

EU Talks: A Conversation with Mr. Esko Aho, Former Prime Minister of Finland

“Education, Technology and Innovation at the Dawn of the New Normal Era”

14 May 2020, 14.00

Former Prime Minister of Finland Mr. Aho,

Dear Participants,

Welcome and thank you for joining us for this DEİK/EUTALKS webinar on education, technology and innovation at the dawn of the new normal era.

And special thanks to the Prime Minister, for making the time to join us this afternoon.

We are all brought here today online because of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which, whether we like it or not, is forcing a “new normal era” upon us. It has, and will continue, to impact many aspects of our individual lives and our societies as a whole. We will narrow in on three crucial pillars overlapping for global progression: Education, Technology and Innovation.

Globally, over 1.2 billion children are out of the classroom - an unprecedented challenge for our modern world. But very quickly, we saw how our modernity was able to adapt to this changed landscape. And – in enters technology and innovation.

From virtual classrooms to interactive apps, tech and innovation has been at the forefront of solving what could have been one of the largest disasters and fall-outs from this pandemic: failing to educate our next generations. In Turkey, we responded by starting one of the most comprehensive distance learning operations globally: the state-sponsored EBA online platform, which will serve nearly 20 million students.

But the implications of Covid-19 spill obviously far outside of the classroom. Many believe this crisis will spark a much-needed wave of medical innovation.

Because ultimately, the solution to this pandemic is medical. And the world is uniting, not dividing, in this search. The EU Commission registered \$8 billion in pledges worldwide – including from Turkey and from Finland. With this level of funding, many believe the innovative engineering needed for creating a vaccine will now come earlier than the initially estimated timeline.

During the most pessimistic of moments, mankind adapts itself even to the situation, seeks and finds a way out. I believe that we have adapted much better in terms of psychology and business than we expected and have created timely solutions. Innovation is also similar: ever evolving and developing...

In this process, some critical sectors that have strengthened their online infrastructure and invested in R&D are becoming prominent. We find solutions according to changing situations all over the world and Turkey is no exception in this race to find the best solution for people and businesses alike.

As DEİK, with our 146 Country to Country based Business Councils with an understanding of “business diplomacy”, we are aware that, those who are capable in adapting to difficult conditions and those who can manage to keep the supply chain, who can give sufficient confidence to counterparts, will lead the change for a better world.

While continuing our business, a human perspective must be at the core of innovation and education. We must adapt this point of view to our business; it has to be the cornerstone of our education. We need to use this for the benefit of society despite all the negativities.

Mr. Aho, the Prime Minister, a new normal perhaps will become the regular way and pave the way for new standards and methods but also raises some questions.

Are these lockdown measures and social distancing a limitation of freedom or instead, do you think this works as a stepping stone for the next leap of mankind?

Soon, we will enter the normalization period in many countries one by one. This transition may not be easy on every sector, but eventually, smart solutions for businesses, an educational approach to back up the human factor in this transition to a more digital, faster-paced world will shape things to come.

As I always say, the response to the virus has forced nations to close-off, and some commentators put forth that the pandemic might mark the start of “deglobalization”.

However, it is also becoming apparent that the end to this crisis and any future issue similarly affecting all countries will require global coordination and cooperation.

- How should the leadership - local or global- be it governments, businesses or schools- be shaped to tackle such massive threats to the well-being of people without infusing any fear in their minds and keep everyone motivated and efficient?

- What are some silver linings you see on this issue - if there are any - that may become life-changing lessons for future generations?

We expect that, our minds and conscience will guide us, while we're adapting to innovation during the next stage.

I feel privileged to be together with you and our esteemed participants here to discuss the answers to these questions.

Thank you again to Mr. Aho, Turkey-Finland Business Council, Chairman Halil Kulluk and to our audience for joining us.

Finally, will you all please excuse me since I have to leave the webinar at around 3 pm with Turkish time, without interrupting any one again, since a sudden overlap happened today out of my control.

Thanks again.

Nail OLPAK

President of DEİK