

## **Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations, Volume 2, Number 1, January 2021**

Yeşilbursa, Behçet Kemal. “Perspectives on Anglo-Turkish political relations: An interview with Mr Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Republic of Turkey, 2 December 2020, Ankara”, *Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations*, Vol. 2, No. 1, (January 2021), pp. 89-92.



### **Perspectives on Anglo-Turkish political relations:**

**An interview with Mr Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Republic of Turkey, 2 December 2020, Ankara<sup>1</sup>**

**Behçet Kemal Yeşilbursa<sup>2</sup>**

**Q-1. How would you describe the current political relations between Turkey and the United Kingdom?**

Turkey and the United Kingdom (UK) are allies, strategic partners and two pivotal powers geographically located at both ends of Europe. The “Strategic Partnership” lays a road map towards deepening cooperation in a wide range of areas, including trade, investment, energy, education, culture, regional issues and global security. Multidimensional cooperation between Turkey and the UK, not only provides bilateral benefits but also contributes to collective efforts towards tackling issues that challenge regional and global stability and prosperity. We work in close contact with our British colleagues in international fora.

Historical and deep-rooted relations continue to progress smoothly, as also evidenced by the frequent high level phone contacts and a number of mutual “social distanced” visits even during the hardships of a worldwide pandemic. This demonstrates the strength of bilateral relations and the importance attached by both sides to keeping the pace of cooperation. In this regard, we are looking forward to hosting the 8th meeting of the Turkish-British “Tatlıdil” Forum in Aydın, Kuşadası (Ephesus), which is a valuable mechanism that brings together government, business, academia and media circles from both countries, and facilitates fruitful contacts and cooperation.

The UK also stands out as one of the first countries to express solidarity with Turkey following the attempted coup in 2016, perpetrated by the FETÖ terrorist organization. We also commend the UK’s stance against the PKK and its affiliates.

**Q-2. Has Brexit affected the relations between the two countries? If so, how?**

<sup>1</sup> The interview took place at the Turkish Foreign Ministry in Ankara on 2 December 2020. Photo: (Right) Mr Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Republic of Turkey. (Left) Rt. Hon. Mr Dominic Rennie Raab, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs for the United Kingdom.

<sup>2</sup> Prof. Dr., Bursa Uludag University. E-mail: bkyesilbursa@uludag.edu.tr



## **Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations, Volume 2, Number 1, January 2021**

Yeşilbursa, Behçet Kemal. “Perspectives on Anglo-Turkish political relations: An interview with Mr Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Republic of Turkey, 2 December 2020, Ankara”, *Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations*, Vol. 2, No. 1, (January 2021), pp. 89-92.

Turkey and UK are staunch allies and strategic partners. Brexit will not affect this. We are going to continue working towards strengthening our relations in every field, now as two non-EU member NATO allies.

On the other hand, it is a fact that Turkey has lost an important partner within the EU after the UK’s departure on 1 January 2020. Turkey will have to make new trade arrangements with the UK, as UK will also depart Customs Union, which Turkey is member of, at the end of the EU transition period on 31 December 2020. Work towards signing a Free Trade Agreement continues between our relevant authorities. The deal is almost ready. We are waiting for the outcome of the UK-EU Free Trade Agreement negotiations to finalize the draft. Both Turkey and UK are working hard to prevent any disruption in bilateral trade.

As much as it is a challenge, I believe Brexit will also provide us with new areas and opportunities for cooperation. Britain aims to improve its global trade relations and enlarge its supply chains, and Turkey will be a strong partner in the context of these “Global Britain” goals as well. Therefore, I am optimistic about our relations after the end of UK’s EU transition period.

### **Q-3. How would you describe relations between the two countries on issues such as Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean?**

As two of the three guarantor powers in Cyprus, Turkey and the UK have to work together with a view to reaching a just and viable settlement on the Island. As our efforts have not achieved the desired results so far, the Cyprus issue remains as one of the primary issues on our common agenda.

Turkey and the UK have a constructive dialogue on the Eastern Mediterranean region, where UK is also present with its two sovereign bases on the Island. I am in contact with my British colleague, Dominic Raab regarding the Cyprus issue.

