

TURKEY, EU AND A CHANGING WORLD

Meeting challenges together

REPORT

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Turkey is part of Europe's past and present, and will be part of its future whether or not it joins the European Union, Turkish Prime Minister **Ahmet Davutoğlu** told a Friends of Europe Policy Spotlight debate.

He was visiting Brussels on 15 January for meetings with Donald Tusk and Jean-Claude Juncker, the new Presidents of the European Council and Commission respectively.

Juncker said last year that he would freeze EU expansion for five years, but Davutoğlu said the reluctance by some EU member states to admit Turkey was harming Europe. The EU has not benefited as much as it could have from Turkey's past decade of strong economic growth, he said.

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Moreover, an EU containing Turkey would have more influence over recent events in the Middle East and North Africa.

“If Turkey had been a member of the EU, the European Union would have been much stronger to affect developments, and European identity would have been more inclusive,” said Davutoğlu, who was foreign minister from 2009 to 2014, until then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was elected President. “Turkey is an asset for the EU. And the EU is a strategic objective for Turkey.”

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In a wide-ranging speech, Davutoğlu placed Turkey's relations with the rest of Europe in

historical context. He also contrasted his country's past decade of economic growth with the EU's weak performance, and called on Europeans to be more accepting of Muslims in the wake of recent violence – from the terrorist killings in France to the unrest in the Middle East – and growing anti-immigrant sentiment.

Many of the world's current problems stem from the lack of a new international framework to follow the Cold War, he said. Previous large conflicts were followed by international conferences or new organisations, such as the Congress of Vienna after the Napoleonic Wars, the League of Nations after the First World War and the United Nations after World War II.

Though the Cold War ended in 1989, “but now, a quarter of a century later, we have not had a new congress, or inclusive organisation or a transformation of existing organisations,” the prime minister said.

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Instead, he said, there had simply been great hope after 1989 that freedom and peace would prevail. “Unfortunately, after 25 years now, we are facing big challenges in almost all fields. What went wrong was that world leaders were not able to unite and to establish a new world order.”

Partly as a result of this, Davutoğlu said, the responses to four big events have been inadequate.

First, after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, a number of frozen conflicts were created. One of these then heated up in 2014: “Nobody was expecting two years ago that a country that was united and which had territorial integrity for a quarter century – Ukraine – would now face the question of disintegration,” Davutoğlu said.

The 2008 financial crisis was another shock. Six years later, the big economies can only aim for low growth rates, with many European countries barely growing at all. "Europe is economically stable and has been the centre of economic activity in the world for the last two centuries," said

“*All European leaders should unite. If we do not provide a vision, there will be confrontation.*”

Davutoğlu. "But it has a big problem – whether in 50 years' time Europe taken as a whole will still be one of the leading economic powers."

But European leaders do not seem to know how to fix their economic problems, he said. "What is your solution? What is our solution together? All European leaders should unite. If we do not

provide a vision, there will be confrontation."

After the terrorist attacks on New York on 11 September 2001, NATO acted in Afghanistan. In addition the U.S. tried to stabilise Iraq. But terrorism is still a problem, as indicated by the terrorist attacks in Paris in January and the rise of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. "The last incidents show very clearly that the challenge of security is still on our table," he said.

The fourth challenge – and one where Davutoğlu criticised the EU response heavily – is the upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa. The Arab Spring started in 2011 with the rightful demands of Arab youth: "We all supported them. But many of these young Arab people are either in prison – in Egypt, in Yemen and other places – or in the grave, like in Syria."

“*It was the failure of the international community; it was the failure of Europe, the failure of all of us – because we didn't support this moderate, young heroic Arabic generation.*”

Davutoğlu contrasted the EU support given to Eastern Europe in the 1990s with its lack of help for the Arab Spring countries. He said that this failure had contributed to the rise of extremists.

"It was the failure of the international community; it was the failure of Europe, the failure of all of us – because we didn't support this moderate, young heroic Arabic generation," he said. "When they were put in prisons, when they were killed by chemical weapons – a terrorist group came and filled the vacuum. What we were expecting from the EU in the Arab Spring was to support democracy. We expected the EU to finance democracy in the Middle East, like it financed

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democracy in Europe in the 1990s. It would have been cheaper than fighting terrorism."

To meet these new challenges, the EU and Turkey should work together more closely, Davutoğlu said: "If the Turkish border is secure, the European border is secure. If Europe is secure, we are secure. There are not two different concepts or destinies."

But he questioned EU member states' willingness to take the kind of steps that Turkey has. Two million refugees from Syria and Iraq are currently living in Turkey, which he said has spent 5 billion dollars just on camps. Some Turkish towns now have more Syrians than Turks. "In all these border cities we have welcomed these refugees," he said. "If this was Europe, I would be asking whether anti-Syrian and anti-foreigner feelings were growing."

Europe should make an effort to be more inclusive, Davutoğlu said. On 11 January, he took part in the march in Paris in honour of the victims of the previous week's terrorist attacks there. "I want to

“*I want to see the same solidarity when a mosque is burned in the centre of Berlin.*”

see the same solidarity when a mosque is burned in the centre of Berlin,” he said. “In the last two years, 94 mosques have been attacked in Germany.”

He called on Europeans to accept Muslims as part of their society, pointing out that many come from countries colonised by European countries in the 19th century. “There are 45 million Muslims living in Europe and more than 6 million Turks,” he said. “The challenge is to make the European identity an inclusive identity.”

Such a spirit might also improve Turkey’s prospects for EU membership – something that would benefit the current EU member states, according to Davutoğlu. Turkey applied for membership in 1987, signed a customs union agreement in 1995 and was officially recognised as a candidate for full membership in 1999. However, new EU members require unanimous approval by current members, and member states such as France and Germany oppose Turkish accession.

Davutoğlu’s arrival in Brussels was delayed after his plane had to circle the city during rough weather, while waiting for permission to land. “Circling over Brussels is almost a metaphor for Turkish membership of the EU,” said moderator Giles Merritt, Secretary General of Friends of Europe.

Juncker – speaking to the European Parliament in July as nominee for Commission President – gave the reason for an EU membership as the need to consolidate the current 28 members, up from 15 in the past decade.

“Of course we are not happy with a freeze,” said Davutoğlu. “You cannot freeze history. Sometimes history dictates what you are supposed to do. If the EU takes us we will be happy and the EU will be happy. But if the EU doesn’t take us, we will not wait in front of the refrigerator.”

You can find the photo-gallery of this debate on Friends of Europe’s [Flickr channel](#)





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