

11 Nisan 2011

Over-indebtedness of states: a danger for democracy and human rights

Ms KELEŞ (*Turkey*) – “Over-indebtedness of states: a danger for democracy and human rights” is a very good report with a very interesting title. It is interesting because the relationship between over-indebtedness of states and democracy, as well as human rights, is often neglected and not brought to people’s attention. Therefore, some governments claim that there is no problem if finance can be found, but this is not true. Financing debt only by borrowing or with hot money from abroad makes over-indebtedness inevitable. This means governments either being obliged to curtail necessary investment and expenditure or paying a lot of interest, transferring the burden to future generations. This is not fair on future generations, because they are not the ones who spent the borrowed money. Also, no government has the right to endanger democracy and human rights through bad economic and political governance.

In this century, economic recovery measures should not endanger democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The report rightly says that funding for education, housing and health care should not be decreased and that the most vulnerable members of society, such as women, children and the elderly, should not suffer further from the measures that states take. It is also clear that we cannot realise human rights as we should if we do not consider the problems of economic and social rights.

Globalisation is a reality of this century. Capital today is not stationary: it goes from one country to another, and there are also multinational companies. It is also true that the liberalisation of foreign trade helps to vitalise economies and increase competition, but every country has a budget and a production capacity. If you cannot produce goods of comparable quality and cost, you cannot make enough money to pay back what you have borrowed.

Globalisation, liberalisation and leaving economic activity only to the initiative and entrepreneurship of the private sector cannot be a solution to over-indebtedness, no matter how good the international organisations set up to solve the crisis are. At the core of the solution is a good banking system, the presence of developing economies, the ability to produce export goods at a similar cost and of a similar quality to developed countries, good guiding of the public sector and, last but not least, good governance.

12 Nisan 2011

The religious dimension of intercultural dialogue

Professor GÖRMEZ (*Chairperson of the Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey*) – Dear President, Excellencies, honourable spiritual leaders, distinguished members, ladies and gentlemen, I greet you with my deepest regards. It is a special honour for me to be here with you all and to be given the opportunity to be part of this ongoing sharing of intercultural dialogue, which we all need for a more peaceful future.

I would like to begin by thanking God Almighty, who blessed us as human beings, guided us towards a life to be shared in justice and compassion and gave us the ability to live together in peace. It is he who taught us peace and brotherhood, justice and honesty, patience, courage and forgiveness. Praise be upon all prophets, including Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and our prophet Mohammed, from whom we inherited the ultimate values of compassion, love, justice, law and order. We learned from them all that the path of these teachers of wisdom is common to the depth of all our cultures and religions.

Dear friends, as you all know, in acknowledging the contribution of religions and religious institutions to intercultural dialogue and to the enhancement of multiculturalism, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has produced the White Paper, “Living together as equals in dignity”. Now, we have a report on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue. Please allow me to share with you my happiness and my hope that, in response to the report, the exchange of opinions by five religious traditions will considerably contribute to the future of not only Europe but the whole world.

I also find it meaningful that the report has been produced at exactly the time when a number of European politicians are competing with each other to declare that multiculturalism has failed. It should be remembered that the problems that the European Union faces, as well as the challenges that jeopardise cultural diversity, cannot necessarily be attributed to religions themselves. The inability of politics to go beyond its own limits cannot be overlooked. If and when politicians are ready to engage in dialogue with religions and religious institutions, they will then be in a position to contribute to society as well as to politics.

The crisis that humanity is facing is not only an economic, social, political and cultural one but a comprehensive metaphysical and spiritual crisis. The lack of knowledge about religions and the misuse and abuse of religious ideals also play a role in blocking recognition of the crisis. Let us remember that religion is a phenomenon that speaks directly to the consciousness of the individual and prepares him or her to be sincere, fair, compassionate and altruistic towards others.

It is through that preparation that religion shapes every soul for a culturally diverse life.

Although religions may differ in their approach to cultural diversity, their capacity to contribute to our social life is significant in many ways. Islam places cultural and religious diversity at the centre of its jurisprudential and moral world view. It does not attribute religious authority either to individuals or to institutions, but leaves it to the free choice of community and normative values of knowledge. That was the background of the diversity and openness built by Islam in history, and it can still guide us in our contemporary efforts to achieve intercultural living.

Divine teachings, from those of Adam to those of Mohammed – peace be upon them – are nothing other than a call to the ultimate meaningfulness of life, which is the opposite of nihilism, fatalism and pessimism. They are nothing other than a call for humility against arrogance towards God, for humanity, justice and fairness against exploitation and oppression, for living together in dignity against discrimination and inequities, for sharing and not wasting against consumptionism and extravagance, and for family-centred life against promiscuity. That is the core message of the Ten Commandments of Moses, the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus, and the Farewell Sermon by Mohammed – peace be upon them all. They all preached the same message over and over again.

