



Friends of Europe Les amis de l'Europe

*In partnership with*



**Europe's World**

THE ONLY EUROPE-WIDE POLICY JOURNAL

VIP DINNER DEBATE

# TURKEY'S EUROPEAN FUTURE

MONDAY 19 JANUARY 2009

CERCLE ROYAL GAULOIS, BRUSSELS



Keynote address by  
Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

Comments by  
Ali Babacan, Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Egemen Bağış, Minister of State and Chief Negotiator  
Elmar Brok MEP, Member of the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs  
and Trustee of *Friends of Europe*  
Olli Rehn, EU Commissioner for Enlargement  
Dieter Scheiff, CEO of Adecco Group

The summary of debate was written on behalf of *Friends of Europe* by Philip Hunt, an independent journalist.

The views expressed in it are personal opinions and not necessarily the views of the organisations they represent, nor of *Friends of Europe*, its Board of Trustees, members or partners.

Reproduction in whole or in part is permitted, providing that full credit is given to *Friends of Europe*, and provided that any such reproduction, whether in whole or in part, is not sold unless incorporated in other works.

***Friends of Europe, the Security & Defence Agenda and Europe's World* are headquartered in the Bibliothèque Solvay, Parc Leopold, 137 rue Belliard, 1040 Brussels**

*Friends of Europe*

T: +32 (0)2 737 91 45

F: +32 (0)2 738 7597

[info@friendsofeurope.org](mailto:info@friendsofeurope.org)

[www.friendsofeurope.org](http://www.friendsofeurope.org)

Security & Defence Agenda

T: +32 (0)2 737 91 48

F: +32 (0)2 736 32 16

[info@securitydefenceagenda.org](mailto:info@securitydefenceagenda.org)

[www.securitydefenceagenda.org](http://www.securitydefenceagenda.org)

*Europe's World*

T: +32 (0)2 739 15 75

F: +32 (0)2 739 15 92

[info@europesworld.org](mailto:info@europesworld.org)

[www.europesworld.org](http://www.europesworld.org)

## VIP Dinner Debate – Turkey’s European future

*Friends of Europe*, the Security & Defence Agenda and *Europe’s World* kicked off their European political year with a stimulating debate on **Turkey’s European Future** during a **VIP Dinner Debate** on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2009. A distinguished audience of senior politicians, policymakers, managerial executives and journalists was welcomed by *Friends of Europe’s* President Viscount Etienne Davignon, who reminded them that in today’s concerns of energy security, geographic security, and stability in the Middle East, Turkey plays a prominent role.

He introduced Turkish Prime Minister **Recep Tayyip Erdoğan**, who opined that Turkey presented a powerful case for future membership in the European Union. Prime Minister Erdoğan reminded the gathering that the European Union we know today, a power bloc of nearly 500mil people, was not built by standing still and looking back, but by looking forwards to the future. The EU would not be the power it is today without expansion, and each additional member had brought new resources and abilities to the Union.

---

*'Turkey joined the Customs Union in 1996 and first began building relations with the EU in 1966. Now, forty-three years later, we are still trying to become a member of the European Union.'*

Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan



---

Turkey joined the Customs Union in 1996, he said, and established relations with the EU as far back as 1966. 'Now, forty-three years later, we are still trying to become a member of the European Union.' Of the 10 chapters to be completed for accession, Turkey has completed one, and full membership in the EU is still the country's goal.

Erdoğan emphasised that since Turkey is a member of the G20 and has the 17<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world and the 6<sup>th</sup> largest in the European region, it could hardly be viewed as a potential burden to the EU. The country has a population of 70 million young and dynamic people, he stated, with exports of some \$125 billion. Inflation had been at 30% but was now down to 6%, while interest rates, once also quite high, have fallen to 3%. All these figures, he pointed out, are in line with the Maastricht criteria.



*Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan  
with Friends of Europe President Etienne Davignon*

Turning to energy, he said that Turkey is more of a transit country for gas supplies than a consumer. The planned Nabucco pipeline from Turkey to Austria would be important for European energy security; however, conflicts regarding European support need to be resolved if the pipeline is to deliver the promised resources. Turkey has also worked hard to secure its own energy supplies, Erdoğan said. When he came to power in 2003, just nine Turkish provinces had natural gas

supplies – that number has now risen to 63 provinces.

Turkey generates 50% of its energy from gas-fired power stations, he pointed out, which is why it is investing in alternative sources of supply such as hydro, thermal, wind and solar energies. The country also plans to establish several nuclear power plants, although these will take 7-8 years before they are operational.

## Turkey's democratic credentials – becoming stronger?

Cypriot MEP **Marios Matsakis** asked when Turkey would accept that EU personnel are sufficient protection for the citizens of both North and South Cyprus, and thus withdraw Turkish armed forces from the island. Erdoğan insisted that he had fully supported the Annan plan negotiated at Bórgenstock in 2004. He maintained that Turkey had done everything that needed to be done in Cyprus, but South Cyprus was not reciprocating. He saw South Cyprus as simply using the stalemate as an excuse to delay Turkey's accession.

