

Canadian NATO
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
canadienne de l'OTAN

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
respecting its participation at the Sub-Committee on
Transatlantic Relations**

Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)

**Ankara, Turkey
March 14 to 16, 2011**

Report

Turkey's foreign and security priorities and regional security issues, as well as Afghanistan, the situation in the Middle East and NATO after the Lisbon Summit were the main issues discussed during the 14-16 March visit of the Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Relations to Ankara, Turkey. During the three days of meetings, 15 members of parliament from ten NATO member states met with senior Turkish government and military representatives. The delegation, the Assembly's Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Relations, was led by Senator Sergio de Gregorio (Italy) and Assembly Vice President Jadwiga Zakrewska (Poland), and hosted by the head of the Turkish delegation to the Assembly Vahit Erdem. The programme also included a meeting with students from Bilkent University. In a lively and engaged discussion the Parliamentarians informed the students about NATO's new Strategic Concept that the Alliance adopted at the Lisbon summit in November 2010.

I. MAIN SECURITY CHALLENGES

Host country interlocutors reminded the delegation that Turkey is located in the most unstable region of the world. General Ümit Dündar, Undersecretary of National Defence, defined terrorism, cyber attacks, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD); regional conflicts and instable regions; fight against illegal immigration and asymmetrical threats as main security challenges for Turkey.

The Undersecretary described the basic principle of Turkey's defence policy as "making the maximum contribution to reduce international terrorism".

Turkey pursues a "zero problem" policy towards its neighbours and when problems arise, thrives to solve them peacefully, the delegation was informed. General Aslan Güner, Deputy Chief of General Staff, said that Turkey wants to enhance co-operation and friendship with the countries of the region and beyond.

II. TURKEY-NATO RELATIONS

NATO remains pivotal for Turkey's security and Ankara continues to be a key supporter of the Alliances' policies and missions, the delegation learned during the meetings. Egemen Bagis, Minister of State, stressed that NATO is more important today than ever. All official interlocutors emphasised Turkey's important contributions to the Alliance over decades. General Aslan Güner stressed that Turkey is playing an active role in collective defence as well as in promoting stability in the region and beyond. To that end, Turkey is contributing to a range of NATO-led operations, including the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan (with 1,828 troops currently deployed), the Kosovo Protection Force (KFOR – with 504 soldiers deployed), Operation Active Endeavour (OAE) in the Mediterranean (with a frigate, a corvette and other naval assets), and Operation Ocean Shield in the Gulf of Aden (with one frigate). The General added that Turkey's contribution to peace support operations has significantly increased after the end of the Cold War and that it is currently providing approximately 3,400 troops to operations that are led either by NATO, the EU, or the UN.

Host country speakers generally felt that NATO has successfully adapted to the changing security environment, but that it would have to continue its adaptation process. Official Turkish speakers considered the Lisbon Summit very successful. Ambassador Tacan Ildem briefly referred to the decisions taken by the heads of State and Government, notably the important role of NATO partnerships and NATO's engagement with international organisations. Both will be particularly relevant as the Alliance pursues a comprehensive approach to security. He added that the comprehensive approach requires well-established co-operation with other international organisations. The Ambassador expressed optimism that implementation of the Lisbon agreements will allow NATO to balance a likely increasing number of missions with scarce resources. He added that Turkey is a staunch supporter of the Open Door policy of the Alliance.

Naturally, the discussions in Ankara also covered the latest developments in Afghanistan, NATO's most important operational theatre. In Afghanistan, Turkey leads two Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in the Northern Province of Jowzjan and in Wardak province with 93 and 77 personnel respectively. Turkey is also responsible for the training of non-commissioned officers (NCO) of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) at the Ghazi Military Training Center (GMTC) near Kabul. Thus far, 797 NCOs have completed their training, while 400 are currently undergoing training, the delegation was informed. According to Ambassador Tacan Ildem the number of soldiers trained by Turkey exceeds 5,500 annually and Turkey also trains about 1,000 soldiers in Sivas.

Turkey has increased military and security training to Afghanistan; currently 157 Turkish officers, or roughly 10% of all trainers deployed in Afghanistan, serve as instructors to the Afghan army and police, according to General Güner. The Turkish contingent is also operating a military hospital in Kabul, he added. Moreover, the Turkish development agency is very active in Afghanistan and has established projects in 26 provinces in the country. Priority is given to education and health care programmes, he said. The ambassador and other officials repeatedly stressed that a long-term commitment is required in Afghanistan. Thus, whatever timeline for transition has been developed should not be seen as an exit strategy, he underlined. Equally, if not even more important, good governance needs to be addressed by the Karzai government, Ambassador Tacan Ildem said.

