

Turkey's westward march

By **ARZUHAN DOĞAN YALÇINDAĞ**

CHAIRPERSON, DOĞAN GROUP OF COMPANIES



ARZUHAN YALÇINDAĞ started her professional career in 1990 working in a variety of roles at several Doğan Group companies. In 2005 she was appointed the CEO of Doğan TV and Radio. In 2007, she was elected as the first female Chairperson of the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association and held this position until 2010. As of January 2010, she is the Chairperson of Doğan Holding. Ms Yalçındağ is also an active participant in civil society, serving on the boards of prominent Turkish NGOs, such as TEGV, KAGIDER, TÜSEV and the Aydın Doğan Foundation.

About 155 years ago, on 30th March 1856, representatives of leading powers in Europe including the French Empire, the British Empire, the Kingdom of Sardinia and the Russian Empire along with the Ottoman Empire put their signatures under the Treaty of Paris, ending the Crimean War (October 1853-February 1856). One of the most important aspects of the agreement was that the European Powers were recognising the Ottoman Empire as part of Concert European, as a European state. This was a recognition of the modernisation efforts of the Ottoman Empire which had started to convert itself from a despotic medieval state into a contemporary one by recognising the rights of her citizens, accepting to start limiting the powers of the Sultan and initiating Westernisation, although somewhat timidly.

This movement had gained momentum after the War of Independence and the declaration of the Republic of Turkey by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who launched a series of dramatic reforms changing many aspects of daily life from time to calendar, from attire to alphabet, and changed Turkey for good.

Ever since then Turkey had been moving West, embracing common values of the rule of law, Western type of democracy, gender equality and aligning herself with the Western powers by becoming one of the founders of the United Nations and Council of Europe, joining NATO and applying to become a member of the European Communities as early as 1958.

This was in response to the popular aspirations of the Turkish people who had always seen themselves as part of Europe. It was because of this that the Turkish Republic waged a long struggle to be part of the European Football Federation, not of Asia where it could have easily been more successful.

However, this aspiration and desire to join the European Community as it evolved into the European Union did not materialise due to the strenuous times Turkey had to go through from the 1960s-90s, inundated by military interventions, numerous economic crises and a not so well performing democracy and, from time to time, with a not so friendly approach from Europe, residues of which have managed to extend into today's contemporary environment.

When Turkey, as of the end of the 1990s, started

taking a more resolute stance and initiated a set of reforms to comply with the Copenhagen criteria, the scene started changing. Especially after the financial reforms initiated in 2001 to tidy up her faltering economy, Turkey has become more resilient, even to the tsunami of the recent global crisis. In the light of the performance of the economy and the impressive growth rates registered so far, even the staunchest opponents to Turkey's full membership, who had been proposing some fairly unacceptable formulas to evade this decades-old commitment to Europe, started revisiting their approaches.

As the world evolved from a two-superpower model into one super-superpower medium with the sudden demise of the Soviet Union, and after the United States' faltering in the Middle East started giving signals of a dramatic change in the global line-up, giving hints of a new multi-polar world, and as the global economic crisis made the position of the US dollar and euro questionable, in the new global order the voice of a stable and economically more robust Turkey is bound to be heard more clearly.

Here Turkey may offer new opportunities to a Europe which may want to be a major global actor and not be left out of the new global order. A Turkey, with her young and dynamic demographics, well-trained and disciplined work force, a strong industrial base, positioned at a very strategic junction across the energy and trade routes, with good relations in the region which had been the epicentre of the major political and military conflicts since the end of the Cold War, and despite the troubles breaking out near her borders for the last two decades, managing to stay as an island of stability and prosperity, can be much more appealing to Europe.

Europe needs a new generation of visionary leaders who, as in the past, could look forward and grasp the meaning and implications of the new world. When this happens, the relations between Turkey and the EU can take a new turn and move into the fast lane, especially if Turkey evolves along the way into a more democratic society and finds lasting solutions to her domestic problems.

One thing is sure: Turkey is at the top of the list of countries worth watching, and those who see the opportunities Turkey offers and move to grasp this chance will have more say in the future of the world. **F**