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ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER RESEARCH CENTER FOR
ARAŞTIRMA ve UYGULAMA MERKEZİ INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Debrief Antalya Diplomacy Forum 2024 - 2

MURCIR Analysis continues its comprehensive coverage of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum (ADF), providing insightful evaluations of academics who actively engaged in the event. In this debrief, we present the perspectives and analyses of Sinem Ünalldılar Kocamaz and Enis Tulça.

Antalya Diplomacy Forum 2024

Prof. Enis TULÇA, Galatasaray University



More than 4,500 participants from nearly 150 countries attended the ADF Antalya Diplomacy Forum on 1-3 March 2024. Diplomats, academicians, businessmen and students had the chance to attend sessions on many different topics for 3 days. We listened to different approaches to the current problems of our world.

Bilateral meetings were held between foreign country delegations as well between Turkish delegations and participating foreign countries. There was high-level participation from Russia, the Balkans, Central Asia, Africa and Latin America. We hope that participation from Western countries will increase in the coming years.

It was very beneficial for us academics to be together with both our colleagues and our students. I am particularly interested in my academic field, the Cyprus issue, Black Sea Security and the energy field.

I attended multiple sessions. The sessions on Gaza and climate were extremely interesting. I had the chance to meet with TRNC President Mr. Tatar, the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs and his delegation, and the Ambassadors of Austria, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Hungary and Ivory Coast.

I had the opportunity to meet with our Minister of Foreign Affairs, Deputy Ministers, General Directors of our Ministry for Cyprus-Greece, the Balkans and Western Europe, and our ambassadors. It was remarkable that no one came from Greece despite the positive agenda period we are in.

I am sure that my other academicians and participant friends also had very useful meetings at a similarly intense pace during these three days. There was also great interest from the local and foreign press. They also took our opinions about the forum. I believe that the Antalya Diplomacy Forum will become a platform where brands and ideas meet over the years. Just like Davos meetings in the economic field, Antalya Diplomacy Forum meetings in the field of diplomacy will now become traditional. I would like to thank our host Ministry of Foreign Affairs and all those who contributed to the preparation of this effective Forum and this wide logistics network.

Antalya Diplomacy Forum: Turkish Foreign Policy in Times of Crisis

Assoc. Prof. Sinem Ünaldirar Kocamaz, Ege University

We are currently navigating through a transitional period in international relations, marked by a plethora of challenges. We live in an era where the functioning of international institutions falls short, international law is blatantly violated, the far-right gains more votes with each election, and the refugee crisis deepens. Additionally, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict and the events unfolding before our eyes in Gaza cast a darker shadow over our times. On one hand, regional conflicts persist, while on the other, efforts to stabilize regions continue. It is also crucial to acknowledge China's emergence as a daunting contender in the quest for hegemony. Moreover, countries in the Asia-Pacific region, especially in the field of technology, have become formidable competitors to the West. Amidst these developments, all eyes are turning towards Africa, which continues its efforts to integrate into new openings. In this context, the importance of negotiation and compromise has become more evident. The Antalya Diplomacy Forum 2024 took place against this backdrop, reflecting these changing dynamics, particularly since the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which has reshaped the international system, affecting all actors including Turkey and prompting a redefinition of the country's role.

In response to the evolving dynamics of the international system, Turkey has been reconstructing its foreign policy, emphasizing humanitarian and realistic elements more prominently. Identifying itself as a safe haven in the Middle East, Ankara focuses on highlighting this identity in humanitarian crises (such as ensuring food security through the grain corridor initiative, welcoming refugees, and bringing the humanitarian dimension of the Israel-Gaza conflict to the forefront) while also anchoring its foreign policy on realistic grounds in regions like the Mediterranean, the Caucasus, and the Black Sea. The concept of regional ownership has become more pronounced within this political framework. This was particularly evident in panels on South Caucasus and Black Sea security, where the concept of "regional ownership" was emphasized, suggesting that regional problems could be resolved not in Paris or Brussels but among the countries directly affected by these issues. The importance of regional ownership in facilitating the normalization process between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the South Caucasus region was highlighted, marking it as a crucial step.

The continuation of the normalization process, discussed at the Munich Security Conference, represents a significant regional development that merits attention.

In the era of crises, redefining Turkish foreign policy to prioritize diplomacy was a core theme at the Antalya Diplomacy Forum (ADF) 2024. Ankara's significant initiatives in mediation underscore its role as a pivotal aspect of Turkish foreign policy.



