

# ALI BABACAN

## Member of Parliament and former Deputy Prime Minister, Turkey

I have to express my sincere appreciation to the State of Qatar and the foreign Minister of Qatar for organising this event. This is together with IFRI, which is a very important institute for global affairs and international relations. In the international community, it has been a big success story, I have to say, and congratulations for delivering the World Policy Conference in a very consistent and successful way. I was able to attend the Monaco event, which was 3-4 years ago, I remember. Congratulations on doing it this time in Doha, Qatar.

What Turkey went through this summer, in July, was quite traumatic and unexpected and quite abrupt. We were faced with a coup attempt. It was not the whole military attempting this, but it was a faction within our military, tied to Fethullah Gülen. The Gülenists who were within our army attempted this, but it was unsuccessful. It failed. I think it was very important for our president, Erdogan, to make the call for the people to occupy the streets and to occupy the squares of the country. People responded very fast, and in a way, the strong stance of the Turkish people prevented the coup, which could really have gotten worse.

However, we then analysed why this happened, who the Gülenists are and who Fethullah Gülen is. This actually dates back to more than 40 years ago. It was a religious gathering which we thought, on the visible side, was doing good things with schools, charity, social work, social solidarity work and so forth. This was not just in Turkey but around the world. We actually cooperated with them for some time and helped them do more things which we thought were good things.

They infiltrated state organisations step by step. The followers of Fethullah Gülen got more and more into our government units, our judicial system, our police force and our army. After reaching a certain threshold of occupancy or effect, I would say, then they started to emphasise this power for the organisation itself. Seizing control of the state became more and more of an important agenda for them, and we were careful about what they were doing, especially over the last few years, but we did not really think that they could go that far to attempt a coup.

We lost 241 people, mostly civilians, that night, with more than 2,000 people wounded. They hit the Parliament building with F-16 aircrafts. They used Sikorsky helicopters and tanks to bomb the presidential palace, our intelligence headquarters and our police force headquarters. Think about any capital in the world: London, Washington or Paris. In one night, some elements of your own army, using the most modern weapons, hit the most critical state units. That was quite a trauma for us.

After 15 July, we started a very important process. It is a massive operation of the police force and our judicial system nowadays. We are trying to pick the people who are involved with this organisation, and now we call them FETO, a terrorist organisation, since they even used weapons to destabilise the country. We are now making a big effort to make sure that the followers of Gülen or members of this terrorist organisation are no longer in critical positions in the government organisation. However, the thing is, they can hide themselves very well. It is a very secretive organisation.

The problem with this organisation, like some other terrorist organisations in the Islamic world is this. In mainstream Islam, mainstream Islamic thinking, our target has to be religiously legitimate. Every step we have to take towards that target also has to be religiously legitimate. However, regarding FETO and some other terrorist organisations in the Islamic world, unfortunately, if they have a legitimate target, they can do all kinds of nasty things. They can do all kinds of religiously illegal things to reach that target. I think it is a big sickness that the Muslim world has to deal with, and Islamic thinkers have to work on this very carefully.

Another important element with this organisation is that they think that their leader is like the Messiah or the Awaited One. When they get an order, the followers turn into robots or zombies, so they do not even think. Actually, in Islam, thinking and using our brains is a big gift which differentiates us from all the other beings or creatures. In these kinds of organisations, the followers are asked to stop thinking, close their minds, lock their minds and do every kind of crazy things. This is also a sickness, a big flaw that we have to deal with. This is not just for FETO but for Daesh, Al-Qaeda and other organisations. This is something that seriously needs to be dealt with.

What we are going through is not easy, because Turkey signed up to all the important values and ideals like democracy, human rights, freedoms and the rule of law. Since 2002, from the very beginning of the AK Party, we were very careful to improve ourselves in these areas. This is together with improving our domestic security situation and also being more careful about our external security situation.

We did not really want to make a trade-off between security and freedom. However, this [coup attempt] was such a unique event that, like France did after the Paris bombings, we had to declare emergency rule in the country. Under emergency rule, the mood is “security first”, and when there is a “security-first” approach, then there will probably be some criticism coming from out there. However, the number-one priority right now in Turkey is to strengthen again stability, making sure that our domestic security situation gets back to normal.

Not only is our domestic security situation important, but on our Syrian border, we have two significant terror organisations, which are right across the border, Daesh and YPG/PYD or PKK as we call them in Turkey. They are right on our border and Syria is a huge regional threat for many countries, not only for Turkey. On the one hand, we are dealing with this domestic issue, and on the other hand, we are also dealing with Syria and also looking at how things will evolve in Iraq, as well as Yemen, Libya and so on. These are not easy times in this part of the world, but this part of the world is also in the region of Europe. We hope that our European colleagues and friends will give more input and support in the solving of some of these issues. This is why I think having this WPC in Doha has a very special meaning.

