

“We Are All in the Same Boat: Regional Cooperation to Address the Humanitarian Crisis”

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Adnan Nawaz
Presenter at TRT World

Joint Keynote Speech

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of the Republic of Turkey

**José Luis
Rodríguez Zapatero**
Former Prime Minister of Spain

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“We Are All in the Same Boat: Regional Cooperation to Address the Humanitarian Crisis”

This is a report on a public session titled “We are all in the Same Boat: Regional Cooperation to Address the Humanitarian Crisis”, held as part of the TRT World Forum 2017. The views, themes and discussion expressed in this conference report are of the speakers and participants present at the TRT World Forum 2017, and do not reflect the official view of TRT World Research Centre.



The former Prime Minister of Spain, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mevlüt Cavuşoğlu speak during the joint keynote speech.



Summary

The second day of the TRT World Forum 2017 opened with a joint keynote speech by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the former Prime Minister of Spain, and Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey. The main theme of their speech was the lack of international cooperation in addressing pressing global issues. They particularly focused on the need to deepen the cooperation between Turkey and the European Union to address the humanitarian crisis in Syria, the rise of anti-immigrant and Islamophobic sentiment in Europe, and the fight against terrorism.

José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero highlighted the need to develop better global governance mechanisms to address current global problems. He emphasised the need to rebalance the UN and Bretton Woods institutions to reflect the economic change of developing countries now contributing more to the world's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) in relation to developed countries. He explained that this economic shift has created worries amongst Europeans, which have resulted in anti-immigrant and Islamophobic sentiments, but emphasised that a vast majority of Europeans want an open and inclusive Europe. Zapatero called for a new understanding of the relations between developed and developing countries, which can only occur through dialogue and by respecting the different identities, cultures, and religions. Zapatero argued that Turkey, as an international and regional player, performs a vital role in the stability and peace of the Middle East and the world at large. Finally, he underlined the importance of strengthening the relationship between Turkey and Europe, highlighting Turkey's role as a bridge between the East and West and its vision in understanding the pressing issues occurring in the region.

Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, also called for more cooperation between Turkey and Europe, in addressing the needs of vulnerable people. He explained how despite being the 17th largest economy in the world, Turkey ranks as the world's second largest humanitarian donor - thus highlighting the countries crucial role of leadership in the humanitarian world. Çavuşoğlu argued that Turkey is praised for its open door policy towards refugees, but receives very little economic assistance, as exemplified by the failure of the EU to fulfill its promise of providing 3 billion Euros to help Turkey with the economic burden of hosting more than 3 million Syrian refugees. He criticised the double standards of various countries in treating some terrorist organisations as 'good terrorists' and providing support to them whilst labelling others as 'bad terrorists.' He argued that in order to solve the humanitarian crisis, the root cause should be addressed through humanitarian relief and by fighting terrorism in the affected countries. He explained that Turkey shares European values and has tried hard to become a European Union member, but that the EU has not done its best to integrate Turkey. Çavuşoğlu said that Turkey must diversify its foreign policy by looking towards the Islamic world and to other regions. Finally, he cites the double standards of the EU towards Turkey, and the rise of anti-immigrant and Islamophobic sentiment as the main factors as to why the Turkish people no longer support the process of Turkey's integration to the EU.



Moderator, presenter at TRT World, Adnan Nawaz kicked off the discussion for the keynote speech.

We Are All in the Same Boat: Regional Cooperation to Address the Humanitarian Crisis

The second day of the TRT World Forum 2017 opened with a joint keynote speech by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the former Prime Minister of Spain, and Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey. Their speech highlighted the lack of cooperation in dealing with regional issues and how this challenge could be overcome. The need to reform the global governance system, the lack of global cooperation in addressing regional issues, and Turkey-European Union relations, were the main topics addressed by their joint speech.

In 2005, as Spain's Prime Minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero launched the Alliance of Civilizations initiative with the then Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, which aims to overcome prejudices, misperceptions and polarisations between Muslim communities and Western societies. The Alliance of Civilization has become a UN project after the endorsement of Secretary General of the UN. Zapatero has been an ardent supporter of cooperation and of respecting the diversity that exists between cultures, religions and identities.

