

Common legacy, common future

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AHMET ÇALIK

was born into a family active in the textile business since the 1930s. He founded Ortado u Tekstil Ticaret ve Sanayi A. . in 1981 and Calik Holding in 1993 to group together his diverse investments in energy, telecommunications, financial services and construction and media. He was declared worthy of the Turkish Republic Distinguished Service Medal in 1999, Turkish Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs Distinguished Service Medal in June 2002, and Turkish Grand National Assembly Distinguished Service Prize in 2006. He currently serves as Chairman of Calik Holding.

Turkey and Britain share an important common denominator: a grand legacy in the shaping of world history. As two nations that were once heir to the world's most glorious empires, the Turks and the British have their own unique and often confident way of conducting business.

This is not to say that these two countries have always walked side by side in the grand march of civilizations. They had their own cultural and religious dynamics, political mechanisms and intellectual processes. Yet their imperial legacies allowed them to approach each other with more tolerance and confidence. Both know how to deal with diversity and how to benefit from it. In their imperial rule they have always been able to incorporate the periphery into the centre. Both empires flourished by enriching themselves from their multiculturalism.

It is precisely here that we see the dynamics of an encounter of Turkish and British civilizations rather than a clash of one. The latest encounter of Turks and the British is without a doubt the most fertile one. Britain is now the most ardent supporter of Turkey in the EU. British leaders have been the most vocal defendants of a Europe that should see Turkey as a natural and strategic part.

It is in this context that the decision of Chatham House to award its prize to President Abdullah Gül carries an especially meaningful and strong message to world opinion makers. Under President Gül's leadership, Turkey truly became a most important regional player, and Britain, as is usually the case, was one of the first to realise and recognise this transformation. The recognition of President Gül by Chatham House is not only an acknowledgment of his accomplishments as a politician and a statesman but also a celebration of the new heights of the relations between Turkey and the United Kingdom to which President Gül has contributed greatly during his tenures in office.

As business people, we are fully aware that in today's global world, the economic prowess of a country integrated into global markets is closely interrelated with its foreign policy. In this new age of uncertainties we all have become stakeholders in each other's welfare and stability. Since the end of the Cold War and with the beginning of a new global era we, as the Turkish business community, have been encouraged by the new vision of Turkish diplomacy around the world.

In recent years Turkey's emerging role as a hub in its region and its image as a rising star in the global sense also empowers its investors around the world. Our trade and investment relations have greatly amplified in recent years creating a new contiguous market between Europe and the Middle East, the Caucasus and the Central Asian region. Energy is one of the leading areas whereby Europe and the resource-rich Caspian basin as well as the Middle East will eventually be linked through Turkey via new oil and gas pipelines that will satisfy Europe's growing energy demand.

Thanks to its rapprochement with its near abroad, its zero problem policy with its neighbours, and its proactive engagement with different spheres of influence, we now see a Turkey with a distinct global vision and extraordinary potential to create stability in its region. President Gül, with his grasp of the region's dynamics and his embrative style has been very successful in utilizing his country's true potential in the world scene.

Turkey's relations with the UK constitute one of the most solid elements of Turkey's drive to become a full member to the EU. The bilateral relations between Turkey and the UK have a multi-dimensional character due to strong historical ties. On 22-23 October 2007, a Strategic Partnership Document was adopted between Turkey and the UK. This document reflects the multidimensional relations between the two countries and sets out mutual goals to deepen the existing cooperation.

As Chairman of a business group that is focused on energy transportation among other areas, I believe the best example of the solidity of Turkey-UK relations are the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipeline, both being projects of historic magnitude and the product of the joint vision and efforts of our countries.

President Gül has displayed unwavering leadership and determination in all these areas and efforts throughout his career in public life. Turkey is at the brink of an extraordinary intellectual, financial and political leap and President Gul is keen on seizing the moment and taking his nation forward. Like her British counterpart, Turkey with its impressive imperial legacy, sees itself ready to take its new place in the global scene. A grand European Civilization will only be possible if Europe utilises this latest encounter with Turkey and follow the steps of Britain in recognising a grand opportunity for cooperation and growth. 