The ambassador emphasised the need to establish a secure environment in Afghanistan and the region. Although public support for Afghanistan is relatively high in Turkey as Turks are very sensitive to terrorism, it is necessary to explain the reason for Turkey engagement there to the population at home. It is therefore necessary to publicly stress that the security of the region is closely linked to Turkey's security.

III. SECURITY IN THE BALKANS

Stability and security in the Balkans remains high on the agenda of Turkish foreign and security policy, the delegation was informed. Official interlocutors noted that significant progress in the stabilisation was achieved, but also recognised that more needs to be done. Recognising the shortcomings of existing agreements and the implementation thereof, Ambassador Ildem provocatively suggested that the international community created "some kind of monster" (i.e. the Dayton peace accords) to which it is now hostage. General Güner said that the prospect of EU membership was the most important incentive

for increased peace and stability of the region. He and others considered the situation in Bosnia & Herzegovina to be quiet now; it was important to implement the Membership Action Plan (MAP). A positive development was that, by now, 75 countries recognised Kosovo as an independent country, the delegation was informed. Turkish officials also underlined that Serbia, which was crucial for the region, should not be excluded from Europe.

IV. THE CAUCASUS

During the exchanges, the delegation also briefly discussed the situation in the South Caucasus. Turkey is also very interested in solving the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict, the delegation was told repeatedly. Host country speakers who commented on the issue emphasised the need for a diplomatic solution, preferably under the auspices of the UN Security Council. General Aslan Güner explained that Turkey is willing to normalise its relations with Armenia. Ambassador İldem pointed out that Turkey has an exemplary relationship with Georgia and that it would like to see Georgia integrate in Euro-Atlantic structures. The Georgia war confirmed Ankara understands that so-called frozen conflicts can quickly turn into hot conflicts and that it is necessary to address these conflicts, he added.

V. TURKEY AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES IN ASIA MINOR

Given its geographic location as well as its close and longstanding relations with the region it was not surprising that the recent developments in a number of Arab countries were high on the agenda during the visit. General Ümit Dündar, Undersecretary of National Defence, stressed the need for a fair and lasting settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict. He said that Turkey has been a strong supporter of the Middle East process. In addition, Turkey also supports and contributes to the diplomatic process to settle the nuclear issue with Iran. In this context he said that Turkey is in favour of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East, which could also help to eventually create a world free of nuclear weapons. General Aslan Güner noted that the bilateral Turkish-Israeli relationship deteriorated recently and that it was now on a minimal level. Israeli raid on the Turkish-led aid flotilla bound for the Gaza Strip last year blame each other for the incident. This incident on 31 May 2010 deeply strained relations between former allies Turkey and Israel. During the raid, Israeli commandos killed nine Turkish nationals.

As to Iraq, Turkish interlocutors, including General Güner, stressed the importance of maintaining the country's political unity and national sovereignty. He added that a break up or further fragmentation of Iraq would be counterproductive, not only for the country itself, but for regional security. Undersecretary Dündar said that it is vital to control the existence and the manoeuvres of the members of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), especially in the northern part of Iraq. Another interlocutor voiced concern about Iran's influence over Iraq, and particularly Iran's support to the Kurdish position on independence for Kirkuk, which contradicts Turkey's position on a unified Iraq.

More generally, host country speakers underlined that Turkey prefers to have a constructive, co-operative relationship with Tehran. Contentious issues, particularly the Iranian nuclear programme, should be solved by diplomatic and political means. In this context, Ambassador Tacan İldem reminded the delegation that Turkey acts as a facilitator

country and pointed out that it recently hosted a meeting of the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany (P5+1) meeting with Iran. The Turkish diplomat stressed that a “military option” is not an option for Turkey. Moreover, Ankara does not consider sanctions to be good instruments. He added that Turkey encountered enormous financial disadvantages in the past as a result of sanctions and war and that, although Turkey is not in agreement with the sanctions, it abides by the established international sanctions regime towards Iran. Turkey does not want Iran to be a nuclear weapons state, among others, because it would destabilise the region. The ambassador explained that Turkey had called upon Iran on numerous occasions to co-operate with the international community and will continue to do so.

General Aslan Güner and others also said that Turkey wishes to have a constructive relationship with Syria and that the latter’s engagement with Western countries should be encouraged. Turkey also supports the unity and sovereignty of Lebanon, the General explained.