“Living together as equals in dignity” has been the fundamental message of Islam, and it has been practised by Muslims for centuries. Thanks to that, Islamic civilisation has produced societies that have been so multi-ethnic, multicultural and multireligious for centuries that no other nations have shown any sign of such a capacity for diversity. However, it is questionable whether Muslims today remember that honourable history well enough to introduce the same vision of diversity into their contemporary life in the face of the confusions imposed by modernity.

If we are able to speak of a common European cultural heritage – as mentioned in many documents from the European Union and the Council of Europe – we should also be able to acknowledge the significant contribution of Islam to that heritage. One way of acknowledging its contribution is to free ourselves from the Eurocentric view of history which ignores the place of Islam in Europe, jumping from ancient Greece to the Middle Ages and then to the new Age of Enlightenment.

In hoping to benefit from the rich experience of religions for the purpose of intercultural dialogue, we should remember that a vision of a multicultural society will not be made reality by external interventions to reshape and redefine religious systems. On the contrary, individuals and groups who experience “otherisation” should be freely allowed to improve and express themselves within their own traditional dynamics. There will be no other way of determining our common future and active participation in society.

When we consider the ways in which Islam and religions in general are portrayed, we should ask the following questions. Who, with a sincere heart and a sober mind, can consent to the mocking and caricaturing of his or her religion? Is it possible to save ourselves simply by condemning those who legitimise every means of “fighting for religion”? Are those who allow religion to be used and abused to legitimise exploitation, discrimination and conflict less guilty of provoking belittling, hatred and cultural terror?

It is the intellectual and moral duty of religious leaders, scholars and decision makers not to sacrifice Europe’s civilised and cultural richness for the sake of hegemonic discourse. We must continue our mission to enhance our societies’ ability to achieve a better way of living together. With that hope, I pray to God to bless us with a bright future for living together as equals in dignity, and wish you all the best of success in your efforts to promote our highest common values.

Ms MEMECAN (*Turkey*) – I congratulate the rapporteur on taking such a positive approach and, in particular, on emphasising humility in her introductory speech. Human beings from all walks of life have been trying to learn to live together for ages. As she rightly pointed out, having developed many civilisations, we still urgently need to create a new culture of living together. Obviously, we have not managed to learn to live together. People continue to be the victims of abuse based on differences. We should use every opportunity to prevent people from falling into this trap. Abusers use religious beliefs and sacred values to create chaos and unrest. Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and Christianophobia are recent examples of such provocations.

This report alerts us to the danger of falling into those traps and urges us to consider living in peace through mutual respect. Positive and constructive statements by religious leaders are vital in eliminating the seeds of hatred among people and in urging them to understand and respect each other. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the religious dignitaries who participated in our session for their inspiring speeches.

Religious faith, other faith or non-faith-based establishments unite people. Belonging is a comforting feeling for many people. People find peace in their faith and in the religion they adhere to. The variety of religions also points to a variety of differences among different groups of people. Differences are the basis for defining the other. People have a tendency to fear the other, but our differences make our environment vibrant, dynamic and productive. We should not try to eliminate our differences or to impose our understanding on others. Universal human rights should be the guidelines. We have to learn to enjoy and respect our differences and the other. Therefore, the most important value we need to instil is a respect for difference, pluralism and diversity, especially in our children. Unity in diversity

should always be kept alive and embraced by everyone. We should share experiences of good models of pluralist teaching and promote programmes of exchange, especially among young people, as the rapporteur very rightly recommends. With the new demographic scene in Europe and as the whole world in fact becomes closer we need mutual respect more than ever to live good lives.

Communication from the Committee of Ministers to the Parliamentary Assembly

Mr DAVUTOĞLU (*Minster of Foreign Affairs of Turkey and Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers*) – Mr President, distinguished members of the Parliamentary Assembly, ladies and gentlemen, I welcome this new opportunity to address your Assembly just a few weeks before the ministerial session marking the high point of our chairmanship on 11 May.

Some months ago, I spoke to you about our determination, which I believe is shared by all member states, to restore our Organisation to its rightful place on the European scene, firmly convinced of the relevance of its values.

