

Conservative Friends of Turkey held a reception and panel discussion during the Conservative Party Conference in Manchester, on Monday Oct 3, 2011. Several MPs, MEPs, and local politicians from all over the UK were in attendance in the panel discussion titled "Turkey-UK Strategic Partnership in a Changing World". Speakers were the Minister for Europe David Lidington MP and international relations expert Dr Gulnur Aybet.

After a brief introduction from CFT co-founder Dr Onur Cetin, chair of the panel Ambassador Cevikoz reminded the audience that a new strategic partnership agreement between Turkey and UK was signed by Erdogan and Cameron in July 2010. In the light of Foreign Secretary Hague's recent interviews (he said he has calls with Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu as frequently as with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton), David Lidington MP reconfirmed that Turkey-UK dialogue is very healthy and more critical than ever for Europe, Middle East and Central Asia.



Notes:

Rt Hon David Lidington MP

- Turkey is increasingly prosperous and this makes the case for our economic partnership more important.
- Turkey is strategically close to West and culturally close to East, has Islamic identity but firmly committed to democracy.
- Nobody says Turkey is a role model after the Arab spring, it has different history and traditions. But a message about greater respect for human rights would be more effective when it comes from Ankara, rather than London or Paris.
- As an emerging leader of the Middle East, we'd of course prefer Erdogan to Ahmadinejad.

- A resolution to Cyprus issue would silence Turkey's critics, but we can't dictate anything, Turkish and Greek Cypriots should start detailed talks and they need to own the process.
- UK has an outward vision for EU: lowering barriers to trade as well as to neighbours, and we remain committed to the Turkish accession.



Dr Gulnur Aybet

- UK is a balancing actor when Turkey's relations with West are occasionally strained.
- Turkey can now talk to anyone in its region.
- When it approaches Iran, it is more realpolitik than ethnic or religious ties, which also explains strong relations with Russia.
- Regional mediator role is proving quite challenging, Turkey needs more time to make it work.
- Turkey's Libya policy was carefully planned: opposing any military intervention until NATO takes over, and then contributing only in humanitarian terms.
- It is obvious that Turkey-US relations are strong and not dependent on Israel anymore.
- Turkey will find other alliances as long as the West doesn't have a coherent strategy.
- Turkey's EU accession is a small scale issue compared to the role it can play with a strategic vision.