VI. THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Turkish interlocutors considered the recent developments in a number of North African and Middle Eastern countries to be significant. General Dündar commented that Tunisia and Egypt have embarked on an irreversible path of change and transformation. In contrast, he and other speakers regretted the continued violence and use of force in Libya. General Güner noted that the events in these countries reflected the demands and desires of the people and that outside forces should refrain from intervention.

Ambassador Tacan Ildem underlined that movements that have democracy as their goal are movements that NATO Allies should encourage. He explained that the sentiments in these countries are generally not anti-western or anti-US. Rather, it is freedom and democracy that the protestors want. He cautioned, however, that democracy and freedom do not come overnight. Therefore, NATO Allies and the international community should do whatever is necessary. He cautioned, however, that NATO Allies should be extremely careful, too. In this context he noted that NATO contingency planning would be normal. He cautioned, however, that a military intervention by the Alliance without broad international backing would be dangerous as it would be easy for extremist Islamist forces to misrepresent NATO’s actions. He explained that the public perception of NATO in many Muslim countries is negative. The diplomat added that the UN Security Council Resolution 1970 gave a strong signal to the Libyan leadership and people, but any further action by NATO would require an additional instrument of legitimacy, a new UN Security Council mandate. NATO should concentrate first and foremost on providing humanitarian assistance and it should do this as a part of a broad international effort.

The ambassador concluded by saying that it is clear that there is strong public support for the movement, primarily pushed by the young generation, against repressive regimes in many Arab countries. There are, however, no easy solutions and it will be a “long journey”; elections are, particularly if the circumstances are not well prepared, not a remedy for the situation, he suggested. What is required, he said, is the engagement by the international community.

VII. TURKEY-EU RELATIONS

Turkish interlocutors, including Egemen Bagis, Minister of State for EU Affairs, criticised that the EU had changed the rules of the game for accession. Several decades after it applied for EU membership, Turkey has opened fewer than half of the chapters into which the accession talks are divided. But most of the remaining chapters have been blocked, primarily because of Turkey's continuing occupation of around one-third of Cyprus, an EU member since 2004. Only social policy and employment, public procurement, and competition policy are at present eligible for discussion.

Pointing to the more than five million Turks already living in EU member countries, the continuing reforms in Turkey and its increasing political and economic importance in the region and beyond, Minister Bagis expressed optimism that Turkey would soon join the EU. The Minister also stressed that the EU needs Turkey more than Turkey needs the EU. Turkey can be a source of inspiration, he said, lamenting that the main problem in making further progress towards EU membership are prejudices and that the EU has allowed itself to be taken hostage by the Cyprus issue. Mr Bagis also noted that it appeared that the EU's decision making process has become more cumbersome as a result of enlargement. The Minister expressed optimism, however, that Turkey would soon join the EU, possibly as early as late 2013. Turkey will become a member of the EU because it is Europe's interest, he concluded.

The delegation also met with Interior Minister Osman Gunes who provided an extensive briefing of Turkey's activities to combat terrorism and drug trafficking. In many aspects, Turkey is already like a EU member country, he explained, pointing out that, in terms of crime rate per population, Turkey is safer than many European countries. Illegal trafficking in drugs, particularly in heroin/cocaine, poses a security issue for Turkey, he said. Turkey acts as a bulwark against the inflow of drugs into the EU, the Minister emphasised, as the amount of heroin interception in Turkey is about twice the amount that has been intercepted in the entire EU. International cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking and against internationally active terrorist groups is crucial, the speaker said, adding that Turkey expects assistance in its combat against terrorist groups from EU and NATO member states.

The delegation also visited Bilkent University where it had an engaged discussion with students about NATO's new Strategic Concept. A visit to the Turkish Army War College concluded a very interesting visit. The Sub-Committee will continue to monitor the situation in Turkey's vicinity as it forms a crucially important region for NATO and Alliance member countries.

Respectfully submitted,

Honourable Raynell Andreychuk, Senator
Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association
(NATO PA)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)
ACTIVITY	Meeting of the Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Relations
DESTINATION	Ankara, Turkey
DATES	March 14-16, 2011
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Raynell Andreychuk, Senator
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	
TRANSPORTATION	\$7,846.17
ACCOMMODATION	\$450.60
HOSPITALITY	\$0.00
PER DIEMS	\$221.90
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$0.00
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$90.00
TOTAL	\$8,608.67