



SÜLEYMAN DEMIREL, 1954 TURKEY

Former Prime Minister & President, Turkey

Upon graduating from the Istanbul Technical University in 1949 as a civil engineer, Süleyman Demirel was eager to embark upon a career as a public servant. Soon thereafter, he was nominated to become an Eisenhower Fellow. The country was engaged in significant dam-irrigation and electrification infrastructure projects at the time and he was reluctant to go on fellowship, at first. In 1954 Demirel traveled to the United States as an Eisenhower Fellow, making him one of the very first.



“Looking back, I am so happy that I overcame that hesitation and took that leap of faith. The experience not only broadened my horizons, but was without a doubt one of the greatest sources of inspiration for me during my whole life devoted to public service and my country.”

At the time of his fellowship, Europe was divided and the shadow of the Iron Curtain loomed heavily. Demirel was a young engineer, eager to learn and make a difference in the lives of his fellow citizens. He said, “I was confident of the great potential of my country and committed to bring it to life. I cannot say I knew the world too well then. But for me and a great majority of the Turks, the U.S. was undoubtedly the land of freedom and opportunity. It was a source of inspiration for many like me who sought to make a contribution to their own society in democracy, prosperity and progress. During my 10 months in the U.S. as an Eisenhower Fellow, I was fascinated to see in person a progressive democracy and an innovative economy.”

Demirel’s EF experience amplified his ambitions to serve his country and he was drawn into politics and elected as prime minister in 1964. Throughout his political life, spanning 38 years, he has had the distinction to serve his country as a parliamentarian, prime minister, and president. He has seen coups, been imprisoned, and banned from politics, but never gave up his faith in democracy and in his country. Demirel said, “That is probably due to what I learned as an Eisenhower Fellow: Leaders do not have the luxury to give up and abandon the hopes and trust vested in them by the people. They have a responsibility to lead no matter how tough the hardships encountered may be.” Demirel has made numerous contributions as a statesman to the impressive achievements of Turkey over the years and started negotiations for European Union membership.

“Consider for one moment what sort of a world we could have been living in if Dwight Eisenhower’s vision of a world, in which cooperation replaced confrontation and understanding replaced ignorance, could not have endured. This is precisely the motivation I had for myself during my long political career. I have entered six general elections and been elected to every public office I held. I believe we need to exert every effort to further enhance the effectiveness of this remarkable enterprise of EF and remain true to its mission of preparing the leaders who will better the world around them for this and succeeding generations.”

Leaders bettering the world around them.