Recent developments have since shown that those values are more central than ever to people's expectations. The important events of recent months on the southern shores of the Mediterranean and in the Middle East have been an eloquent reminder. Among other things, they provide an opportunity for us in the Council of Europe to forge a strong partnership founded on trust with those countries, for our common interest and benefit. We must not miss that opportunity. We have a duty to do what is within our power and remit to help those who show a desire for freedom and the will to live in a democratic society that respects human rights and the rule of law.

Given the Council of Europe's expertise in these areas, I paid a visit to Tunisia in February with Secretary General Jagland, with a view to offering our Organisation's assistance for establishing a democratic transition process, fully respecting the sovereignty of the country. I am delighted to see that our proposals were well received and have taken tangible form.

In mid-March, a delegation from the Council of Europe's Venice Commission travelled to Tunisia, where it laid down the basis, with the competent authorities, for co-operation on future constitutional and electoral reforms. Encouraged by the member states, the Turkish chairmanship is providing both political and financial support for that co-operation.

Beyond the question of Tunisia, the Committee of Ministers has engaged in a broader discussion on establishing a coherent strategy for a neighbourhood policy. The core mandate of the Council of Europe is and will remain geographically

focused on Europe, but in today's increasingly globalised world, we cannot simply be indifferent to the regions around us. Withdrawing into ourselves cannot be the solution. On the contrary, it is by paying closer attention to Europe's neighbourhood that the Organisation's mission can better be fulfilled.

In this context, the ramifications for our member states of a possible mass arrival of asylum seekers from the regions affected are particularly important. What the Council of Europe could and should do in such a situation has already been on the agenda of the Committee of Ministers. On 3 March, the Ministers' Deputies considered the question on the Secretary General's initiative. Two important points were stressed: on the one hand, the priority that should be given to respect for the human rights of those who have fled or might flee the southern Mediterranean to seek asylum in Europe; on the other hand, consideration for the legitimate interests of the member states. In this context, the principles of solidarity and burden sharing between member states were emphasised, as well as the need for co-ordination with the other international stakeholders.

I myself had the opportunity to stress the importance of co-ordinating the efforts made at the level of the European institutions during talks in Brussels on 4 March, with the first Vice-President of the European Commission and High Representative of the European Union, Catherine Ashton, together with Secretary General Jagland.

On a separate note, the high-level dialogue meeting of the two organisations with Ms Ashton, which took place in a very constructive atmosphere, was also an opportunity to discuss a number of topics of common interest, in particular, co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union, as well as the prospects regarding accession by the Union to the European Convention on Human Rights.

I am pleased to see your Assembly taking the same approach, which is geared to support and assistance for the emerging democracies on the southern shores of the Mediterranean and also those in the Middle East and central Asia. Through the "partner for democracy" status, you are offering those countries access to the activities of the Assembly in exchange for their commitment to progress towards the values advocated by the Council of Europe.

The issues I have just raised as well as other topics will be on the agenda of the ministerial session that we are organising in Istanbul on 10-11 May. In particular, we are convinced that the Council of Europe has a leading role to play in fostering conditions for living together as harmoniously as possible in our European pluralist societies. Europe must make its cultural, linguistic, religious and social diversity a strength and a catalyst for sparking energy, rather than a source of division or even confrontation. As I stressed in my previous address to your plenary session last January, intolerance and extremism are on the rise everywhere. On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on 21 March, I

expressed my strong confidence in the Council of Europe's determination to pursue its work through all the means at its disposal to ensure that no one is subjected to discrimination or exposed to hatred because of their race, colour, sex, language, religion, origin or for other reasons.

In this process, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, as the only body established in Europe to monitor combating racism and racial discrimination, which are unfortunately still prevalent in European societies, deserves our special tribute. Within its limited resources and secretariat, the ECRI strives to carry out its important mandate. We should all support its valuable activities.

In today's world, people increasingly become the target of discrimination and intolerance, leading to hatred and violence, just because they are perceived as different. As I said in January, we, the Council of Europe members, cannot just stand idly by and, indeed, we have not. In this context, we expect the report of the Group of Eminent Persons on "Living together in 21st century Europe – pan-European project", which will be presented during the ministerial session in Istanbul, to deliver innovative proposals to guide the action that the Council of Europe might take in future to promote the values of tolerance, respect and mutual understanding.

I know that the Assembly has a keen interest in this question and I congratulate you on the initiative of bringing together several eminent guests from the religious world today to debate the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue. I understand that the debate this morning was lively and enriching. Promoting mutual knowledge and respect, built on common values of human rights, must mobilise all efforts within this Organisation and its member states.

