

## **Building bridges: rail's potential to connect Europe to Asia**

Minister, MPs, ladies and gentlemen

I am delighted to be with you today in Karabük. Our gathering here already says much about the close links that Turkey and Europe have – through trade and investments, contact between peoples.

And of course, through transport networks and cooperation.

More than 45% of Turkey's trade is with European Union countries. Our trade integration has now reached a point that in several sectors - automotives, aviation, textiles, electronic goods - it is not worth even trying to distinguish between European and Turkish products.

And nearly 80% of foreign direct investments in Turkey come from the EU.

Our mutual interests are substantial and numerous. There are also many geopolitical challenges and opportunities in the region and beyond, which the EU needs to address, together with Turkey.

Take Turkey's potential as a 'land bridge' between Europe and Asia. Trade between these two regions has grown impressively in the last few years – and this is a good example of potential waiting to be filled – particularly for Turkey and its developing rail network, perhaps as a "southern alternative".

International connection and cooperation: this also applies directly to transport and is a large part of what transport is all about.

It is the lifeblood of any country's economy since it constitutes the heart of the supply chain. Areas without good transport connections do not grow or prosper.

Turkey's Black Sea ports, well-developed railway system and its East-West corridors clearly demonstrate the important contribution that transport makes to the national economy.

Ladies and gentlemen

In Europe, our main goal is to create a single transport area where barriers between countries and between different modes of transport like air, rail and road are removed. This is how we plan to connect and serve Europe's 500 million citizens, using transport to create jobs and economic growth.

On a practical level, it means working towards achieving compatibility between countries in their legal and regulatory environments, in safety and security, and in technical standards.

In rail, for example, I am delighted to see Turkey's efforts in rolling out the ERTMS management system– and that the Irmak-Karabük-Zonguldak line will also be equipped with this technology: it sets a single signalling standard across Europe and is an essential element for building the single European rail area.

Building this rail link will certainly help Turkey to boost economic development and regional cohesion.

The EU is providing €330 million, most of it as a grant and the rest as a EIB loan for the project.

This is why I very much welcome Turkey's policy to revitalise rail traffic.

This is in line with EU policies aiming to shift passenger and freight journeys from road to rail.

In terms of fuel security, it makes a lot of sense to do this. Not only can we no longer afford to rely so heavily on fossil fuels because of environmental concerns, today's sky-high oil prices also make it prohibitive to do so.

For this to happen, of course, rail has to be made an attractive option for passengers and business. It should offer a high-quality service at competitive and reasonable prices – and be provided economically and efficiently.

That applies to Turkey as much as to the 27 Member States of the European Union, as we strive to link up those networks beyond the EU's borders.

In Europe, we are working to get rid of the barriers, bureaucracy and bottlenecks that are holding us back from reaching that goal, along with the numerous 'missing links' across our transport network. All of these hamper growth and hinder the development of efficient networks.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude:

At the European Commission, we recognise the importance of strengthening our transport relations. Turkey is one of our most important partners.

As a Mediterranean country, Turkey plays a key role within the regional cooperation structure of EuroMed. It has also long been a very active participant in the EU's TRACECA programme to create a multi-modal Europe-Caucasus-Asia corridor.

The EU is strongly committed, now and in the long term, to Turkey.

I wish you all every success with the future of this important railway project and see you - ***Insha'Allah*** - on the first comfortable train on a new modern line from Ankara to Zonguldak!