



# ALI BABACAN

## Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey

### **Thierry de Montbrial, President and founder of the WPC**

Thank you very much for the exhaustive review of some of the major subjects we will discuss over the next three days. Let me ask two related questions. Firstly, how do you see the future for Turkish/Iranian relations? Secondly, in realistic terms, what would be the best outcome for Syria in the next 12 months?

### **Ali Babacan, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey**

First of all, Turkey and Iran are two countries between which the border was fixed in 1639 and it has not changed since. We always had very balanced relations in this region and I think the level of mutual respect has been an important element in our bilateral relations. We have also been working very closely with Iran in many multilateral settings, including regional organisations that we actually put together, including some other countries as well.

I have already made clear our position on Iran's nuclear programme, which I think is evolving in a much better direction with the new set of negotiations that started, but on the other hand, for some regional issues, we think differently. I think this is very natural, but on the other hand, we always keep the political and diplomatic channels open to discuss everything very openly, just like two close neighbours talking about everything openly and candidly. I think that has been an important element of the relations as well. I think that bilateral relations will continue to be strong and balanced.

In regard to Syria, the next 12 months is very difficult to define. There are many different scenarios. The Geneva 2 conference is a very important chance for us, but on the other hand, our view has always been very strong about having an intermediary arrangement until the next elections, the new constitution and so on, so that the interim government takes the country towards a functioning representative democracy.

A representative democracy is a democratic system that is inclusive and has many, many segments of the population represented in parliament and in government. We believe that this is the ideal way to go, but of course there are other scenarios, which could push things in many different directions. The big threat is the longer the situation continues, the more small extreme groups actually develop, gain strength and do more. That is dangerous not only for Syria, but for the entire region.

The National Coalition is now regarded as the official counterpart of the Arab League. When the Arab League invites the Syrian government for talks, they no longer invite the regime, but they invite the Coalition for official meetings with the Arab League. That is quite representative and is also a heterogeneous group. It is very important for this group to stick together and create a viable alternative to the existing regime. The next 12 months will not be easy and this chemical weapons deal has quite a long calendar. On one hand, it was good because it has now been dealt with, but on the other hand, the fact that many countries and the UN are now talking with the regime has given the regime a new source of legitimacy, being a counterpart for these kinds of talks. How we balance this out is also going to be important.

### **Thierry de Montbrial, President and founder of the WPC**

If the process, which started with the five plus one negotiations with Iran, continues smoothly, do you think it might help provide a solution to the Syrian issue?

**Ali Babacan, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey**

First of all, when we talk about the nuclear file and P5+1 in Iran, it is important to keep these talks within the framework of the nuclear file. There could be countries that view the issue from a wider angle, but we think that it is better to keep it concentrated on the nuclear file. If we have goodwill, support and compromise, I think there might be a chance. That is why it is very important to stick with the calendars and what has been mutually agreed and promised, and continue to build mutual trust, which is crucial.

**Thierry de Montbrial, President and founder of the WPC**

Thank you very much. We have time for one good question.

**François Clémenceau, Le Journal du Dimanche**

J'aimerais que vous soyez un peu plus précis sur votre réponse, en ce qui concerne la Syrie. Vous avez mentionné qu'effectivement il ne devait pas y avoir de lien entre la négociation avec l'Iran et ce qu'il se passe du côté Syrien, malgré tout vous êtes au courant des dernières nouvelles à savoir que les groupes extrémistes dont vous venez de parler ont pratiquement dévalisé, à la fois les installations et l'arsenal de l'armée libre de Syrie à la frontière turque. Est-ce que cela ne vous pose pas un problème en tant que gouvernement et principal soutien de la coalition syrienne ? Merci.

**Ali Babacan, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey**

I missed the first part of the question. Was it about stolen weapons?

**Thierry de Montbrial, President and founder of the WPC**

He said that you did not fully answer the question about Syria.

**François Clémenceau, Le Journal du Dimanche**

Je disais que sur ce que vous venez d'aborder en ce qui concerne l'opposition syrienne, vous avez mentionné des petits groupes extrémistes qui menaçaient de devenir de plus en plus prépondérants en Syrie. Et cela menaçait évidemment l'ensemble de l'échafaudage. Il se trouve que ces petits groupes d'extrémistes syriens sont devenus beaucoup plus gros que ce que l'on imaginait il y a quelques mois et que récemment ils ont donc, à la frontière turque, à Babalawa, saisi l'essentiel de ce qui contenait l'infrastructure de l'armée libre de Syrie à l'état major du général Idriss. Je voulais savoir si cela menaçait ce que vous-même avez l'intention de construire avec la coalition nationale syrienne ?

**Ali Babacan, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey**

I think we should probably concentrate more on why those groups exist and how they continually extend their grounds, in a way. It is a country in which half of the population has been internally displaced or living in exile or living as refugees and so on. It has a regime that is killing its own citizens. 150,000 people have already been killed. The international community has only taken one step so far, which is to deal with the chemical weapons. Only 1,500 people died because of the chemical weapons that were ratified, but 150,000 people died by other weapons.

The international community is not really showing its strength for humanitarian purposes or taking any kind of stance against the regime and so the people are inevitably resorting to these extremist groups, which they expect may bring some improvements. This is a very dangerous situation. Because of this, we have always pushed extremely hard for the UN, the international community and other independent countries to do more about Syria during the earlier phases of the crisis.

To deal with this, we need to continue the diplomatic process, including the Geneva 2 conference. We need to bear in mind that speed is a crucial aspect. If we do not act immediately, the problems will increase. The extremists already



have means and ways of finding weapons. Their only source of weapons is not stealing from other groups or opposition. It is a very small piece of the big picture that we have to be increasingly careful about.

**Thierry de Montbrial, President and founder of the WPC**

I hope this discussion will continue later. Thank you very much, Ali. Thank you very much, Your Sovereign Highness, for your presence and support. Ladies and gentlemen, the next session will start immediately.