

Closing Speech Inspiring Change in an Age of Uncertainty

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CONFERENCE REPORT

Closing Speech Inspiring Change in an Age of Uncertainty

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Closing Speech Inspiring Change in an Age of Uncertainty

This is a report on a public session titled “Closing Speech: Inspiring Change in an Age of Uncertainty”, held as part of the TRT World Forum 2017. The views, themes and discussion points expressed in this conference report are those of speakers and participants present at the TRT World Forum 2017, and do not reflect the official view of TRT World Research Centre.

President of The Rep



A photograph of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey seated in a black leather chair on a stage. He is wearing a dark suit, a white shirt, and a red tie. He is looking down and to his left. To his left is a small table with a microphone and a small bouquet of white flowers. The background is a large screen displaying a blue-toned image of a city skyline at night with the text "Republic of Turkey" in white. The foreground shows the silhouettes of the audience members.

Republic of Turkey

The Keynote Speech of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan received great praise from the audience.

Summary

His Excellency President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan participated as the guest of honour in the TRT World Forum 2017 to give the keynote speech at the Forum under the moderation of Fatih Er, Director of News and Programmes at TRT World. President Erdoğan's remarks spanned from the failure of the current global order in sustaining the international peace to the humanitarian crisis around the world. Attitudes and actions of some of the European countries, namely Germany and France, and the United States vis-à-vis the FETÖ and PKK were also criticised by President Erdoğan. The war in Syria and the refugee crisis were discussed and crucial explanations and suggestions were laid out. 'Western understanding of democracy is under serious crisis,' President Erdoğan said when asked about the double standards of the West concerning the MENA region.

President Erdoğan kicked off his speech by criticising the established world order after the end of the World War II. 'The world is bigger than five', he said, referring to the powerful positions of the permanent members of the UN Security Council. He urged the international community to take action to reform the Security Council. 'There is no justice in this world. We are living in a world where the powerful is right, not the right is powerful,' he said when asked on whether there is support from the international community for Turkey's cause. Following this question, President Erdoğan gave the example of the West in applying double standards when it comes to PKK affiliated groups such as YPG and PYD in northern Syria. He mentioned that Turkey offered support to the US and its army in its war against DAESH in Syria. However, the US had chosen to support one terrorist group, YPG, to fight another terrorist group, DAESH - which causes us to question the unreasonable decision of the US. He said the European countries are no different in regards to PKK and condemned the rallies of the PKK in the capitals of Germany and France.

Considerable emphasis was given to the refugee crisis and the war in Syria. President Erdoğan said Turkey is hosting over 3.5 million refugees within its borders: 'Turkey has spent over 30 billion dollars for the needs of these refugees.' He continued to clarify that the help that Turkey is getting from the European Union and the United Nations cover only a fraction of the cost. Moreover, he criticised the current world order where especially those who are economically powerful are presented as righteous, which leads to injustice in the world. Concluding his speech, the President invited Western countries to be sincere and urged the international community to respect the democratic demands of the people of Turkey.



Director of News and Programmes at TRT World, Fatih Er, summarised what had been discussed in the sessions of the TRT World Forum 2017.

Introduction

His Excellency President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan participated in TRT World Forum 2017 “Inspiring Change in an Age of Uncertainty” as the guest of honour and gave the closing speech at the Forum. The President’s remarks stretched from the failure of the current global order in sustaining international peace to the humanitarian crisis around the world. He pointed out in the very beginning of his speech - as he is asked by Fatih Er, Director of News at TRT World, about the role of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) - that the structure of the UNSC has to be changed urgently. Attitudes and actions of some of the European countries, namely Germany and France, and the United States vis-à-vis the PKK, YPG and PYD, were also criticised by President Erdoğan. The war in Syria and the refugee crisis was also discussed and crucial explanations and suggestions were laid out. “Western understanding of democracy is under a serious crisis,” Erdoğan said when asked about the double standards of the West with regards to MENA region.

Before President Erdoğan’s speech, Fatih Er summarised what had been discussed in the previous sessions of the Forum. Issues such as the established world order after the end of the World War II, the main defendants of the current world order and those who rose against it, global humanitarian aid, the far-right, Islamophobia and xenophobia in Europe and the United States, and old school media vs new social media were some of the main topics of discussion. Fatih Er, then, brought everyone’s attention to the current global order and injustice, which kick-started the conversation.

