

EU Talks: Geopolitical Future of Europe

4 May 2020, 15.00

Distinguished Panelists,

Dear Business Colleagues,

Welcome and thank you for joining us for this DEİK/EUTALKS webinar on the geopolitical future of Europe.

And thank you, of course, to our distinguished speakers for making the time to join us this afternoon.

Here at DEİK, together with our 146 country to country based Business Councils, which are acting at each corner of the world, we represent majority of Turkey's leading businesses, many of which have extensive ties with the EU.

At DEİK, we have been following all developments closely, and there are several evolving issues which are of particular interest to us, notably the EU-Turkey Customs Union, which will celebrate its 25th anniversary in December, while we're having troubles so we believe it should be revised and updated; and the prospects for EU-Turkey visa liberalization - to improve opportunities for Turkish students and businesspeople in Europe.

As many of you will know, our distinguished guests are experts in their fields, who have spent much of their careers shaping the present and future of the European project:

The Honorable Baroness Ashton, who lead the EU's negotiations on Iran's nuclear program and galvanized the agreement between Serbia and Kosovo;

Mr. Bildt, who led the government that negotiated and signed Sweden's accession to the European Union; and Mr. Frattini, who was a member of the Commission that oversaw Romania and Bulgaria's entry into the EU.

External actors have often criticized the EU for a lack of coordinated response to common crises and COVID-19 appears to be no different. These crises also tend to re-open long- standing debates on the Union's authority, as well as tensions between and within Member States.

The debate around Euro-bonds seems to exemplify this lack of alignment — rejected by the Netherlands, supported by France, Italy, Spain or Belgium, and sceptically received by Germany who is wary of a broader pooling of debt risk.

The implications for the future of the European project are wide-ranging, and of significant interest for us at DEİK.

During the Covid19 crisis, we have witnessed important aids going from Turkey to several European countries in critical times. Turkish & the EU leaders had also regular discussions during that process. Do the panelists think that the current crisis, with the economic and social damage it has caused, could lead to a rapprochement in Turkey-EU relations? (i.e. Modernisation of the Customs Union & Revised Refugees Deal) Can we expect some concrete steps in that regard during the German Presidency of the EU?

And which place do they see for Turkey in the geopolitical future of Europe, especially during the current EU leadership?

Covid-19 has awoken the world to the realization that there are risks in relying on distant and often unaligned economic partners.

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 will require global coordination and cooperation.

- Do you foresee an opportunity for the EU to fill the vacuum, and take a more prominent leadership role on the global political stage?

- And if so, would that require further evolution from the Union? Or are the mechanisms already in place for it to effectively expand its regional and global leadership?

We expect that COVID19 will significantly re-shape the EU’s relationships with countries outside of the Union.

I am pleased to be together to find the answers to these questions.

Thank you again to all our panelists and audience for joining us.

Nail OLPAK

President of DEİK

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