The second major item on the agenda for the ministerial session will be the future of the European Court of Human Rights. As you know, we are organising a high-level conference on this topic in Izmir, on 26 and 27 April. Through that conference, our main goal is to further the reform process that was launched by the Interlaken conference in February 2010. The present difficulties challenging the long-term effectiveness of the control mechanism set up by the European Convention on Human Rights are our common concern. The Izmir conference will be the venue, inter alia, first, to take stock, in accordance with the Interlaken action plan, of the proposals that do not require amendments to the Convention and, secondly, having regard to recent developments, to take requisite measures to continue the reform process. The conclusions of the Izmir conference will be examined and given the appropriate follow-up at the Istanbul ministerial session in the form of concrete decisions.

We very much hope that the Izmir conference will identify measures that will contribute in a comprehensive manner to providing an effective and lasting

response to the recurrent – and even, growing – problem of the current volume of cases pending before the Court, so that the effectiveness of the Convention mechanism can be further strengthened.

Another project to which the Turkish chairmanship is greatly attached is the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. Thanks also to the opinion issued, through the diligence of your Standing Committee, work on this important convention was finalised in time, and we were able to adopt it last week. The convention will be opened for signature at the ministerial session in Istanbul.

I take this opportunity to laud the Assembly's active involvement in the different campaigns mounted by the Council of Europe, whether to combat violence against women, act against trafficking in human beings or protect children's rights. The Assembly has a key role to play, particularly in raising awareness of the importance of ratifying and implementing Council of Europe conventions in the relevant circles in member states.

The Istanbul ministerial session will also provide an opportunity for an initial assessment of the follow-up to the Strasbourg Declaration on Roma. In connection with this, the chairmanship welcomes the operational measures taken by the Secretary General, in particular the recent launch of a project to train Roma mediators in Council of Europe countries. We await the interim report that he will present in Istanbul. In view of the importance of the topics on the Istanbul ministerial session's agenda, high-level participation will be all the more important, as we expect the ministerial session to reaffirm the Council of Europe's unique political role as a pan-European forum for devising common responses to the numerous challenges facing our member states.

The Committee of Ministers pays particular attention to the development of the reform process of the Council of Europe – an issue to which the Assembly is also committed and that holds its interest. I know that a discussion on this question was held at the last meeting of the Joint Committee in January this year. Since then work has progressed, and on 6 April the Secretary General presented detailed proposals for priorities for the programme and budget for 2012-13 to the Ministers' Deputies. More in-depth discussions on these proposals will continue in the coming weeks.

Turning now to current political questions, a number of issues continue to hold the attention of the Committee of Ministers. In particular, I would like to mention the question of Belarus. Unfortunately, since I last addressed you there has been no progress towards adopting the values upheld by the Council of Europe. This has led only to the widening of the gap between Belarus and the rest of the democratic European family. Despite the difficult situation, we do not want to close the door on this country. We still hope that Belarus will join the family of European

countries brought together around the values championed by the Council of Europe, and that it will give tangible signs of willingness to this end.

I would also like to say a few words about the political situation in Albania. At the request of the Central Electoral Commission of Albania, the Committee of Ministers approved a scheme to assist with the preparation of local elections to be held in May. I very much hope that these elections will take place in a calm atmosphere. I once again appeal to the sense of responsibility of all Albania's political movements, in order to settle their differences through dialogue.

Another situation we are closely following is that in Bosnia and Herzegovina. You visited the country last month, Mr President, and I pay tribute to your commitment and efforts aimed at the main political stakeholders there. Unfortunately, no central government has been formed since the elections of October 2010. This political stalemate can only be harmful to the country's stability and prosperity. It is important that the political forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina mobilise their efforts in a constructive manner and assume their responsibility to fill this gap without further delay.

Finally, the follow-up to the August 2008 conflict in Georgia remains on the Committee of Ministers' political agenda. Last week the Secretary General presented his new six-month report, which gives a detailed picture of the situation on the ground, reviewing the activities carried out by the Council of Europe. As I indicated in my presentation last January, the Committee of Ministers' chairmanship hopes that these activities will continue to develop for the benefit of all individuals in need as victims of the conflict.

Before I conclude, I would like to refer to the events that we have organised and supported since the end of January, in the framework of our chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. We have focused in particular on strengthening the Council of Europe's monitoring mechanisms – in connection with which we organised a seminar last February in Istanbul, together with the Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, on the human rights dimension of migration in Europe. This provided an opportunity to debate the main divergences between migration law and practice in Europe, and human rights protection standards, as well as to discuss the best ways of helping states to review and develop their migration policies.

We also organised a seminar last month in Antalya on improving detention conditions, in conjunction with the Committee for the Prevention of Torture. The Council of Europe has valuable expertise in this field, and the seminar provided an opportunity to showcase the scope and content of the work carried out by our Organisation in the prisons sphere, with a special focus on the role of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture.

