

Conservative Friends of Turkey holds panel discussion and reception at the European Parliament on Jan 7, 2009



Daniel Hannan MEP:

"Given the potential of voting power based on population, demographics will make Turkey's EU membership problematic"

"At the time against the Soviets and now against terrorism, Turkey has stood with us as a friend, but a friend deserves more support"

Murat Mercan:

"Israel's recent policies will have negative consequences. EU has been passive in this process"

"EU needs Turkey as a full member if it wants to be a global strategic actor"

Umut Oran:

"AKP does not take EU negotiations seriously"

"Our goods are in free circulation throughout EU but our business community still has to deal with visa problems – this is unfair competition"

Conservative Friends of Turkey (CFT) – Brussels was launched at the European Parliament on Wednesday 7th January.

The launch was preceded by a seminar organised at the European Parliament, in conjunction with the Istanbul Cosmopolitan Lions Club, and entitled 'Cold War Reloaded: What Role for Turkey?'

The seminar panel comprised Daniel Hannan MEP, Murat Mercan, Deputy in the Turkish Grand National Assembly and chairman of the Assembly's Foreign Relations Committee and Umut Oran, Member of Board of Directors – EUROTEx; former President and Member of Executive Committee – IAF World Apparel Federation and President of Clothing Association - Turkey. The panel was chaired by Geoffery van Orden MBE MEP. Both Daniel Hannan and Geoffery van Orden are founder members of the Conservative Friends of Turkey. Many MEPs including Roger Helmer, Ari Vatanen, Vural Oger and Evgeni Kirilov, senior officials from the European Commission and NATO, analysts, think-tank representatives and journalists were in the audience.



Taking Turco-Russian relations as a starting point, the panel touched upon various topical issues including the prospects for Turkey's membership of the EU.

Daniel Hannan said that despite all the indications of full membership made by the European Union, there remained the persistent obstacle in the eyes of many in Europe on the size of the Turkish population and the implications for governance in the EU as the union moves towards more population based voting systems.

Hannan said that Britain's Conservatives had been staunch supporters of Turkey for more than 150 years and that the EU's treatment of an important and significant future member was behaviour unbecoming of those that purported to be 'Friends of Turkey'.

Murat Mercan spoke enthusiastically of Turkey's energetic foreign policy with the country reviving its role in regional affairs across its eastern, western, northern and southern flanks. The strength that Turkey brought to foreign policy and multilateral initiatives on regional and global issues would help Europe attain the role it envisages as a strong regional actor, Mercan said.

With the crisis unfolding in Gaza, Mercan spoke of the significant contributions Turkey has made and continues to make in mediating for peace between Israel and her neighbours. Mercan, who has resigned his membership of the Turkish-Israel Friendship Group in the Turkish Assembly, said that Europe's position as a member of the Middle East Quartet would be enhanced by Turkey's membership of the union.

Mercan also said that some of the most pressing global issues; the Balkans, the Caucasus, gas and energy, terror and security, all invited, in some way or other, the help and contribution of Turkey to their resolution.

Umut Oran, speaking on the problems faced by the business community in Turkey, despite the Customs Union agreement, said that the continuing aberrations and anomalies hampered mutually advantageous trading relations and that these should be lifted and accession negotiations speeded up in the long term interests of both the EU and Turkey.

A reception marking the launch of CFT-Brussels took place after the seminar and was attended by around 60 people.

Notes courtesy of Shenaz Bunglawala, CFT Founder Member