Additionally, being involved in countless global issues as foreign minister of a country that champions humanitarian assistance and that acts as a bridge between East and the West, Çavuşoğlu's opinions about causes and solutions to the ongoing problems becomes important in understanding the predicaments on further collaboration.

Reforming the Global Governance System



The emergence of new powerful economies as well as transnational actors requires an urgent consideration of how a well-functioning system of global governance can be established. Some attempts to establish such global systems have been undertaken, yet, there are still several preconditions that should be met and challenges that should be overcome before developing such a framework. The United Nations' current structure causes an unfair and unequal representation of its members and comes to the forefront as one of the first areas to be reformed. International cooperation requires a relationship on the basis of mutual trust and respect. This takes us to the point that old animosities and rivalries should be mitigated through trust-building mechanisms in order to foster collaboration amongst countries.

In this regard, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero highlighted the need to reform the global governing system in order to address pressing global issues. There are a lot of global phenomena – economic issues, climate change, mass migration, and terrorism – and these issues can transcend a state's borders. Unfortunately, there are no suitable global governing mechanisms to address these issues.

Climate change was one of the global issues that he specifically highlighted due to its correlation with violent conflicts and war. It is important for the international community to coordinate and implement policies that address climate change since 80% of the world's conflicts occur in lands that are undergoing desertification or that are already barren.

The second reason why the global governing system needs to be reformed is due to the emergence and rise of developing countries – examples being China, Brazil, India and Turkey – now contributing more towards the growth of the global economy than developed countries like Western European Countries and the US. The global governing institutions – the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation – need to be “rebalanced” to reflect this “transcendental change.”

In this regard, Çavuşoğlu's remarks on Turkey's mediation initiatives as a trusted broker in regional conflicts were of crucial importance in demonstrating how emerging powers are swiftly taking more responsibility in a multitude of areas alongside economic affairs. Turkey is co-sharing the Group of Friends of Mediation, together with Finland. The Group, founded in 2010, aims to promote the use of mediation in the peaceful settlement of conflicts and create support for the development of mediation. Turkey also engages in trilateral mechanisms as a mediator in disputes within the Balkans, Caucasus, between Pakistan and Afghanistan and other regions of the world.



The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, addressed the lack of international cooperation in addressing regional issues.

Lack of Global Cooperation

Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, conveyed the lack of international cooperation in addressing regional issues. He highlighted Turkey's leadership role as being the second country that provides the most humanitarian aid, despite being the 17th largest economy in the world. Çavuşoğlu argued that Turkey is always praised for its humanitarian aid initiatives, such as its open door policy towards refugees, but receives very little economic assistance. For example, the European Union has failed to fulfill its promise of providing €3 billion euros to help Turkey with the economic burden of hosting more than 3 million Syrian refugees. Zapatero commented that Turkey's leading role in dealing with the Syrian refugees is information that needs to be known in Europe because, currently, it is something that has not been highlighted.

According to Çavuşoğlu, the fight against terrorism is another regional issue where there is lack of global cooperation. There are some countries that have adopted a double standard when dealing with terrorist groups, labelling some as "good terrorists" whilst others are "bad terrorists." For example, the United States has treated the YPG (The People's Protection Units), an affiliate of the PKK (The Kurdistan Workers' Party) terrorist organisation, as "good terrorists" and has provided weapons to them in the fight against DAESH (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) in Syria. Some countries perceive the threat of terrorism as being far away from their borders and hence are indifferent and are not willing to cooperate in defeating such a threat.

Furthermore, some Western countries have criticised Turkey's involvement and initiatives in the Middle East, in North Africa and in the Balkans. Turkey, despite being a NATO member, is seen as a threat by fellow allies for its initiatives to provide stability and humanitarian relief in the region. Çavuşoğlu explained the double standards of some of his counterparts in criticising Turkey for being involved in the region, even though they have been doing the same due to having interests in the region. Some countries are free to intervene and get involved in other regions, yet when Turkey does the same thing; it is seen as a threat and an attempt to create its own sphere of influence.

Zapatero calls upon fostering a global culture of cooperation that is based on respecting the different identities, cultures, and religions to overcome the lack of regional cooperation. Only by condemning and rejecting racism, xenophobia, discrimination, and Islamophobia, can there be global cooperation.

