**OPENING SPEECH BY MR. M.RIFAT HISARCIKLIOGLU,**

 **PRESIDENT OF TOBB, AT THE 68th FISCAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**MAY 1, 2013 ANKARA**

Distinguished Chairman of the General Assembly and Presidents of Councils

His Excellency Mr. Minister

Distinguished Presidents and Delegates

I would like to greet you with respect on my behalf and on behalf of the Executive Committee of TOBB. Welcome home.

Since today is the May 1 Labor and Solidarity Day, I would like to first congratulate our worker brothers. As a member of a civilization, which reveres labor and great effort and predicates equal sharing, I wish prosperity, health and happiness for all workers.

**Dear Friends,**

This year’s General Assembly is different. Today, we are having our Financial General Assembly, which we have to organize in May by law. Furthermore, there are the upcoming Chamber-Commodity Exchange elections in 81 provinces and 160 districts and you have to go back to your hometowns.

You said ‘let’s have a smaller General Assembly, let’s make it fast because of the elections’. So, upon your request, we are having a General Assembly that is limited to our community, which stays within the family.

We see that this year there are a record number of candidates running for the elections at the Chambers and Commodity Exchanges. There is fierce competition both at professional committees and assembly seats. This actually is the best indication of what a good job you are doing and how you appreciate the positions you hold.

I am confident that we will go through this process with the maturity that becomes to our community. We will experience the beauties of democracy once again together. I wish the elections would be fruitful for our provinces, our community and our country. Insha’Allah, we will have our General Assembly with the election in August with the highest participation, high level protocol and great enthusiasm as it has always been.

**Dear Friends,**

We have just watched a video about our services that we have delivered with your support and hard work. We owe all these activities to you, the backbone and brains of our community. I would like to congratulate each and every one of you and extend my deepest gratitude to you.

I also take this privilege to thank the President of the Republic, Speaker of the Parliament, Prime Minister, Ministers, Parliament and political parties on behalf of our community for all the support they have given to us. I would like to congratulate the bureaucrats who worked hard with us. We joined forces as the public and private sector and managed to realize many of our projects.

Minister Hayati Yazıcı has always been there for us while we delivered our services. He encouraged and empowered us with his vision and cleared the way for us. Thank Allah we have reaped the fruits of our concerted actions together. Some revolutionary steps such as the Commercial Code and NACE have been taken with his contribution and vision. I especially would like to thank him and his co-workers on behalf of our community.

**Dear Friends,**

Chambers and Commodity Exchanges are the only organizations, which have the authority to represent all local and foreign entrepreneurs, tradesmen, industrialists, tourism professionals and contractors. I am proud to say that the TOBB community that you make up has become private sector’s power, which emanates from collaboration.

We have become one, we have grown, we got strong. We have had a louder voice. We have overcome all obstacles and embarked upon new journeys as we have become one. We never had discrimination under this roof. We have listened to each opinion, each idea with a different excitement.

We remained loyal to the advice “consulting is sunnah”. We always have kept the door of dialogue and consultation open. That is how each societal group, each different opinion, each different idea and understanding had the opportunity to be represented under this roof. We have approached different ideas and opinions with an open mind and heart. We embraced all the different colors of this country.

We have become the voice and heart of Anatolia thanks to you. Anatolia’s heart started to beat here. An active, dynamic TOBB, which has become the voice of Anatolia’s feelings, demands, dreams emerged.

This is how the biggest umbrella organization in Turkey emerged. We have become a large family which gives confidence to the country and which is consulted by everyone. We did this together. We know that with great power comes great responsibility. We have always acted with this awareness.

We always advocated unity and integrity. We have been the pioneers of change and transformation. We did not surrender to problems. We did not concentrate on the negative, we did not complain. At times, we provided advice, we gave ideas, we inspired. We showed the entire world what this nation could do.

Today we are able to compete with everyone, everywhere. In the last decade private sector-driven GDP growth has been 63%. Private sector created employment for an additional 5 million people. Our export volume increased 4 folds, tourism revenues increased 3 folds. We have made our country the 16th largest economy in the world.