### **Thierry de Montbrial, President and Founder of the World Policy Conference**

To make the transition to foreign policy issues, the fact is that there is a perception. Turkey and President Erdogan is perceived very often as having over-reacted, with tens of thousands of people displaced, arrested etc. The result is that there is a sense of crisis in the relationship with Europe, with the European Union. Maybe we will see that in the next few days. There are talks about restoring the death penalty. In that case, that would be incompatible with Turkey belonging to the Council of Europe. Turkey was a founding father of this, and maybe very few people know that.

It is a relatively difficult situation, and with the US, there is the question of what President-elect Trump will do. Will he abide by the request of extraditing Gülen? I am not even sure that he has the power to do that himself, by the way. That is a legal problem here. Be that as it may, there could be some serious diplomatic problems, both with the EU and with the US. At the same time the relationship between Turkey and the West is becoming more and more important. In the case of Europe, we have the refugee issue and we have the Middle East situation. How do you see the interaction between these domestic problems in Turkey and this quite complicated international situation, particularly with the West?

### **Ali BABACAN**

Unfortunately, the world is going through a deglobalisation process nowadays. Many countries are more and more looking inwards and are being disintegrated from each other. World trade, global trade, used to twofold the size of global growth, but now world trade is increasing at par with or even less than the growth of the global economy. In a

way, countries or regions are becoming more and more compartmentalised and populism and nationalism are on the rise, as Prime Minister Davutoglu mentioned in the opening session.

Populism and nationalism are rising, and every country is blaming outsiders for what is going on in their country, it is a big problem. The big turmoil that the Middle East is going through is unfortunately coinciding with the deglobalisation process that the world is going through. Even when we look at the European Union, the 2008-09 Eurozone crisis made so many countries inevitably too occupied with their domestic issues. This meant that not enough attention was paid to the Middle East and North Africa.

When the Arab Spring started, Turkey felt quite lonely in a way, defending and expressing very European values to our Middle Eastern and North African neighbours. Transformation in this part of the world is not easy. In Eastern Europe, when transformation happened after the Soviet Union, many countries entered into the EU and NATO. However, huge political and economic support was given to those countries and they were promised better welfare and better circumstances for their citizens. Poland today gets grants of about 3-4% of its GDP from the EU. Poland is quite an advanced economy nowadays, but they still get a grant from the EU to continue with the transformation. For the Middle East and North Africa, that was unfortunately not given.

Another problem, I think, is the deficit of leadership in the world. That has played a key role in the deterioration of the process. Nationalism and populism is also a result of the lack of leadership in quite a few countries. In Turkey, luckily, we do not have that problem. We have very strong leadership and this strong leadership has been quite influential in transforming the country since 2002. However, I think it is also important to understand the domestic and regional circumstances of Turkey.

You mentioned civil servants being laid off from government units and so forth, but in these difficult times, it sometimes becomes necessary. This is like what happened in Eastern Germany when East and West Germany were being reunified. Hundreds of thousands of civil servants were laid off in order to clear the Nazi mentality from the state system. In terms of our domestic security situation right now, FETO and PKK are the two biggest threats, and sometimes, to make sure that those threats go away, you have to do these kinds of things. As we said, our mood right now is a “security-first” mood.

However, this will change, and we hope that the European Union also goes back to the founding values. I think the world does need a strong European Union in my view. Particularly after the Second World War, the European Union emerged as a very important peace project. Countries were fighting with each other and after millions and millions of people dying, countries were able to find some common areas of interest that they could build on. It started with coal and steel, very simple subjects, and then it turned into an economic entity, with a common market. Then it was the European Economic Community, the European Community and finally the European Union.

Common economic interests were the very fundamentals of the European Union, emerging as a very important success story. Now I am afraid we are losing this, because the feeling was that when we are together, benefits are for everyone. This feeling is now evaporating in many European Union member states. It is like what happened with the Brexit vote. 52% of the British people thought that being together with the EU no longer helped the UK. Actually, being a member of the EU was a cost, not a benefit, so why did they not get out? This feeling of “not having common benefits of being together any longer” is not good, so this is a very dangerous trend that we are observing.

Regarding Turkey, it is a very big pity for us, because we had a strong external EU anchor which helped us a lot to transform ourselves. This is in the rule of law, in human rights, freedoms and in how our democracy functions. Now that important external anchor, or a big target, is also evaporating in front of our eyes as a very important magnet. The EU’s soft power, the leverage of the EU in the neighbourhood, is also evaporating, together with deteriorating solidarity



within the EU. These are not easy times in our region and also within Turkey, but I don't think this is a missed opportunity. We still have to be hopeful and we have to work a lot. There are still a lot of people in this region and around the world who are good global thinkers, regarding what kind of better region and better world we can achieve. We have to move forward.