Finally, again in the framework of our chairmanship, and in acknowledgment of the important role that NGOs play in many issues of concern to our societies, such as dealing with the resurgence of intolerance and discrimination, we also hosted a forum of the conference of INGOs – international non-governmental organisations – of the Council of Europe on the theme “New multicultural challenges: how can NGOs play their part?” in Istanbul in March. The forum aimed to give a civil society dimension to the Council of Europe’s activities and projects in the field of intercultural dialogue, according to the practical experience of the NGOs concerned. It highlighted the importance of the civil society dimension in projects and initiatives to promote living together in Europe. In that respect, the forum also complemented the work of the group of eminent persons.

Mr President, distinguished members of the Parliamentary Assembly, today is the last time that I will address your Assembly in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee of Ministers. I would therefore like to express my deep gratitude for the constant support that you have shown to our chairmanship. I hope that the fresh impetus that we have sought to give the Organisation will be maintained in the future. I am sure that your Assembly will continue to mobilise its efforts in that direction alongside the coming chairmanships, notably that of Ukraine, which will take up where we left off, and to which I express my best wishes and our support.

The religious dimension of intercultural dialogue (*resumed debate*)

Ms KELEŞ (*Turkey*) – As the report states, most people accept that we should create a new culture of living together, which necessitates the acceptance of everyone’s equal dignity and adherence to the principles of democracy and human rights. If we want to realise a successful intercultural dialogue, we should not give the impression that one religion is more apt to terrorist activities, radicalism and fundamentalism than others.

Some of the reports prepared by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe give the impression that fundamentalism or radicalism belong exclusively to the Muslim religion. For example, they use the word “fundamentalism” as Islamic fundamentalism. If one uses the word “fundamentalism” together with Islam only, it is natural for people to think that fundamentalists are found only in Islam, whereas there are fundamentalists and radicals in every country and in every religion. In some of those reports, a similar impression is given with regard to terrorism. I am sure that distinguished members of the Parliamentary Assembly are preparing those reports with very good intentions but I agree with the rapporteur that instead of emphasising what separates us, we should build on what unites us. I also agree that all religious authorities should openly and unreservedly condemn intolerance, discrimination, hate and violence.

Rather than encouraging intercultural dialogue, I believe in the merit of training people about all religions and about religious philosophy in the same courses to show them how similar the values and principles of different religions are. Once people are trained about the main principles and philosophy of religious culture, religious diversity will not be a source of anxiety, fear and tension.

I think so because every dialogue has at least two sides. They try to reconcile the differences but they see each other as the other side. This may go on as an open-ended process. If the people within a country or a union accept democracy, human rights and the rule of law, I think it is enough to integrate with the community. People coming from different countries live together in peace in another country such as the United States. There is no reason why people from different religions cannot do it. We should be objective in our evaluations. We should train ourselves not to be biased towards a religion or a country, and we should respect freedom of thought. I congratulate the rapporteur on preparing a comprehensive report.

Mr ÖZDEN (*Turkey*) – I thank our rapporteur, Ms Anne Brasseur, for preparing this report on such an important and cross-cutting issue. As she set out thoroughly in her report, the diversity that is characteristic of our society is increasingly, and wrongly, considered to be a source of tension and divisions that jeopardise solidarity and cohesion among us. The Council of Europe model is, by definition, a multicultural one that has evolved based on the values of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, tolerance and mutual respect. In recent years, however, we have witnessed an unacceptable tendency in Europe to stigmatise, alienate and discriminate against particular groups, labelling them as “other”, due to cultural differences.

Diversity is a risky asset for societies. It can be the catalyst for social cohesion and democracy, but if we start to perceive it from the viewpoint of “us and the others”, it will be a source of tension and division as it has been in Europe for several years.

The problem, as stated in the report, often lies in our attitude to diversity. We should see it as an asset uniting rather than separating us, and we should consider differences normal. Tolerance should be our guide when it comes to living together with all our differences. Intolerance is not a spontaneous fact in our lives; it is a behavioural pattern acquired in time, and so is tolerance.

First and foremost, we must learn to respect different beliefs, and to that end it is important for the various religious communities to recognise each other. This will be the first step towards initiating a true dialogue between people of all beliefs and views. A new culture of living together based on tolerance can be attained notably through education, which can make a decisive contribution to the promotion of human rights values and, particularly, of attitudes and behaviour. With that

conviction in mind, I join the rapporteur in calling for the religious institutions to be invited to consider together, within the framework of inter-religious dialogue, the most appropriate way of training the holders of religious responsibilities in knowledge and understanding of other religions and convictions and in openness, dialogue and collaboration between religious communities.

