



Conservative Friends of Turkey (CFT) and the Young Conservative Europe Group (YCEG) held a panel on May 10, 2011 to discuss the developments in British & European cooperation with Turkey - covering foreign policy, trade and civil society angles. The panel discussion, followed by a reception, took place at the Europe House - London office of the European Parliament in Westminster.

Panelists were John Peet, Europe Editor of the Economist, Maurice Fraser, Senior Fellow in European Politics at the London School of Economics and Richard Balfe, former MEP. Lord Inglewood and former Conservative MP Ian Taylor moderated the discussion. HE Turkish Ambassador to UK Unal Cevikoz, HE Azerbaijani Ambassador to UK Fakhraddin Gurbanov, James Arbuthnot MP, Chairman of the House of Commons Defence Select Committee, were among the guests.

Panelists made the following points in their opening speeches:

John Peet

- Economy is central to Turkey's transformation and EU relations
- Though slow nowadays, we can't get away from the EU accession discussions, there is no turning back - Turkey will not even discuss privileged partnership
- Foreign policy is another aspect of the Turkish transformation - Turkey doesn't ignore neighbours as before, but rather actively engages
- Cyprus problem is still a burden
- Arab spring gives Turkey a fresh chance to use its expertise and relationships as a leverage in troubled EU negotiations

Maurice Fraser

- There is a suboptimal EU-Turkey cooperation at the moment, interests are not really aligned
- Enlargement fatigue, feeling that Bulgaria and Romania accession was too early, Euro problems, immigration problems, all complicate the situation. Having said that, EU mechanisms for accession are still effectively in place
- There are arguments that Turkey is in better shape than other candidates or some members, but it is just an intellectual discussion now
- British Foreign Secretary has been the only one voicing support, clearly not enough

- Very few pro-Turkey voices at the moment, but also few anti-Turkey - don't give them ammunition
- Women and minority rights will give Turkey hard time in front of EU parliament, even if other problems were solved. There is the feeling of a totalitarian atmosphere at the moment, especially regarding journalism
- Turkey needs to give clear signals in the coming months, as to which side it is on. Arguing that there is another world away from the West, is a policy too clever and risky, giving opponents ammunition

Richard Balfe

- Support of Turkish accession is a rare issue that unites all major British parties
- Glad to see a proactive Turkey, it used to be seen as the cause of every problem and was constantly defending itself
- EU reforms have to be done thinking how to make the society better, not because EU demands them
- Turkish PM should be invited to all summits and Turkey's voice needs to be heard
- Among 3 major powers driving Turkish accession: US made mistakes but its overall influence is positive, France has been short sighted, Germany sometimes even more short sighted but will eventually come on board
- There is no question - Cyprus' EU accession should never have been allowed
- Other Turkish leaders emerging - wouldn't be surprised to see CHP's Kilicdaroglu as a PM one day

In the following Q&A session, a variety of issues were raised by the audience for the panelists to respond:

- **Maurice Fraser:** Nabucco has been the main focus in terms of Turkey's geopolitical importance in energy, but EU still has no strategy - members have been closing bilateral deals. Nabucco's economic credibility questionable, long way to go before it becomes a factor.
- **Richard Balfe:** Germany can be lobbied for Turkish accession but has a right wing government - whereas Turks are in left wing parties, how can they be effective? Government to government lobbying not very feasible, but think tanks, journals etc should be putting forth convincing arguments, and there should be more Turks in the CDU
- **Richard Balfe:** UK's openness and integration abilities allowed better use of intellectual capacity compared to other countries, makes economic sense and must have had economic impact
- **Maurice Fraser:** Arab spring posed problems for Turkey, it has been too friendly with some dictators like everybody else. It has had serious opposition to military action but changing the policy slightly. Adapting the Turkish model for these countries is a simplistic idea, not promoted by Turkey really
- **Richard Balfe:** Turkey's popularity in the Middle East partially due to confronting Israel, and they had it long coming
- **Maurice Fraser:** Human right violations in the Arab world dwarves that of Israel's. Also Iran has been forgotten but nuclear power issue will come back, Turkey will have a role to play

- **Richard Balfe:** There may be concerns about what will happen after the upcoming election, but democracy is deeply entrenched in Turkey, it will develop further, not decay
- **Richard Balfe:** Let's not delude ourselves that Turkey has another world to go, in which it can do some mischief
- **John Peet:** Expect improvements in how Turkish government deals with the Kurdish problem after the election
- **John Peet:** Actually 2012 French presidential election could be more important for Turkey than the predictable results of the upcoming election
- **John Peet:** Austria benefited a lot after the most recent enlargement in terms of business - perhaps a good argument to convince them?
- **Richard Balfe:** Austria is a very right wing country, not tolerant to its own people either
- **Austrian embassy official:** Nobody is talking about Turkey joining tomorrow, Austrian public opinion is negative now but politicians can influence this. Austria is not anti-Muslim, e.g. it supports Bosnia's accession