Turkey Questions The Current Global World Order



After the end of World War II, 'the winners' of the war established new institutions, regimes and organisations and reformed some of the pre-existing ones to prevent another world war from taking place. United Nations was founded as a successor to the League of Nations in the aftermath of World War I with the same key objective - to prevent another world war. Whilst League of Nations was widely considered to have been ineffective in its role in preventing the conflicts of its time, the United Nations, on the other hand, was established with a different structure but integrated much of the principles of its predecessor. A body within the United Nations framework named Security Council was founded. UNSC was assumed to be the most powerful body within the framework and was the only body to have the right of legitimate use of power anywhere

around the world. The body is comprised of 15 members, five of whom are permanent, and the remaining ten serves for a two-year term. Furthermore, the five permanent member states (The United Kingdom, France, Russia, China and the United States) have been granted veto power, enabling them to block any action by exercising this power.

Turkey, as a developing country, challenges the current structure of the UNSC. President Erdoğan set forth a motto in his speech in the United Nations General Assembly back in 2016 by saying “the world is bigger than five.” On several occasions he repeated this assertion to world leaders in order to emphasise the injustice of the configuration of the UNSC in particular and world order in general. He reiterated his claim at the TRT World Forum that the “world is bigger than five” and further elaborated on his statements: “Some powers evaluate today’s world by the circumstances of the Second World War. The world is no longer in the same condition. It has passed away. Should such a change take place? Yes, it should. There are five permanent members, and the rest of the world depend on these five members”, he said.

President Erdoğan also touched upon issues of injustice, sufferings and the inefficiency of the international body in preventing bloodshed around the world. He said “As Diogenes was looking for an honest man with a lamp in full daylight, we now, are looking for justice in the world. Unfortunately, there is no justice in the world. We are living in a world where the powerful and economic elite are perceived as righteous, not in one where the righteous are perceived as powerful. It is not possible for us to accept to live in such a world.” Later, by referring to the images of war and conflict around the world that were shown to the audience, he said, “We have seen some photos on the big screen just now. I do not want to live in such a world. It is a persecution for us to live in a world where barrel bombs are dropped down on people from as young as seven and as old as seventy. What are you going to do by living in such a world? When we bring this up on the agenda, when we share it with powerful nations, no one stands up and says: “yes you are right, we have to do something about it.””



President Erdoğan set forth a slogan in his speech at the United Nations General Assembly back in 2016 by saying “the world is bigger than five.”

The War in Syria

It has been over six years since the war started in Syria, when a small number of students took to the streets in the city of Daraa to protest the Assad regime. Hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives and millions fled their homes during this period. Today, neighbouring countries of Syria host the most refugees. Turkey alone has 3,5 million refugees - the highest number of Syrian refugees residing in a country outside Syria. Adding that Turkey's spending on Syrian refugees exceeded 30 billion dollars so far, President Erdoğan blamed the international community for not supporting Turkey in its efforts to aid the refugees living in Turkey, nor providing a safe haven for those escaping to Europe from the violence. Neither the European Union nor the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has done enough to heal the wounds of the Syrian refugees. "They appreciate our work (Turkey) when we have one on one meetings, but they do not take the necessary steps afterwards," Erdoğan said.

Due to the global shockwaves of the conflict, Turkey is one of the countries that has received the most impact. As part of the spill over of the Syrian civil war, Turkey receives an on-going series of attacks by DAESH, as well as the PYD/YPG. It considers the PYD/YPG forces operating in northern Syria as a terror group, and as the offshoot of the PKK. Since the early 1980s, the

PKK group has been fighting against the Turkish security forces, costing the lives of more than 40,000 people, including civilians. Today the group is recognised as a terrorist organisation by many countries, including the United States and the European Union. However, despite this obvious threat, the PYD/YPG forces enjoy a sort of autonomy and military and financial support from outside, especially from the United States. This poses a serious threat to Turkey from its south-eastern border with Syria, which is about 911 km long.

