

DEBAT

Thierry DE MONTBRIAL

Thank you very much, Ahmet, for this very exhaustive presentation. There is at least one thing that is obvious, which is that you like to teach. After all, to be Professor of International Relations is more comfortable than to be Minister of Foreign Affairs or Prime Minister and so on. We are going to take a few questions, so make them as provocative as possible.

Riad TABET

Mr Prime Minister, the military conflict in Syria is practically over. One of the consequences of this conflict is the problem of refugees. Lebanon, along with Turkey and other countries like Jordan, shares this problem. Now, on the political ground, a solution is negotiated. Meanwhile the international community and NGOs are financing refugees in the countries where they are. In Lebanon, for example, a third of the population is made up of refugees. There are 1.5 million to 2 million people over a population of 4 million people. Do you think that humanitarian organisations should continue to finance these refugees to stay in the countries they have moved to, or do you think they should finance their return to Syria? I do not really see a strategy or a plan for that. What do you think?

Assia BENSALAH ALAOU

Thank you, Mr Minister, for listing the earthquakes. You have suggested that the regional balance and the global balance should come together, just to put everybody together, the stakeholders you mean, in order to find the appropriate answers. Who do you think would be capable of just bringing everybody together? Mr Trump has disqualified America because he has taken sides against Iran. You are ruling out the United Nations. So which authority can do that? That was my first question.

Secondly, what role do you see for Turkey in this quagmire? It has not been that clear. It seems that Turkey has been playing on different registers and sometimes it is not very visible to the rest of the community, whether in the West or in the rest of the Arab world. Could you please clarify that? Thank you.

Ahmet DAVUTOGLU

I am glad you only have two questions.

Michel FOUCHER

Mr Prime Minister, we always appreciate your comprehensive and intellectual view of the geopolitical situation. I have a very practical and maybe provocative question. Is Turkey ready to think about a regional conference, maybe in the style of the Vienna Congress, on a new long-lasting regional order in the Middle East where the first stakeholders will be Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel, with P5 countries in the back seats?

Mona MAKRAM-EBEID

Thank you, Mr Minister. For years, Turkey was looked upon as a modern country in the region, as an Islamist democratic country. Today, Turkey is accused of financing and giving asylum to radical extremists. Can you explain why? This is part of the Qatar crisis that you mentioned. Thank you.

Ali ASLAN

Thank you, Thierry. It is great to see you again, Mr Prime Minister. As Thierry said, I am a German of Turkish descent and tomorrow morning we will be discussing the future of Europe. I am not revealing any shocking news when I say

that relations between Turkey and Europe could be better. There is some pondering in Europe about whether Turkey still wants to be part of the European Union. I want to take advantage of your presence here today to hear an unequivocal statement and perhaps a pledge about whether Turkey still wants to continue on the path to EU membership. Thank you.

Ahmet DAVUTOGLU

I have six questions. Thank you very much, Thierry. I fully agree about the refugees in answer to Riad's question. There is no international strategy. Therefore the burden is on the shoulders of the neighbouring countries, Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan. There is an urgent need for an international conference about our refugee strategy because in addition to Syrian refugees, there are Libyans and others as well. How can we deal with this question based on humanitarian values, as well as the financial aspects of this crisis? The first priority should be for the refugees to go back home, but I am sure when Syrians see that Assad is still staying in Damascus, many Syrians will not go back. This is a psychological influence on refugees everywhere because they escaped from a regime and the regime is still there. A peace plan on the ground guaranteed by international powers would allow refugees to return. Without this, no refugee will go back when the situation remains fragile.

Regarding the question on Turkish role, we have a good example of what we have achieved. In 2003, in the first days of our government, before the Iraqi war, we established an Iraqi neighbourhood platform where all the conflicting parties on Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Jordan and Egypt all met around the table. This mechanism continued until 2008 and after some time, P5 became an observer to this group. This was a very successful example of minimising tensions between neighbours on Iraq and also creating a consensus among them about territorial integrity and the stability of Iraq, which was in the interests of everybody.

About Turkish foreign policy, at the beginning, until the Arab Spring, even until 2013 when Daesh came into the picture, when oppressive regimes and terrorist organisations became two options for Arab people, not democratic choices, Turkish policy was proactive in establishing a regional order. I want to give an example of regional order. In 2010, I was guest of honour at an Arab League meeting and I proposed a new regional order like was mentioned, the Congress of Vienna or the Helsinki process, which was based on four principles, which were one, high-level political dialogue, which we do not have today unfortunately; two, a common security framework in the region; three, economic interdependency and four, multicultural co-existence. I think regional orders can be based on these four principles.

Without high-level political dialogue, especially in the Middle East, you cannot solve anything because at the end of the day, leaders decide. Without economic interdependency, you cannot have stable, sustainable order. Economic interdependency is the best way to maintain peace. A common security approach against terrorists or against any inter-state tension is a must and also multicultural co-existence, especially in cities. If you ask me, the most dangerous situation is a divided city, like Berlin during the Cold War. Today in Iraq, cities are being called Shiite cities, Sunni cities, Kurdish cities, and this is the biggest threat. This could be the basis for a new regional order and in the UN system, between the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly, there should be intermediary mechanisms where regional powers can come in to be like a start-up process going on in Syria. This is also another method for solving the issues.