As one of the Guarantors, the UK has a unique role in the Cyprus issue. It has witnessed all the negotiation processes and the attitude of the concerned parties since the very beginning. Having participated in the latest Conference on Cyprus, the UK knows very well why the Conference ended without any result in Crans Montana in July 2017. Simply, the Greek Cypriot side did not want to share the power and wealth with the Turkish Cypriot side. The UK has also been the closest witness of how Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots have been working positively and constructively towards a settlement.

Equal treatment of both sides on the Island is a basic UN principle. In this regard, the UK’s efforts towards the Cyprus issue in line with this principle will be very precious, as any approach disregarding the balance between the two sides will not help create an atmosphere of trust. Therefore, we expect a balanced and constructive attitude. This would encourage the Greek Cypriot side towards a change in their mentality.

### **Q-4. What are Turkey and the UK’s approaches on the problems in the Middle East (such as Syria, Iraq, Libya and terrorism)?**



## **Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations, Volume 2, Number 1, January 2021**

Yeşilbursa, Behçet Kemal. “Perspectives on Anglo-Turkish political relations: An interview with Mr Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Republic of Turkey, 2 December 2020, Ankara”, *Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations*, Vol. 2, No. 1, (January 2021), pp. 89-92.

Cooperation in the field of security and fight against terrorism is an important pillar in our bilateral relations. Both countries contribute to the work of the Global Coalition against DEASH. We are in close contact both at the bilateral level, and with international organizations regarding the developments in our region. We also have established bilateral security dialogue mechanisms. The fight against PKK and FETÖ is a standing agenda item in our security dialogue. We expect strengthened cooperation and further support from the UK and other international partners in that regard.

### **Q-5. What would you like to say about the economic and trade relations between the two countries?**

Trade, economy, investments, tourism and defence industry are the driving forces in our bilateral relations. The UK is Turkey’s second biggest export market in Europe and 6th largest trade partner. Trade volume was 18.5 billion Dollars in 2018 and 16.9 billion Dollars in 2019. We aim to reach 20 billion Dollars.

There is mutual will to further develop bilateral trade relations. Brexit and Covid-19 present certain difficulties, but they also present new areas of cooperation. For instance, as global supply chains were disrupted by the pandemic, British companies are finding new chains in their near neighborhoods. Turkey is one of the first countries that comes to mind in this regard. New areas of cooperation already emerged, especially in the health sector. For example, Turkey is a prominent producer of personal protection equipment, and UK is procuring such products from Turkey. Turkey also extended a helping hand to its ally and donated more than 250.000 pieces of medical personal protection equipment to UK in April 2020, when need for PPE was at its peak in UK. Innovation, high tech, fintech and renewable energy are also areas with potential. We hope to sign a Free Trade Agreement with UK before the end of the year to enable a smooth transition in trade.

### **Q-6. And your thoughts on the socio-cultural relations?**

Turkey and the UK have historical relations and a deep-rooted culture of working together. The UK has been one of the first countries with which the Ottoman Empire established regular diplomatic relations. The first Ambassador appointed by the UK to the Ottoman Empire, William Harborne, assumed his duties in Istanbul in 1583, and Yusuf Agah Efendi was appointed as the Ottoman Ambassador to London in 1793.

Cultural interaction between Turkey and UK dates back many years. Undoubtedly, the Battle of Gallipoli was the most memorable event that left its mark on our contemporary history. Both countries managed to transform this painful experience into a groundwork for friendship. Today, it is commemorated as a symbol of the friendship bonds established between the peoples of two countries.

Cooperation between Turkey and the UK in the fields of science, education, innovation, art and culture is also growing. The UK is an important destination for Turkish students in higher education. Cultural exchanges continue, with the contributions of Yunus Emre Institute in London and British Council in Ankara.



### **Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations, Volume 2, Number 1, January 2021**

Yeşilbursa, Behçet Kemal. “Perspectives on Anglo-Turkish political relations: An interview with Mr Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Republic of Turkey, 2 December 2020, Ankara”, *Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations*, Vol. 2, No. 1, (January 2021), pp. 89-92.

Turkey is among the most favoured holiday destinations for UK citizens. Last year 2,5 million British tourists visited Turkey. We hope to see more UK citizens visiting Turkey after the pandemic. Moreover, approximately 400,000 Turkish people living in the UK constitute a bridge between our societies. We collaborate with our British friends for preserving the rights of our citizens stemming from the Ankara Agreement in the post-Brexit era.