The Assembly is best fitted to contribute to the promotion of a new culture of living together. In that context, I welcome the initiative of the Turkish chairmanship, namely the establishment of the Group of Eminent Persons, which is working on the definition of a new concept of living together.

The Council of Europe has developed a wide set of norms and standards for the protection of human rights as well as the enhancement of tolerance and intercultural dialogue. I believe that its truly pan-European character can allow it to deal more effectively with this issue.

13 Nisan 2011

Address by Mr Erdoğan, Prime Minister of Turkey

Mr ERDOĞAN (*Prime Minister of Turkey*) expressed his pleasure at addressing the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the oldest parliamentary forum of the people of Europe. His address coincided with a meaningful date in Turkey, since 61 years ago, on 13 April 1950, the Republic of Turkey had ratified the statute of the Council of Europe. Thus, he was honoured to speak before the Assembly, currently headed by one of his compatriots, as the Prime Minister of Turkey, a founding member of the Organisation and holding the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. The Council of Europe had contributed greatly to the strengthening of democratic stability on the continent: the Council of Europe's respect for human dignity was to be commended and members of the Assembly should be wished success in continuing their work, which had been going on for 60 years.

He himself had addressed the Council of Europe five years ago on the Alliance of Civilizations. The Assembly had recently discussed the religious aspect of intercultural dialogue. Following the introduction of the Alliance of Civilizations, more than 100 countries had become a group of friends of the Alliance of Civilizations which had led to global interest and had played an important role internationally. In their understanding of each other, the Christian and Muslims worlds had been greatly shaped by the crusades, which had always been seen as the cause of prejudice and misunderstanding. But it was necessary to look at the other dimensions of the crusades, since they had also resulted in two cultures, two civilisations and two religions meeting and beginning to impact on one another. There had been effective interaction in many areas including music, science, language, art, and even cooking, and this interaction was at the root of both Western and Eastern civilisation. The history of the crusades was not just one of war and conflict but also of cultural interaction: even the armies had engaged in commercial activity! The broader history of Europe was no different, in that it could not be interpreted solely through conflict. Those who interpreted it in this way would be unable to build a peaceful future. The Council of Europe and the European Union were the most significant indications that history should not be interpreted through division. The whole world was striving for peace and these two organisations, both envied by the rest of the world, should further elevate the common values everyone shared.

Increased racism was a pressing concern for people living around Europe. It was sad that polarisation continued to deepen. Politicians had the responsibility of developing the leadership and good sense to prevent this. The oppression of fundamental rights for purposes of demagoguery or to win an election was an example of injustice which caused harm both throughout Europe and beyond, not just in the areas where such oppression occurred. Turkey was the only country to

have adopted secularism while having a predominantly Muslim population and had proved to the world that secularism, democracy and Islam could exist side by side. It was ironic that secularism was now being debated in Europe and being turned into an element that restricted freedom. Religious intolerance should give place to undisputed tolerance. To use religious freedom as a political tool was dangerous. The importance of universal values, such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law, was greater today than in the past. People's expectation of these rights transcended Europe and echoed across the globe. In a global world, it was impossible to establish islands of stability and order. Capital did not recognise borders and nor did problems.

A world in which one part became ever richer and another part became ever poorer was not a world we could live in, or live for. It was unsustainable. If Europe withdrew into itself, these universal values would be impossible. Such a Europe could not safeguard or promote these values even for itself.

Europe should not be deaf to the calls for freedom from the Middle East and North Africa. To claim that only some deserve democracy and fundamental rights and freedoms, or to say that democracy was premature for certain societies, was as dangerous as racism. Some people only saw what was under the ground, but they should listen to the calls for universal values and act without calculating their own interests. It was important to see the things as they were: not only the oil wells, but also the tragedies in the Middle East and North Africa.

The idea that democracy could not exist in the Middle East had been shown to be false. All arguments against democracy based on differences of culture or civilisation were wrong: to highlight ethnic or religious differences was contrary to the spirit of democracy and the will of the people. The last thing he wanted to see was conflicts or violence. It was essential that the only outside involvement was humanitarian, not military. No one wanted to see a new Iraq or Afghanistan in North Africa and the Middle East.

The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan had opened wounds, and the situation in Libya and Palestine should be approached carefully and with universal values in mind. It was very important to share the values of the Council of Europe with neighbouring countries.

