



# Turkey and the ACS: distant neighbours

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Our distance is bridged by many common values, issues and concerns, bound by common objectives and friendship

Turkey has had constantly developing relations with the ACS since it gained the status of Observer Country of the Association during the Ministerial Council which was convened in Honduras on 7th December 2000. A Framework Cooperation Agreement, signed between Turkey and the ACS on 10th December 2001, has helped determine the various modalities of our relations, while putting our cooperation on a more institutionalised basis.

On 18th September 2008, I presented my Letters of Credentials to HE Luis Fernando Andrade Falla, the Secretary General of the ACS. Throughout this period, during which I have maintained a strong level of collaboration with the Secretary General regarding several areas of cooperation, I have witnessed the continuous development of the Association and observed the excellent work it has accomplished.

Turkey no longer sees geographical distance between our regions as an effective impediment to further deepening our relations. Today, our distance is bridged first of all by the many common values, issues and concerns that we share. Thus, Turkey considers itself geographically far but still a 'neighbour' to the Caribbean, bound by common objectives and friendship. Turkey has the utmost desire to continue strengthening the relations of friendship, solidarity and cooperation with the Greater Caribbean. My Government has instructed me to work towards this goal.

In the era of globalisation, cooperation mechanisms between regions play a key role in achieving development, stability and security. This is the basic principle behind Turkey's relations with the Caribbean. Turkey has the vision of developing a partnership with the ACS. Our endeavours towards cooperation aim at contributing to long-term and comprehensive efforts whose purpose is to establish a common future based on global peace, equality and welfare.

Our common will of expanding and deepening the cooperation between Turkey and the Caribbean States

is a natural result of the increasing importance of Turkey and the ACS in their respective regions.

Today, Turkey, with its geostrategic position, vivid economy, strong tradition of democracy, social dynamism, cultural diversity and well-trained armed forces, has become an island of stability, security and welfare in a region home to several 'frozen' and ongoing crises. Contributing to international peace and security has always been the driving force behind Turkish foreign policy, which is based on founding father Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's principle of "peace at home, peace in the world."

Turkey, with the increasing amount of humanitarian and development aid it has been providing, is considered a 'rising donor country'. We are also contributing to peacekeeping missions worldwide, either run by the United Nations or other international organisations. The effective mediation efforts we have been conducting between sides of different conflicts within and beyond our region are a result of our active foreign policy directed to finding a lasting global peace.

In parallel with its rising political influence, Turkey's economy is also rapidly growing. Turkish GDP has reached US\$620 billion in 2009 and it is the 16th largest economy in the world, with a foreign trade volume of nearly US\$250 billion. In recent years, Turkey has become one of the most attractive countries in the world for foreign direct investment. The total amount of foreign direct investment inflows in the last four years has reached US\$70 billion. Last year, more than 27 million tourists visited Turkey, with a total revenue of more than US\$21 billion.

Within this general framework, we desire to develop constantly deepening relations with the Caribbean States. In the direction of the "Latin America and Caribbean Action Plan" which we put into force in 1998, we continue to carry out works to increase our relations with the multilateral organisations in the region, alongside increasing our bilateral cooperation with the countries in the greater Caribbean area. We believe that the institutionalisation of relations between Turkey and



Caribbean countries will form an appropriate framework for a comprehensive and action-oriented dialogue based on equality and common interests.

We observe with satisfaction the increasing role of the Caribbean region in global politics and trade and its potential to increase its global influence even further. We praise the progress that has been achieved through this long-lived regional cooperation and integration project to transform the economies of the Caribbean States into a single market and to form a framework for a Single Economy. This integration process will enable the regional countries to benefit from the advantages of the greater economic market.

The societal fabric of the Caribbean region, with its ability to join people from three different continents with varying beliefs, cultures and language structures, forms a unique historical example. We believe that this special societal structure forms a model and a source of inspiration to glorify diversity as a humanitarian quality. In a similar way, as Turkey has interacted with different cultures throughout its history, it has also accumulated ample experience in this context. With this tradition, Turkey carries out much needed works in the forum of dialogue among cultures and religions. Being aware of the interest conveyed by the Caribbean countries to the “Alliance of Civilisations” initiative which Turkey co-chairs with Spain, I believe that we can work together to ensure the contributions of ACS countries to this initiative.

We also hope to include the issue of sustainable development in the agenda of Turkish-ACS relations. This will also be consistent with our commitment to reaching the United Nations Millennium Goals. Lending a helping hand to countries who are less fortunate is not only a moral obligation; it also forms a pre-condition for international stability and welfare. Within this context, although Turkey itself is a developing country within the range of middle income brackets, it continues to increase its humanitarian and development aid in parallel to its economic and social development. Initially, the majority of our aid focused on our immediate vicinity. Yet, in time, we have succeeded in extending our aid to reach out to regions including Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean countries.

In the last three years, our official development aid has ranged from US\$600-700 million. When the aid provided by our private sector and non-governmental institutions is included, the total amount of aid corresponding to the same period amounts to US\$1.1-1.7 million annually. We attribute special importance to the problems of

Least Developed Countries, Developing Small Island States and Developing Landlocked Countries in our development aid. We have allocated diverse resources for development projects in these countries.

Turkey can be of assistance in planning and implementing small and medium-sized development projects in Caribbean countries through the channel of the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA). The agenda of the Caribbean is not unknown to Turkey. We want our cooperation to focus on meeting the needs of and solving the problems encountered by the region.

We are aware of the adverse effects of a shrinking global economy on the Caribbean region’s tourism revenues. We are prepared to share our experience and knowledge regarding this sector which is of critical importance to us as well. The rapid acceleration of food and energy prices is another problem encountered by all. Climate change is yet another global threat that requires collaboration. We hope to cooperate with regard to these issues within a structured process of dialogue. This is why I want to underline our wish to collaborate within our dialogue on such issues as climate change, developing the regional capacity of renewable energy sources, problems emanating from tropical storms and hurricanes, rising sea levels resulting in the damage of agricultural production, rising food prices and energy costs.

Until now, Turkey has supported the ACS, especially on the issue of natural disaster risk reduction. This year, our focus of support has moved to another area of great importance: the works of the Caribbean Sea Commission. We believe that efforts made in that respect constitute important and correct steps for the future of the Caribbean States. We will be also focusing on strengthening our cooperation in the field of university education. This year, we increased the number of scholarships for higher education extended by the Turkish Government to the Caribbean States. In fact, Turkey pledges to remain engaged in a creative and imaginative manner to promote and further bolster our present cooperation.

I am told that among the many remarkable dictums of the great Caribbean poet, Derek Walcott of St. Lucia, there is one that would shed light on the philosophy behind our common attitude: “Any serious attempt to try to do something worthwhile is ritualistic.” Please allow me to pledge on behalf of Turkey that at all levels of Turkish society, we feel and shall remain ritualistic about the cooperation which will develop between Turkey and the Greater Caribbean with plenty of contacts and visits on both sides. ■

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