Against this backdrop, Erdoğan clarified Turkey's position and criticised the behaviour of its NATO ally, the United States. He said: "Turkey's border with Syria is 911 km long. Which country should have a say here? It is Turkey. Along the Syrian side of the border, Turkey is engaged in an intensive fight against the bloodthirsty terrorist organisations of the region such as PKK and its affiliates PYD and YPG. Who uses the PYD as its ally in Syria to help combat the terror group DAESH? The United States. Now, is it logical to try to rehabilitate or destroy a terrorist organisation with another terrorist organisation?" The President then touched upon a phone conversation he had with United States President Donald Trump: "As I have spoken to Mr Trump about this matter, I can clearly mention it here. I told the US government that we should work and unite in the fight against DAESH, that we should destroy it together. I also told them that we have prepared two brigades for this - let us do this job together. Their response was, "we are going to do it with PYD and YPG."

“Who uses the PYD as its ally in Syria to help combat the terror group DAESH? The United States. Now, is it logical to try to rehabilitate or destroy a terrorist organisation with another terrorist organisation?”



President Erdoğan also touched upon issues of injustice and the inefficiency of the international body in preventing bloodshed around the world.

Europe and the United States's Double Standards



European countries have been heavily criticised for not applying the same standards to similar, if not same, issues in different parts of the world. The latest and most profound example of this is their attitude towards different terror groups. “Europe should immediately change their policy on this issue” was the message of President Erdoğan. He then continued to give several examples of Western double standards and especially referred to the support given to YPG and PYD terror groups in northern Syria. He mentioned that Turkey told the US government that its army is ready to conduct war against DAESH in Syria, but instead the US chose to support another terror group, YPG, in its fight against DAESH. The President questioned this decision of the US and said the European countries are no different with regards to PKK and condemned the rallies organised by the PKK in the capitals of Germany and France. Stating, “everybody should know the truth,” the President explained how he had “given Germany 4500 files of suspected PKK terrorists living in Germany” and that he “did not receive a single response on this matter, not one.” He reminded that PKK is in the EU’s list of terrorist organisations and that “its people are walking freely in the streets of Europe.” Furthermore the President added that despite

the Turkish Intelligence Agency supplying files of PKK members, no action was taken against these people.

The situation in France with regards to the PKK presence was also explored. President Erdoğan implied that PKK members were free to move around Europe. When asked about the recent PKK marches in France, he strongly condemned the German and French authorities: “They marched with posters and banners of the head of the separatist terrorist organisation. Under whose supervision? They did it under French police supervision.” Following this, he referred to another march that took place in Germany where PKK members threatened Erdoğan with death: “the situation is the same in Germany. They declared my ‘death warrant’ under German police supervision.”

The attitudes of European governments towards the members of FETO, (Fethullah Terrorist Organisation) who plotted the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016, in Turkey, killing more than 250 people and leaving thousands wounded, were also severely criticised. Referring to the reluctance of European countries in condemning the coup attempt, he said: “Now I ask, was there a coup attempt in this country on the night of 15 July? Yes, there was. Against who? It was against us. Did we establish an authoritarian, totalitarian regime in this country? No. We are the ruling party with the support of our people and we have been ruling the country for the last 15 years. We have transformed the economy by tripling the material power since coming into office. We are now talking about a developing Turkey in its infrastructure and superstructure. There was a coup attempt and countries who present themselves as ‘Democrats’ opted to wait and see how the crisis would play out – only calling after they figured that the coup was thwarted and averted. They offered their sympathies and support only for the sake of political correctness.”





President Erdoğan kicked off his speech by criticising the established world order created after the end of the World War II.

Prospects



To overcome these problems, everyone has to uphold democracy and respect the democratic ways of problem solving. President Erdoğan referred to this problem and emphasised that “on the basis of values, if it continues like this, the result does not seem positive. If this mentality does not change, democracy will be questioned. As of now, ‘democracy’ does not represent the ideas of humankind. So, we can also name this the failure of democracy.”

First of all, the UNSC, as the most powerful body of the United Nations framework, needs to be reformed in a way that will enable it to function as a small council of representatives of all nations around the world. Secondly, the bloodshed in Syria has to be stopped immediately so that the people of Syria will maintain their very basic human right – the right to live. All actors involved in the war have to cooperate together and find solutions to end the conflict. Lastly, if the main objective is to establish a better world for everyone, then standards have to be the same for all. This is true, especially when it comes to dealings with terrorist organisations around the world. There cannot be ‘good’ and ‘bad’ terrorists. All terror groups have to be condemned and treated accordingly.