Regarding terrorism, Turkey has been a model, without forgetting that this proactive policy had to change or was forced to change after 2013 when Daesh came into the picture as threatening Turkey and terrorist organisations. Then the democratic wave in the Middle East changed after the coup d'état in Egypt. The old leaders started to come back and they were confident, like in Yemen, Saudi, and the Arab Spring became a tension between oppressive leaders and terrorist organisations. The democratic transformation has not been supported by international groups. Turkey had to change to a self-defensive position rather than a proactive position because we tried to keep our territory intact. Therefore we had a Euphrates Shield operation in Syria or extraterritorial operations in Iraq to defend ourselves. I usually do not like this as a strategy, but the fragile situation in the region forced Turkey to take that position, especially last year's coup d'état attempt in Turkey. Unfortunately, the silence from the international community regarding this coup d'état made the Turkish political elite even more self-defensive.

What we need today in Turkey is a new inclusive, long-term strategy of democratisation and stability. We cannot continue with this self-defensive position. However, at the same time, everybody should understand the trauma Turkey is facing to maintain the survival of democracy against the threats in the country from terrorist organisations and the religious cult of Gülen or any other new attempts of coup d'état and also against instabilities coming from the outside.

Lastly, regarding the question from Mona about terrorism, I have to be very frank, Mona. We have to differentiate terrorist and opposition. I am with Qatar. You may criticise Al Jazeera, but without freedom of speech, without freedom of intellectual analysis, you cannot have democracy. Sustainable stability in the region can only come through democracy, which means freedom of speech and freedom of press. We also face problems in Turkey, but calling for Al Jazeera to be banned is not a way out. More dialogue is the solution.

I want to give one striking example. In 2006, Rached Ghannouchi from Tunisia came to Turkey as an intellectual, but also as an opposition leader in exile. I knew him from academic life. I welcomed him and we spoke together. The next day, the Tunisian ambassador came to see me and said, 'A terrorist came to your country and you welcomed him'. I said, 'Ghannouchi would not kill a fly'. He told me, 'In one of his demonstrations in 1991, some people were injured'. The problem is you are not separating opposition and terror. If you treat all opposition as terrorists, then you cannot survive. We have to make a difference between these two. Now Ghannouchi is welcomed everywhere as part of a more moderate, more democratic wing of Islamists, and that diplomat has served in Tunisia, even after Ghannouchi came back to Tunisia.

Today, we have to be very hard against terrorists, such as Daesh, Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda, all types of terrorism. I stood shoulder to shoulder in Paris with all the European leaders after the terrorist attack in Paris in early 2015. However, at the same time, we should not give the impression that anybody who thinks differently than the existing *status quo* is a terrorist because that definition of a terrorist makes terrorists happier. What we need is an inclusive approach to opposition at national, regional and global levels, more dialogue, more freedom, but being as hard as possible against terrorists who take up guns and use violence against people. There should be a differentiation. Despite all these difficulties, Turkey will continue to be a good model and a good example for everybody. Thank you very much.

Ali, regarding your question on the EU, the relation between the European Union and Turkey is important for Turkey and the EU and it is also a peace model for interreligious and intercultural co-existence and harmony. Therefore the government's first strategy was to make Turkey a full member of the EU, and in 2004, we got this decision. Unfortunately, after that, we had several difficulties. I do not want to blame any specific actor, but one thing is clear: Turkey had to face many double standards, let me say, regarding the Cyprus issue and other issues. Despite all this, Turkey has continued. When I was re-elected as Prime Minister on 1 November 2015, my first target was to rearrange Turkish/EU relations and it was a success story on 18 March. There was a deal between me and the European leaders, including Prime Minister Merkel, President Hollande and others. It was a strategic agreement to solve the refugee issue and also to put Turkey and the European Union back on the right path to liberalisation and readjustment of the custom union and all the other pending issues in the package.

When I decided to leave my position, the first thing I did was to call Mr Juncker, our close friend. I told him, 'I am resigning, but you must continue this process'. In June, we were expecting to get visa liberalisation and I also told the new Prime Minister of Turkey that this should be the most important priority for the new government, but unfortunately after that, there was a huge tension and the Europeans did not fulfil any of these promises, despite the refugee issue being solved. Now what all of us have to do is, instead of provoking emotional rhetoric between Turkey and the EU, we have to be rational. Turkey needs the EU. As a Turkish citizen, I am telling you that we need the EU and nobody can simply isolate Turkey from the European continent. The European Union needs Turkey. The only thing is to sit around the table, put everything on the table in an honest and transparent manner and start a new process. Thank you.



Thierry DE MONTBRIAL

Thank you very much, Ahmet. I am sure that I speak on behalf of everyone when I wish you well and I wish Turkey well. Thank you very much.

Ahmet DAVUTOGLU

Thank you.