

The Club of Rome 2002 Annual Conference, Bilkent University, Ankara, 27-28 October 2002

Introduction

The Club of Rome, established in 1968, an international forum of prominent representatives of academia, politics and business from more than 50 countries of the world, held its annual Conference on October 27 and 28 at Bilkent University in Ankara. This year's Conference focused the manifold challenges to the Black Sea Region and the Caspian Sea Basin. Turkey was considered to be the ideal site for this meeting since political stability and socio-economic development in that region are recognized to be of growing geo-strategic and economic importance to the entire globe, and as HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, President of The Club of Rome, emphasized in his opening address, Turkey serves as a bridge between Europe and the area on which the meeting is focusing. This enhances the bridge-building role of The Club of Rome in its global quest for an ethic of human solidarity.

Baroness Nicholson, member of the European Parliament, reminded the audience in her address that she and other colleagues in the European Parliament have been supporting the Turkish candidacy for membership since the 1980s. She appreciated the progress Turkey has made in reforming its laws in order to conform to the norms of the European Community, realizing that this endeavour presents a huge challenge not only to politicians but also to the business world and the emerging civil society.

This was also the occasion for an announcement of the creation of a Parliament of Cultures, the result of a joint endeavour of the President of The Club of Rome, Prince Hassan, and from the Turkish side Ihsan Dogramaci. The Parliament of Cultures has as its objective the promotion of peaceful resolution of conflict. It will gather together in its Assembly intellectuals and individuals noted for their contributions to understanding and respect between different cultures, religions and ethnic groups. In the selection of the members of the Assembly, every effort will be made to ensure geographic, religious and ethnic equity.

Turkey and the European Union

The core message of the Annual Conference was that Turkey should become a member of the European Union. This would be in the interest not only of Europe, but of the world at large.

A Turkish membership would enhance the prospects for peace and stability in the Black Sea Region and Caspian Sea Basin. It would also help build a bridge and improve understanding and cooperation. Moreover, membership of the EU would establish Turkey as a truly democratic society, characterized by openness, transparency and respect for human rights. A membership would also help eradicate poverty and significantly improve material standard of living for millions of Turkish citizens.

The Club of Rome Activities

The Club of Rome set the pace for new thinking 30 years ago with the Report: *Limits to Growth*. The Club of Rome continues to do so.

The Conference received an assessment of the impact of The Club of Rome statement to the 2002 Johannesburg Summit.

Among other forthcoming reports are:

1. The Future of People with Disabilities
2. The Joint Role of Public Affairs and Private Business
3. Business and Politics: A New Approach to Leadership
4. The Challenge of Combining, Working and Learning Throughout a Lifetime

The Conference also reviewed the progress of several practical projects:

1. The creation of anticipatory democracy: involving society in preparing for major shocks in the future, such as the exhaustion of major reserves of oil in about 2040.
2. Educational reform to encourage institutions to change their courses to make them more responsive to the Global Problematique and Global Resolutique.

3. A Trilateral Training Project involving entrepreneurs in Germany, Russia and Turkey: there can be no prosperity without entrepreneurial skills.
4. tt30 is a group of about 30 independent people around the age of 30 who are working on, among other things, Overcoming the Digital Divide. National Club of Rome societies are encouraged to establish their own versions of tt30 in their own countries.
5. The Jordan Badia Research and Development Program is working on social, environmental and rural renewal.

Black Sea Region and Caspian Sea Basin

The Conference examined this area from three perspectives: as a region of cultural diversity; as an arc of crisis and so in need of crisis management and peace building; and as a region for economic cooperation and development.

Among some of the themes that emerged were:

1. The importance of Turkey as a meeting place of cultures – and not as a clash of cultures.
2. While some participants in some global conflicts claim to operate with Islamic motives, it is important not to overestimate this dimension. Islam is not a factor in most of the world's conflicts, for example Northern Ireland, Congo, Rwanda and Sri Lanka.
3. There is the importance of implementing UNESCO's Culture of Peace (including the endorsement of the UNESCO Seville Statement).
4. The area has many environmental problems, particularly those of recovering from the Soviet era (such as the destruction of the Aral Sea).
5. The area is having to cope with a number of challenges simultaneously – without a road map. Among the challenges are: repairing the environment, fostering economic development, eliminating corruption, encouraging democracy, combating organized crime, building up the nation, enhancing cultural diversity and reducing cultural animosity.

6. Therefore, for countries outside the area, it is necessary to recognize the complexities of the area and become much better informed about it.

What are the signs of hope?

1. The key resource of any country is its people. The area has over 300 million people. They are eager to learn, willing to change and able to benefit from the experiences of other countries.
2. The example of Bilkent University is itself an illustration of what one person can achieve from his vision. The University is one of the areas leading ones – and more modern than many in the European Union.
3. The success of the Black Sea University Foundation, now a decade old, shows the value of common projects: people working across national boundaries on common problems. We either learn to work together – or we perish separately.
4. Although the area does have a history of some old hatreds, the area also has a history of cooperation, such as the Great Silk Road and now the Great Steel Road (the Beijing-Paris Railway).
5. The great powers now recognize that the area is important to them. That can be good news. But this can also be a problem as has been seen elsewhere around the world. Turkey could take the lead as a coordinator, such as through centres of competence, eg., on water management, to take the technology lead for the area. Turkey's crucial role could help minimize problems from inappropriate great power involvement.
6. The contribution that Turkey can make to working for economic and social development and peace in the area will make Turkey more attractive to the European Union as a partner.

Among the proposals that were made and which will receive further consideration are:

1. The Club of Rome could have a seminar on Inclusion.

2. The Club of Rome could examine the work of the Bretton Woods System (World Bank and International Monetary Fund): we live in a global economy but not a global society.
3. The problems and prospects of the mass migrations of peoples and the brain drain need investigation.

To conclude The Club of Rome is grateful to the Bilkent University for hosting this Conference. Given the impending decision over whether or not there will be a war in Iraq, the Conference is a example of how to organize good things in bad times.

While there may be limits to growth, there are no limits to human hope and human ingenuity.

Keith Suter

The views expressed in this statement are not necessarily those of The Club of Rome.