In Tunisia, the activity of the Council of Europe was timely and impressive. Secretary General Jagland and the Turkish Foreign Minister had visited Tunisia, and the President of the Assembly had had important contacts there. Tunisia was trying to create a democracy. In Egypt, the transition to democracy and governance by a civil majority was important. It was not easy to move from autocracy to democracy, but the ground was being laid for this.

Turkey supported UN Security Council [Resolutions 1970](#) and 1973 on Libya. These resolutions should guarantee the territorial integrity of Libya and the prosperity of its people. Turkey was following developments in Bahrain and had made contact with all parties to try to resolve the situation. Stability in the region, in Syria, Jordan and Yemen, was also important, and work was under way to ensure developments continued in the right direction and at the right speed.

Turkey was a country which could speak to all countries, faiths and ethnic groups in the region. Turkey could play a role in establishing and maintaining peace. It was a founding member of the Council of Europe, was in talks with the European Union on accession, and had important regional ties. Turkey was working for peace, stability and order. Turkey did not take sides, act with its own interests at heart, or seek a role. Turkey's work for peace demonstrated its importance for the European Union, and Turkish accession was vital to the European Union. The issue of Turkish membership should not be used in domestic politics or elections. Turkey could take the initiative in geographic regions such as the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East and North Africa.

Turkey was overcoming the effects of the financial crisis, with 8.9 % growth in 2010, and was now the fastest growing country in Europe. It had the 17th largest economy in the world and the sixth largest economy in Europe, with a GDP of \$736 billion. Although not obliged to, Turkey had met two of the four Maastricht criteria, on the budget deficit and on debt burden. This was better than most European countries. To prevent Turkey's accession to the European Union for populist or artificial reasons was foolish. Turkey needed the European Union and the European Union needed Turkey. Some saw the Turkish situation differently and were against accession for political reasons. This was an injustice to Turkey, to European Union values and to all European citizens. The example of the customs union had proved Turkey's worth to the European Union. Turkey expected that the membership issue would be dealt with fairly.

Since the end of 2002, Turkey had achieved historic reforms, especially in the area of democratisation. The government had focused on combating corruption and poverty, and was continuing this successful work. The government had also worked to lift restrictions on freedom. Freedoms had been strengthened in the last decade, and many issues were now discussed freely that could not have been discussed a decade ago. There was zero tolerance of torture, and barriers to freedom of expression had been removed. Some had alleged that there were restrictions on freedom of expression, but this was wrong. In the past, the media and the press had taken instructions from criminal gangs and the mafia, but now the press was free, and freely criticised anyone and everyone. Disputes were also resolved openly. Some believed that restrictions on the press were the cause of arrests. In Europe, there were no journalists or newspapers which encouraged a coup d'état. In Turkey, 26 journalists had been detained or arrested, but not because of their journalistic activities. He had had a meeting on this issue with the Secretary General, and an

envoy would be sent to Turkey to see the realities on the ground and that these people were involved with organised crime. This should lead to more objective information being made available.

The deep-rooted changes that had been occurring around us gave us great responsibility. We should be on the side of democracy, human rights and the rule of law and against conflict, oppression of violence, and injustice. The Council of Europe and the international community should stand together on these principles.

14 Nisan 2011

Urgent debate: the large-scale arrival of irregular migrants, asylum seekers and refugees on Europe's southern shores

Ms MEMECAN (*Turkey*) – I congratulate the rapporteur, Ms Strik, on this comprehensive report on an alarming humanitarian issue. I am glad that the report was put together by a woman, as I see a humanitarian perspective superseding economic and political concerns. I also congratulate the Council of Europe's Secretary General and the Committee of Ministers on taking immediate action on the possibility of a major influx of people fleeing northern Africa, even before it happened. People in Africa and the Middle East are in the process of transforming their countries into democratic regimes. It is a painful, violent and chaotic but hopeful period for those people. They are struggling to instil European values into their societies. Europe should be there for them during this period. The result will be mutually beneficial. Peace in the region is peace at home.

There are immediate humanitarian consequences of these struggles, and Europe should consider all necessary long and short-term measures detailed in the report to deal with the catastrophic humanitarian emergencies. Tunisians and Libyans whose lives are in danger for political or economic reasons are fleeing their countries, but they risk not being able to make it. Their trips must be a nightmare. We cannot ignore those people's suffering and tell them to go back home just as they arrive on our shores. We should and can give them a break. There are many means of hosting these people temporarily until it is safer for them to return. Their accommodation will cost us time, money and energy, but in this day and age, we cannot escape from this basic responsibility and turn our backs on these people. We can all afford to share our bread and provide them with their basic needs.