**Olli Rehn**, EU Commissioner for Enlargement, remarked that the reform of human rights issues such as freedom of expression and religion, as included in Turkey's latest national programme, are an important step forward in the EU's eyes, as is the new acceptance for broadcasting in the Kurdish language and the reform of trade union laws. Noting the increasing strategic importance of Turkey, he said, 'The key issue is still Turkey's domestic policy-making – we have to decide on Turkey's capacity to deepen and widen its internal democracy.'

---

*'The key issue is still Turkey's domestic policy-making – we have to decide on Turkey's capacity to deepen and widen its internal democracy.'*

Olli Rehn, EU Commissioner for Enlargement



---

Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs **Ali Babacan** stressed that the core values of EU member states are shared by Turkey. 'The country launched on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008 a national programme of around 130 new laws and 340 items of secondary legislation, after consulting with some 87 NGOs. Much of the draft programme is available on the internet for public comment.'

Turkish Minister of State and Chief Negotiator **Egemen Bağış** reminded the audience that just 50 years ago, a military coup resulted in the execution of the prime minister. 'Ten years ago, the mayor of our biggest city was imprisoned for reciting a poem. Today, that man is our Prime Minister.' He went on to comment that 'Turkey is evolving for its own benefit, as well as others,' and, quoting Willy Brandt's statement of 1969, 'If more democracy means more risk, then we are ready to assume that risk.'

## What are attitudes within Turkey to EU accession?

Economist correspondent **David Rennie** asked whether public opinion in Turkey towards EU accession is changing. Erdoğan responded that the 2008 movement for dissolution of his



party had delayed the accession process, and Turkish public support in favour of accession had dropped from 75% to around 50%.

'Has the EU ever applied special-partnership status to any country other than Turkey?', he asked. 'When you do that, naturally the Turkish intelligentsia will say – OK, they are keeping us at arm's length.' They would try to revive the enthusiasm, he said, but the EU institutions need to play their part as well.

## Would Turkish membership benefit the EU?

**Ali Babacan** maintained that Turkish membership would add more diversity to the EU: 'With Turkey joining, regions like North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus will feel closer to the EU.' He said that, 'Turkey, with all its connections, will open doors for the EU. Our country is an important ally for Europe,' even if it still has to catch up to European values in certain areas.



*From left to right Giles Merritt, Olli Rehn, Egemen Bağış and Dieter Scheiff*

Turkish labour forces are very important for Europe, said **Dieter Scheiff**, CEO of the Adecco Group. He stressed that Turkey is the fourth largest labour market on Europe's borders, with an educated, active and young labour pool. In today's labour markets, flexibility of work is important, he added, which means movement of people. To get the right person to the right job at the right time needs to be easy.

He also emphasised the importance of adapting Turkish laws to European standards. Europe recently implemented a temporary work directive which brings flexibility to the companies but also security to workers. He personally wished that Turkey would implement a similar law. "Turkey can be a very active partner for the European Union and also an important source for labour," he stated.

## Turkey's accession prospects – improving or diminishing?

**Ali Babacan** said that the coming year would be a difficult one, as the EU would be more inward-looking while dealing with current crises. But the accession process would continue, he said, and it is important that Turkey continues to reform and follow the accession process 'chapter by chapter.'

**MEP Elmar Brok** of the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trustee of *Friends of Europe* believed that the real problem in Turkey is now public opinion, because the Turkish people had hoped the process would move more quickly. 'In the EU it is clear that Turkey is even more important to Europe strategically than it was in the Cold War. I would feel more secure to have a democratic Turkey living under the rule of law in that part of the world, than a Turkey which is on the other side. Therefore we have to conduct a policy of "Turkey in our camp",' he said.

However, he stated, from the European perspective, the important questions on Turkish membership concerned issues such as the rule of law, the judicial system, freedom of religion, and the role of the military. He also wondered if changes in legal statutes would be also be perceptible in practice. 'Some of us have doubts about whether change at such depth is possible. If it is possible, then my opposition to Turkish membership would go down.'

---

*"In the EU it is clear that Turkey is even more important to Europe strategically than it was in the Cold War ... we should therefore conduct a policy of 'Turkey in our camp'.*

MEP Elmar Brok, European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trustee of *Friends of Europe*



The EU itself also needs to examine its future direction, he remarked. 'What is the final goal of the European Union? What is our integration capacity? How far are we able to reform ourselves?' 'If you see how many countries want to join,' he said, 'you can see the possibility of over forty countries in the EU!' We need to think carefully about how the EU will develop.'





# Friends of Europe & Europe's World TV

EN FR

## Europe'sWorld

THE ONLY EUROPE-WIDE IDEAS COMMUNITY

International | Security & Defence | Europe | Sustainable Europe | Developing World

### EUROPE'S WORLD TV


#### Turkey's European Future

Brussels, Monday 19th January 2009


Turkish Prime Minister **Recep Tayyip Erdoğan** put a powerful case for Turkey as future member of the European Union to a distinguished gathering of senior politicians, policy makers, managerial executives and journalists.


On the right you can watch an edited film clip with selected extracts from the dinner debate.

**Full Speech of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan**



**Panel discussion on 'Turkey's European Future'**





Visit *Europe's World TV* on [www.europesworld.org](http://www.europesworld.org)

Friends of Europe thanks its VIP partners (Visibility – Input – Platform)



Education and Culture

European Active Citizenship

With the support of the European Commission:

Support for bodies active at European Level in the field of active European Citizenship