will better comprehend the significance of the principle of secularism which also guarantees the freedom of religion and conscience.

The rights and freedoms of the citizens

A matter of foremost importance among the issues to which I would like to draw your attention to is the need to trust the democratic system. The democratic system within which citizens elect their own representatives, is a structure based on the universal principles of law where ways of legal recourse are open and fundamental rights and liberties can be thoroughly enjoyed both individually and collectively. Becoming an open society is the bare minimum for the development of countries and the fulfillment of individuals. The freedoms of thought, expression, religion and conscience stipulated in our Constitution are, at the same time, the guarantee of a dignified life for our people. We should never deviate from the goal of becoming an open society where any kind of opinion - provided that it does not instigate violence - can be freely and fearlessly expressed. The contemporary world has long learned not to fear fundamental freedoms; similarly, we also need to claim ownership of our freedoms as our most vital values under all circumstances.

In today's world, a broad understanding within which different characteristics are highlighted and where change and diversity are not things to be feared is gaining greater

ground. As long as the values that bind us as a nation are intact and the fundamental principles of the constitutional order are deep-seated and respected by all, our differences and diversities will not be an element of weakness but rather our greatest wealth. If we can see this reality, we can further consolidate our unity and solidarity, as well as our peace and order. As our democratic culture is nourished by pluralism, we can more readily lay claim to the values that make us who we are.

As we all know, states exist to ensure the happiness, peace, wealth and security of the people. A country cannot claim to be contemporary if even a single citizen is being discriminated against or frowned upon based on his or her religious, linguistic or ethnic characteristics or economic status.

In the activities of the state, the most important element to be meticulously upheld should be a people-based approach to public service. The fundamental rights that all citizens are bestowed with by birth are of the essence. This means that, bureaucrats of all levels and politicians of all affiliations acting on behalf of the State and Government must be ever mindful of their primary task to protect the rights and freedoms of the citizens.

Achieving conditions to ensure complete gender equality and active participation of our women in all fields of life should be our primary objective. I would like you to know that I will be supporting all your steps to accomplish this objective.

The principle of "justice" and the rule of law

A prevailing sense of justice among citizens is one of the most important elements for ensuring sustainable economic development and continued social harmony. The principle of "justice" lies beneath the notion of a state governed by the rule of law. The Republic of Turkey must be a state where the judicial system functions as rapidly as possible, where people's sense of justice is not harmed and where everyone's conscience is at ease. It is the will and determination of the distinguished members of Parliament that will guarantee this.

It is the strong feeling of social confidence that will bind the citizens to their State with unbreakable ties, increase their drive to claim ownership of the democratic system and boost their pride and honor. Corruption and injustice top the list of the scourges that shake social confidence. Therefore, transparency in public life is the most efficient way to eliminate corruption and injustice. Every citizen should be able to access any information he or she needs as soon as possible. And the shortest access to information is only possible through an independent and impartial media that is conscious of its responsibilities.

Having a contemporary legal system, transparency and stability will increase Turkey's strength and its standing among other members of the international community. It is crucial to provide equal opportunity to every citizen in every field of life such as

education, economy, public duties and access to public service in order to have self-confident individuals and a strong social fabric.

The accession negotiations with the EU

Turkey has correctly chosen its goal and has achieved great strides to date towards reaching it. We have to continue taking firm steps with our free will and determination on the path which we embarked upon on 3 October 2005 when we launched our accession negotiations with the EU. It is imperative for our country that we carry out the political and economic reforms geared towards EU membership more resolutely. The political climate in Europe may always change. In order to reach the modern standards that are important to us, we should be able to demonstrate, if necessary, the will to open and close the negotiating chapters on our own. A Turkey which has completed its reform process and thereby achieved full convergence with the EU in all fields will take its own decision about its accession to the EU when the time comes. We have to carry out these reforms not because others want them, but for our people and by ourselves. As it will be much easier for a modern and strong Turkey to overcome the obstacles on the path to its EU accession, in time, these obstacles will lose their meaning. We can make this happen.

I am confident that by the time we celebrate the 100th anniversary of our Republic, Turkey will have become one of the leading countries of the world, with its strong and robust democratic institutions, its stable and huge economic prowess, its people trusting one another and its societal structure where diversity is seen as wealth. With its powerful democracy, economy and armed forces, Turkey will not only make its citizens happy, but will also bring comfort and stability to its region. We live in a geography full of risks; for its region and for outside observers, Turkey must be an oasis of security in this geography in every sense.

National security and Turkish Armed Forces

In this context, it is an absolute prerequisite for our national security to maintain the high deterrence ability of our strong, modern and efficient Turkish Armed Forces to which we are indebted for the victories that we are going to celebrate this week, and which as a symbol of our independence, has earned the esteem and admiration of the whole world.

Especially in light of recent actions aimed at our security, we also need to further strengthen our devoted police force, which is a guarantee of our law and order against all acts that threaten our security. Let's not forget: It is not possible for a country to develop and improve its prosperity if the citizens in that country are not able to sleep at night in peace.

We will continue our effective struggle with great determination against acts of terror that threaten Turkey's indivisible unity. Martyred sons of this nation that have fallen in this

cause deeply sadden us all. "Fire burns only where it falls", but our state exists to alleviate the sufferings and to put out the fire. We will never forget that our martyrs have entrusted their families and relatives to us.

"Peace at home, peace in the world" should continue to be our fundamental principle. When our country, from East to West, and South to North, equally shares the benefits of prosperity, this will expand peace and stability, bolster brotherly bonds between individuals and strengthen our unity and solidarity. We should establish a proud ground for cooperation with our close and distant neighbors based on mutual trust and respect. I consider our relations with the Turkic Republics and communities as a historical responsibility and I will follow the issue with utmost diligence. While we continue to foster our relations with our neighbors with ever more resolve, we should pursue active policies to keep the initiative in our hands, without remaining indifferent to the developments in the world.

The requirements of a social state

We are all aware of the requirements of a social state and the need to expand our social security system. We know that there is considerable ground to cover in the field of health and that we should make new strides in the fields of education, science and technology. We should continue to preserve the stability of our economy which is competitive on an international level. Introverted economies cannot sustain themselves in today's world. The means for full competition should always be open both at home and abroad. In our efforts to increase the level of prosperity of our people and to carry our nation to higher levels, an effective and efficient economy with competitive power will be the most important factor.

Before concluding, I should like to reiterate my conviction in the strongest way. While fulfilling this honorable duty that you have conferred upon me, I will always and under all circumstances ask for the support of this noble Parliament that reflects our nation and its will. My door will be open to all. I will be in close cooperation with all political parties and civil society organizations without bias. I will give the utmost importance to democracy, fundamental rights and freedoms. I will continue my path, in a transparent and fully impartial manner, embracing all my citizens. I will do my utmost for the well-being of my country and the peace of my citizens. I will work tirelessly for an ideal of Turkey; where there is no oppression; where arbitrariness does not exist; where there is no difference between the weak and the strong in benefiting from their rights; where the rights of citizens are protected and watched out for, and which is strong at home and respected in the world.

May God not embarrass us.

I once again salute our great nation and you all with deep respect, affection and gratitude.

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