

Brussels Forum

March 27, 2011

Press Conference

Speaker: Hello. Turkey's EU minister and chief negotiator, His Excellency Minister Egemen Bagis will make short statement and if you have any questions you are most welcome.

Mr. David Brunnstrom: Minister, my name is David Brunnstrom. I work for Reuters. I just wondered if you could tell me whether NATO states are now seeing eye to eye on the expansion of the NATO mission in Libya or are there still some obstacles that need to be overcome that would prevent an agreement today? Particularly I'm interested in your view on the political leadership of the mission, whether that should reside with NATO or should it go into this body that emerges from London?

The Hon. Egemen Bagis: Well, our government's approach to Libya is not based on the last few months' events, but for a period of more than 500 years. And we

don't have a colonial history with Libya. We have very friendly feelings, brotherly feelings, towards the people of Libya. Turkey is interested in seeing an end to the conflicts, to bloodshed, to all kind of disagreements and we would like to see people of Libya prosper.

Turkey is a member of NATO and our dialogue is still ongoing and Turkey is trying to share her knowledge, her know-how, her observations based on that 500 years. And I would bring your attention to an article by *The Guardian* even before this whole thing started. When there were demonstrations a rebel from Libya was telling the *Guardian* reporter that if anything, they would like to see Turkish military as a peace keeper. And, again, that was unsolicited and was at the very early stage of that conflict. And that's an indication of our good reputation.

In Afghanistan, Turkey assumed the command of the ISAF forces to us. Turkey has been present with a very good sized military in Afghanistan. And thank god we

did not have any casualties in Afghanistan. It's because we believe we know how to communicate with the local people on the ground. And as a country with the second largest military in NATO, Turkey's entitled to express her views and help shape the policies. And right now, all that dialogue is still ongoing.

Speaker: I'm with Radio Free Europe. You've spoken about the humanitarian situation in Libya and you're contributing to the NATO operation now. What about in Syria where the regime has killed over a hundred people? We don't know because there's not much press allowed in there? Do you have similar concerns about what Syria is doing against its own people? Which is just as bad as what Muammar Gaddafi is doing to his.

The Hon. Egemen Bagis: We are following the developments in Syria very closely. We value Syria. Syria is a very important neighbor, a very important and friendly country. We would like to see no conflict, no bloodshed anywhere in the world. We would like people of Syria to be in peace with the rest of the

world and among themselves as well. That's why my prime minister called President Assad yesterday to encourage him with his decision to move with reforms. I think most of the people in that large geography are looking up to Turkey and they want to have similar democratic reforms that Turkey has been conducting in her approach to become a member of European Union.

So on one side, we see EU member states who are encouraging the modernization, democratization, the demands for human rights in that greater Middle East and North Africa. On the other side, they are not really treating the source of inspiration of those demands, which is Turkey, with the dignity that she deserves. So I think our European allies have to revisit their position on Turkey's EU aspirations.

Speaker: Hello from the Balkans. I'm from the Balkan press. Not so long ago, several months ago, the Balkan was one of your government priorities, fourth if I remember well, and today what is your current analysis on the situation in the Balkans? Do you see

deterioration of it? And do you intend to be active or more active in that region?

The Hon. Egemen Bagis: Well, I flew to Brussels from Skopje. I enjoyed a very fruitful official visit to Macedonia. Macedonia is a very friendly country as well and Turkey enjoys our relations with that country. And I realized once again that Turkey's influence is very respected, not only in the Middle East but also in the Balkans. And we have a saying in Turkish, as I mentioned during the panel: if your neighbor's house is on fire and if you don't help them put it out, that fire might eventually burn your own home. So what Turkey's trying is to prevent new fires and try to put down some of the current fires in the region, be it to the south of Turkey or north of Turkey or east or west of Turkey.

And Balkans, I think that the stability in the Balkans is very important. Balkans is in the heart of Europe. And as far as Bosnia is concerned, we would like to see Bosnia intact. We would like to see peace

within Bosnia. We would like to see prosperity in Bosnia. And let's be frank. There are different ethnicities, there are different religions throughout the Balkans. Not only in Bosnia, in Macedonia, in Albania, in Kosovo, in Serbia and so forth.

The history should have taught us that we cannot change each other. Neither the Muslims can turn the Croats into Bosnians, nor the Serbians can turn the Croats into Serbian, nor we can change ethnicity or religion. But we do have a choice of respecting each other as we are and try to work on our common denominators. And that's what Turkey has been recommending. That's why we are trying our best to mediate between Serbia and Bosnia and we have come a long way. That's why Turkey values her relations, each and every one, with the Balkan countries, and that's why Turkey believes all of the countries in the Balkans should be integrated with NATO and with European Union. Both Bosnia and Macedonia and Montenegro and all the other countries in the region should become members of

NATO and members of European Union, because that would ensure the continuation of the stability that we would like to achieve.

Speaker: (Inaudible) from *The Observer*. Just to follow up on Bosnia, there was on the panel a remark from Michael Leigh saying that they wanted to cooperate with you on this dossier and the one to Turkey but then somehow this was not reciprocated or that from the Turkish side there were only the old arguments brought gain. How do you respond to that? Or why exactly didn't it work out?

The Hon. Egemen Bagis: Honestly, I don't know what Michael was referring to because I was not the person that he spoke with or he dealt with regarding Bosnia. I'm Turkey's Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator but there is always another side of the coin. If he felt that Turkey was repeating her official line, that was probably because my colleagues, whoever were talking with Michael and Mr. Cooper, had observed that they were chanting the official line of the

commission. And I think we need to be creative and we need to be able to have a very extensive dialogue.

The platform for that dialogue should be the EU summits at the level of presidents and heads of states. For the last four and a half years, neither my president nor my prime minister have been invited to any of these summits and I think that's more of a European problem than a Turkish problem. I think EU ought to listen to Turkey's observations and hear Turkey's recommendations. They might not always agree with our approach, but at least hearing Turkey's view would enrich the European position and they would have more alternatives.

Turkey, as I said, wants to see peace, development, stability, justice, equality, democracy, free market economy, all around her region. And as the most eastern part of the west, and most western part of the east, we have geographical and historical responsibilities to all the countries around us.

Thank you very much.