We achieved all these with your, our private sector’s faith, talent and hard work. We earned, our country earned. We have been the best example in the world of what organized entrepreneurial force can add to a country. Who made us achieve this: our chambers, our commodity exchanges, you who crowd this room today.

**Dear Friends,**

I would like to share some of our activities with you briefly. You will see the details in the activity report. One of the biggest challenges we had was vocational training. Companies were looking for people to hire, people were looking for a job.

For the first time in the history of our country, private sector had a say in vocational training through chambers and commodity exchanges. Thanks to the UMEM Beceri’10 (Skills) Project we launched with relevant Ministries, we have been the beacon of hope, bread and butter for the unemployed in 81 provinces.

We have become the professional organization that gives the biggest support to exports of companies. We all have to take pride on the fact that Turkey exports with TOBB assurance. The Authorized Economic Operator practice by the Ministry of Customs and Trade will give impetus to our exports and lead to cost-savings.

Furthermore, we have undertaken a guarantee risk worth of 35 billion Dollars for international transportation. It is TOBB, which issues the highest number of TIR carnets in the world. We modernized the border gates thanks to Mr. Hayati Yazıcı’s vision and your willingness to own up this project. We completed the modernization of Ipsala, Kapıkule, Hamzabeyli, Sarp, Habur and Cilvegözü border gates.

This way, we reduced the logistics costs in exports by 450 million TL in 1 year. We were losing this amount of money every year. We resolved this problem altogether. United Nations showcased this project as a success model all around the world. Currently, we are modernizing the border gates in the east one by one under the leadership of our Ministry. We are working on Çıldır-Aktaş, Dilucu, Kapıköy and Esendere border gates.

Moreover, we are taking a huge initiative for Istanbul. As you know, Halkalı customs in Istanbul is the biggest land customs gate in Turkey with an annual volume of 40 billion Dollars. But, it is right at the center of the city and in big chaos. It is a nuisance for our industrialists, tradesmen and transporters and also a suffering for Istanbulites.

The Minister has given his full support to us. We will move Halkalı Customs to Çatalca and modernize it. We will also build the Logistics Center that Istanbul needs in Çatalca. With the Great Anatolian Logistics Project we have recently launched, we have taken an important initiative to connect Anatolia to Europe via railroad.

We facilitated SME’s access to funding by the Credit Guarantee Fund and SME Venture Capital companies. Business Development Centers in 19 provinces offer consultancy services to SMEs in Anatolia in areas where they need.

The derivatives exchange, which we founded and is among the top 30 derivatives exchanges in the world merged with Bourse Istanbul. TOBB ETU which we founded has become the most preferable university with a high brand value in a very short time.

Back in the day everybody had a difficulty in accessing the trade register gazette. Now, the gazette is on the Internet. It is transparent. It is now enough to log on to TOBB’s website to access trade register information about any company. There were problematic issues with the Commercial Code and Law of Obligations. Under the light of your recommendations, that is, with your efforts and under the leadership of the Minister and the hard work of his co-workers, these laws have been amended. Hence, we have kept the real sector from undertaking an additional burden of 6 billion TL every year.

You know that the activity field of companies was a total chaos. None of the institutions in Turkey knew how many companies were active in which field. There were different activity classifications in different institutions. Therefore, it was not possible to draft a trade and industry inventory. There were difficulties in implementing industrial policies, designing investment incentives and SME support and matching foreign trade demands. All went well and we have broken a new ground. We put an end to this chaos.

We have put the NACE system in practice. We knew there would be reactions. But we were determined. Because, one who does not take risks cannot progress. Thankfully, our Minister’s firm stand empowered us. We have set up a new and sounder system. We will make the most of it altogether.

One more request coming from you was that the investment incentive numbered 5084, which was expired should continue. We worked really hard on this matter. Hopefully, we will get a positive response soon. We would like to thank the Prime Minister for showing sensitivity in this respect.