However, it is clear that the forum's decision this year to host Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, especially after facilitating a meeting between him and Ukrainian leader Vladimir Zelensky two years ago, was not warmly received by Western allies and Ukraine. Turkey's increasingly close dialogue with Russia has not been welcomed by the European Union and the USA. Despite Turkey's long-standing efforts to balance its relationships, finding equilibrium between Western allies and Russia is challenging. Notably, Turkey's refusal to join sanctions against Russia remains a frequent point of criticism from the EU. In a period where the dynamics of the Russia-Ukraine war are changing and starting to divide Europe internally, it might be difficult for Turkey to reassume its mediation role from two years ago. Moreover, Turkey's increasing cooperation and trade volume with Russia in the energy sector must also be considered. Despite these challenges, Turkey's ongoing efforts and initiatives to open the grain corridor demonstrate its commitment to its role in the mediation sector. The meeting between Turkey and Ukraine, which took place immediately after the ADF, and Ankara's statement that "we are ready to host a peace summit that will include Russia" demonstrate their commitment to mediation. In addition to mediation, the importance of public diplomacy, soft power, and collaborations were frequently emphasized concepts by policymakers throughout the forum.

At the 2024 Antalya Diplomacy Forum (ADF), Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban stood out as a prominent figure. Orban, known for his role as a spokesperson for the rising right-wing, populist rhetoric, and the Visegrad group, which often finds itself at odds with Brussels, continues to be a colorful and widely criticized character in international relations. His stance on immigrants and refugees, frequent disagreements with Brussels, and dissatisfaction with the financing of the Ukraine war showcase his significant position. Orban's assertion at ADF 2024 that immigrants/refugees disrupt public order and are intolerable for a strong state, reaffirming his opposition to refugees, attracted attention. He emphasized the welfare of the Hungarian people as his priority and stressed the need for an immediate end to the Ukraine war and a ceasefire. Orban also predicted a victory for Trump in the upcoming November presidential elections, suggesting it could increase the chances for peace in the Middle East, thereby indicating his preferred U.S. leader for future policies. His comments about Brussels are particularly noteworthy, hinting at potential future crises within the EU. Orban does not hide the divergence of Visegrad group policies from Brussels on various issues, including migration policies, green energy, and budgetary concerns, criticizing the EU for being too prescriptive about values and urging Brussels to respect differences more.

Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan's opening remarks at ADF 2024 highlighted regions, regional organizations, and regionalism as defining themes. Africa's growing importance in Turkish foreign policy is evident, as it becomes a new battleground for influence amidst China's increasing investments through the Belt and Road Initiative. The region's significance is also acknowledged by Russia, the EU, and the USA, with Africa beginning to be represented in the G-20 through the African Union. Turkey is determined to strengthen its political and economic ties with Africa, highlighting the importance of panels focused on the Sahel region and the expectation of a more ownership-driven and realistic approach to solving African countries' problems. The concept of the "Global South" remains a pertinent issue for global governance, with those heeding its calls likely to gain an advantage in future international challenges. Turkey's sensitivity and desire to deepen relations with Africa will continue to be a prominent topic in international relations and Turkish foreign policy discussions. It would be beneficial to see similar dynamism in transatlantic and EU relations. The absence of key figures like NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, noted in the previous ADF, underscores the stagnant relations with Western allies despite Turkey's successful regional initiatives. Panels related to transatlantic security and Europe, addressing the European security architecture and the EU's capacity to shape global transformations, indicated a waning transatlantic spirit. Without efforts to build a positive agenda with both the EU and the USA, the widening gap could harm Turkey's balance policy. The US Strategic Mechanism Meeting following ADF is crucial in this context. Addressing defense industry issues and counterterrorism consultations could be a starting point.

Moreover, discussions on food security, energy security, and women's safety, along with panels on artificial intelligence, not only guide Turkish foreign policy but also international relations at large. The forum's focus on finding solutions to the Gaza-Palestine issue and addressing the global situation from the Balkans to Africa and Europe to Latin America signifies a necessary effort. The need for platforms that promote diplomacy, consensus, and productive discourse is evident. The Antalya Diplomacy Forum strives to fulfill this role towards achieving a fairer world, with policymakers, practitioners, and academics tasked with continuing this struggle. Let's hope that next year's ADF will convene under the auspices of achieved ceasefires and peace agreements.

***The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the editorial policy or position of MURCIR.**