Çavuşoğlu proposed addressing the root causes of humanitarian crises in the locations that they occur as a way to solve them. Putting up walls and fences to stop those fleeing humanitarian crises is not the solution; supporting one terrorist organisation to fight another terrorist organisation is not the solution. The solution to humanitarian crises is to provide aid and assistance in the places where such crises occur regardless of distance, as exemplified by TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency) providing humanitarian relief in faraway regions like the Caribbean and Latin America.

“I would not like for Turkey to lose that attitude of being a great factor, a great country, a great international player – international and not only regional – of being another European country, another great European country.”



The former Prime Minister of Spain, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero highlighted that it is imperative to develop better global governance mechanisms to address current global problems.

Turkey-European Union Relations



The former Prime Minister highlighted the importance of deepening Turkey-European Union relations since Turkey plays a fundamental role, “because the future of Turkey is in grand part the future of the relation between the East and the West.” He would like for Turkey to continue looking towards Europe and to continue the process of integration since Turkey would provide a “suitable vision of the Middle East, of the crisis in Syria and Iraq as well as the Balkans” to the European Union. Zapatero strongly believes that Turkey plays an important role in the stability and peace in the Middle East and hence why he promised to continue working “for an open Europe and for Turkey to recuperate that European enthusiasm, that European eagerness.”

Zapatero argued that the rise of far-right, xenophobic, and anti-immigrant groups in Europe is due to the bad economic circumstances in the European Union. The far-right political parties have capitalised on the economic circumstances for political gains. He acknowledged that there are countries that have not implemented proper integration policies, and that it is more difficult for some Eastern European countries to have a dialogue with the Islamic world in comparison with Spain. However, he strongly believes that the majority of European citizens do not share xenophobic, Islamophobic and racist values and instead want an open and inclusive European Union.

For his part, Çavuşoğlu explained that Turkey is part of the European continent, that it is a founding member of many of the European Union institutions, that it shares the European Union values, and that the European Union will continue to be an important economic partner. But he argues that the European Union cannot be Turkey's only partner, that there is a need for Turkey to diversify and balance its foreign policy by looking towards the Islamic world, towards Africa and towards other parts of the world.

He explained that Turkey has done its best for the last sixteen years to strengthen its relations with the European Union, to become a member, but that the European Union has not done the same in integrating Turkey. The rise of far-right political parties has resulted in anti-immigrant, xenophobic, Islamophobic and Turkey bashing sentiments across Europe. This is a leading source of frustration in Turkey-EU relations. Çavuşoğlu cites the double standards of the EU towards Turkey and in dealing with regional issues, and the rise of anti-immigrant and Islamophobic sentiment as the main factors as to why there is a lack of enthusiasm among the Turkish people in continuing the process of Turkey's integration into the EU.



The former Prime Minister of Spain, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero and the Minister of Foreign Affairs to Turkey, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, focused on the need to deepen the cooperation between Turkey and the European Union to address the humanitarian crisis in Syria, the rise of anti-immigrant and Islamophobic sentiment in Europe, and the fight against terrorism.

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Conclusion

Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero highlighted in their speech the need for better cooperation in addressing humanitarian crises since the impact of such crises goes beyond a country's border. Currently, there is a lot of indifference in the international community in addressing the root causes of humanitarian crises because of the perception that such crises do not affect them due to their distance and location. Some countries have also applied a double standard in the way that they deal with pressing regional issues, which instead of promoting cooperation to address these issues, actually make them worse.

José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero explained the need to make reforms in the global governing institutions, to reject and condemn racism and xenophobic values, and to respect the different identities, cultures and religions as a way to foster better regional cooperation. He also highlighted Turkey's vital role in providing stability and peace in the Middle East. Çavuşoğlu conveyed the lack of cooperation in dealing with regional issues, such as the lack of economic assistance and burden sharing when dealing with the Syrian crisis and combating terrorism. He also explained that Turkey has been doing its best in strengthening its relations with the European Union and that this would ultimately culminate in Turkey becoming an EU member. However, the EU has not reciprocated Turkey's efforts, as exemplified by the rise of Islamophobia and Turkey bashing across Europe.

The effects of humanitarian crises go beyond the borders of the countries in question. Therefore, it is essential for the international community to come together and cooperate with each other since we are all in the same boat.