Another growing problem is the difficulties in the collection of cheques and bonds. We have broken another new ground to alleviate the problems of the real sector. The cheque and credit records of companies have become public. It is now possible to see the record of the other party by just pressing a button. This way, you will make better decisions and see what kind of a risk you are taking. Whatever the banks can see about their clients, you will be able see the same. That is, our tradesmen and industrialists will no longer be shooting in the dark.

**Dear Friends,**

Those who have an idea without knowledge wonder what Chambers and Commodity Exchanges do. Chambers and Commodity Exchanges keep track of the problems of their members and find remedies for them. But, is it enough? No, it should never be enough! Because, we who produce, export and invest deserve better.

We can no longer surrender to the old mentality. This country will have the best and the most beautiful. We used to look at other countries and envy them, now we are a country that is envied. Our chambers and commodity exchanges have become a role model for this region. You made this difference. While doing this, we did not sacrifice our values. We never turned our backs to our own culture. We acted in the most contemporary way under the light of those values.

Ahi Evran says ‘be right, be patient, be resilient’. We have been right, we have been patient. We have been as resilient as a rock thanks to these values. In the past, the Ahi order started organizing in the Turkish business community and gave direction to this community.

Thanks to this tradition, which sets an example to both Turkey and the World, OECD showcases our Chamber and Commodity Exchange structure as a role model to all the countries in our region. Do you know what they say abroad? They say ‘if you want your private sector to prosper, if you want people’s capitalism and if you want your society to be more democratic in your country, go and set up a Chamber and Commodity Exchange structure like in Turkey’.

It is not us but the world that say this. The President of Kazakhstan Mr. Nursultan Nazarbayev invites us to benefit from our experience. He wants us to train Islamic countries in order to learn how we have been successful.

In the past, all our activities were limited with our country. Nobody noticed us when we went abroad. But now, we have a say in all the business organizations in global markets. We are now a community that defends the interests of our private sector all around the world.

We have been elected the Deputy Chairman of both Eurochambres, the biggest business organization in Europe and the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the biggest business organization in the Islamic World. We have been invited to have a seat on the management of International Chamber of Commerce, which is the biggest business organization in the world. We have been nominated to be the president of the Arbitration Center of Jerusalem, which will settle the disputes between Palestinian and Israeli businessmen.

It is not any other organization but us who have this honor. Turkey has this honor. On behalf of you all, we assumed this honorable responsibility, which we think will be a bridge in the peace process. Do you know why we assumed all these responsibilities? Because, you know how valuable peace is. You know how valuable tranquility is. You can definitely not remain silent against unfairness. You think rights are above all.

**Dear Friends,**

There is one argument debated in the media recently. I would like to tell you the facts so that you can learn the essence of the matter. As you know, I have been invited by the Prime Minister to be on the Wise Men delegation. He said the following very openly:

“Ask citizens what they think. Learn their worries and expectations. Then, report all these to public institutions’. So, they want us ‘to listen to citizens and take note of their thoughts and report to them’. So we are not speaking out of both sides of our mouth, but trying to listen to what comes out of the citizens’ mouth.

I frankly state that we cannot refrain from assuming this responsibility. We have always advocated that there would be no trade without peace. Without trade, there would be no wealth. So, our position is clear: we are servants of this country ready to assume responsibility for this country within the framework of integrity and unity of our country and people.

So, one cannot hold back from the duties assigned by the state. This is the state tradition. Especially, our community cannot stay clear of this responsibility. Because, we have always been at the forefront of all problems our country encountered. This community has been asked to contribute to each and every national matter.

This is recognition. This is power. This recognition, this power shows how this community rose on your shoulders. You are now people consulted not only for the problems of the private sector but also for the problems of our nation. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart. This community will never forget your services! Turkey will never forget your services! May Allah bless you all!

**My fellow co-workers,**

Whatever we did, whatever we accomplished, we owe it all to your support. We worked together, we achieved together. Many hands make light work. We owe our success to working as a team.