All European states should be ready and willing to respond to this humanitarian challenge unilaterally as well as in co-ordination with other nations. Those countries who do not hesitate to take unilateral military action should be the pioneers who provide protection and aid to the people who are affected. International co-operation and co-ordination will help to deliver timely and efficient responses. Europe should be a good host, but it should also be alert to those who intend to abuse our good will, especially by way of trafficking. An orchestrated international mechanism can give effective priority to humanitarian aspects while also keeping member states vigilant to the possibility of abuses. We are faced with a tragic situation of unknown magnitude, but it is manageable if we have the will.

Rural women in Europe

Ms KELEŞ (*Turkey*) – I congratulate the rapporteur on her excellent work and the rapporteur of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs on her contribution.

This is a very well-prepared report which brings into focus the special position of rural women in Europe. It is undeniable that women all over the world suffer from discrimination and an inability to exercise their economic, social and political rights on an equal basis with men, and that they are confronted with violence both at home and outside. It is also true that their situation is aggravated by globalisation and economic crises, as well as crises such as war.

Urbanisation takes place in both developed and developing countries. Cities attract people as a result of their infrastructure and the opportunities that they provide in employment, education and health care. That causes depopulation in rural areas, which leads to a vicious circle of unemployment, fewer education and health services, and poor transport infrastructure.

The worldwide trend is that women have fewer opportunities to obtain employment and gain access to credits and social security, health care and social services, even when they live in cities. It is usually the men who own property and have the advantage when it comes to inheritance rights. It is clear from the fact that only 1% of the world's property is owned by women, although they make up 50% of the world's population, that the problems of rural women and, indeed, the problems of women in general are not peculiar to certain countries or continents. Most people – even those who appear to take a sensitive approach to democracy and human rights – do not seem to consider that a serious problem, but it is a serious problem, and it is a problem involving democracy and human rights.

Globalisation and liberalisation are the important realities of the century in which we live, but in developing countries, research and economic capacity are not sufficient to produce industrial goods at the price and of the quality of those in developed countries. Therefore, developing countries should work more on industrial investment and developing their real economies. That will help to develop not just the agricultural sector but the industrial sector and to solve problems such as unemployment, because the industrial sector is the only sector that creates increasing employment opportunities.

In general, rural women work in agriculture without payment. As the report points out, they are vulnerable to violence, including so-called honour crimes as well as domestic violence and trafficking in human beings. Solving those problems is both a big challenge and a duty that we must undertake if we really want the implementation of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Ms MEMECAN (*Turkey*) – I thank the rapporteur for her work on this excellent report and for providing a road map for member states on how they can improve the lives of rural women.

I would like to take this opportunity to talk about Turkey's initiatives, which can be considered best practice in empowering Turkish rural women, by developing policies in health, education and employment.

With education campaigns for girls in rural areas under the leadership and sponsorship of our First Lady, the primary school enrolment rate rose to 99.3%. One of the most effective campaigns has been the conditional cash transfer for education, which is given to the most needy parts of the population. The amount paid per student is higher for girls than it is for boys and it is higher for higher education. To strengthen the status of women in the family and in society, the cash is transferred only to the mothers' bank accounts.

The cash transfer not only financially empowers women but mobilises them to get out of their homes and villages to go to the nearest town with a bank branch and open a bank account for probably the first time in their lives. Such exposure to "outside places" are significant for exploring opportunities and eventually raising expectations for a higher standard of living. The campaign has been a great success, benefiting millions of students, as well as hundreds of thousands of rural women.

There are state-run campaigns to improve the health and lives of rural women. Since 2008, we have run the host mother programme which looks after rural pregnant women at risk for a month before and after birth in the town closest to their villages. The maternal death rate decreased from 61 per 1 000 in 2003 to 16 per 1 000 in 2010. Following the success of the cash transfer campaign in education, a similar campaign was instituted in health care. Rural women are paid a small amount of money if they visit a gynaecologist regularly during pregnancy and if mothers take their babies for regular monthly check-ups until the child is six-years-old. The primary aim of the campaign is to improve the health of the younger generations and to reduce the number of mother-and-baby deaths. However, the major side effect of the campaign is again socialising rural women and building their self-confidence.

Occupational and technical skills classes are offered in 30 provinces in co-operation with business associations and civil society organisations to teach women occupational skills with which to enter the work force. Micro-credit programmes in rural areas have been launched to promote female entrepreneurship.

The stance was undertaken in the firm belief that the well-being and social participation of rural women is crucial to Turkey's sustainable development, which can be achieved only through a targeted, wholesome approach. I wanted to share those initiatives with you. Thank you for listening.