We increased the service capacity of Chambers, Commodity Exchanges and TOBB together. We have become centers providing services to the private sector. Chambers and Commodity Exchanges have broken many new grounds in the past years. You set up the laboratories for tea, olive oil, flour and wheat, aflatoxins and pesticides.

You provided the most contemporary electronic exchange halls and electronic product bond platforms to the real sector. You set up modern laboratories at commodity exchanges in 73 provinces. The organized industrial zones developed because Chambers have taken responsibility and thus, industry spread to Anatolia. There were only 12 OIZs in Turkey. Today almost 150 OIZs are filled with investors thanks to you.

We have done concrete and robust work in the field of education investments together. Chambers and Commodity Exchanges have been and are making investments in schools in their respective provinces. You did not have employees speaking a foreign language in the past. But today Chambers and Commodity Exchanges are going from strength to strength in international projects.

You get funding from abroad and collaborate with European Chambers. More Chambers and Commodity Exchanges are accredited each year. Currently, 131 Chambers and Commodity Exchanges are accredited and are certified that they provide the same service of the same quality with the best European Chambers. That is, you are already a member of European Union with this high service quality you have achieved.

Who achieved all these? You did. How did you do it? By relying on the contemporary vision you adapted in your Chambers and Commodity Exchanges. I congratulate you all. You cannot be proud enough. We have become active and constructive organizations, which do not complain at all but diagnose the problem, take initiative, find solutions.

With this, Presidents of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges became opinion leaders in their towns. I congratulate the Presidents, Executive Committees, Assemblies and Professional Committees of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges, I mean, I congratulate all of you who worked round the clock to promote and develop this community.

You have always known that the positions you were entrusted with are only a means for providing service and this has always has been your mantra. You have always kept in mind that you will have to answer afterlife. This is the service understanding of this community. So, I would like to remind that Presidents of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges do not get paid. They do this gratis. They spend their time and effort to resolve the problems of their cities and members and not for their own businesses.

Therefore, all Presidents of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges, all Assembly members are competent service providers. I am proud of you. You have to be proud of yourselves and of being a part of this community. Share the honor and joy of this service story with others in your cities. Do not forget that others will not tell the whole story if you do not tell it.

**Dear Friends,**

As you know, we have the upcoming elections. There is of course competition during each election process. But please do not forget that the elections at the Chambers and Commodity Exchanges is not competing for a position but is a relay race for serving to our community and country.

Positions are temporary. The essential thing for us is to serve the real sector. The main thing to do is to leave a trace in this world. Presidents and management of 365 Chambers and Commodity Exchanges, Presidents and members of Assemblies, Professional Committees are all distinguished people.

These people who all have the merits in their fields have duly done their part. It goes without saying that there will be winners and losers in these elections. There will be people who will hand over their positions or who will not run again in these elections. They have undertaken this big responsibility in a difficult time. I am honored to have worked with them. May Allah bless them all.

Our brothers who will take over this responsibility to serve will strive to do better in the future. May Allah help them. There is one thing I ask of you. Let’s see the election results as handing over the relay, as rejuvenation. The to-be-elected friends should benefit from the experiences of former presidents. They should uphold the unity and community spirit under this roof. Let’s be honored to be a member of this big family.

If we want to be richer, if we want to be more developed, if we want to be sharing more fairly, if we want to be freer, happier, we should close ranks. Because, these elections will neither be the first nor the last. The main thing that will lead us to success is unity.

We will work more, produce more, employ more, invest more and export more like we did in the last decade. We have faith in ourselves! The people have faith in us. This community that you make up is the safeguard of a strong economy and strong Turkey. We will keep running for new horizons and for the great Turkey like we did in the past.

I maintain that Turkey will get what it deserves. One of the top 10 economies of the world will be Turkey. We will attain this goal together. Let our brotherhood, unity and togetherness be everlasting. Let us go places. May Allah help us.