

More cooperation with EU to beat challenges, minister says

Hurriyet Daily News, 05.12.2016



More cooperation with the European Union is needed to vanquish challenges, Turkish EU Minister Ömer Çelik has said, commenting on the European Parliament's call to freeze Turkish membership talks.

“Moves such as the European Parliament's visionless decision will go down in history as marginal decisions. In the future we should cooperate more against big challenges,” Çelik said. The minister made the comments at the 35th Turkey-EU Joint Consultative Committee meeting held in Ankara. European lawmakers voted to approve a non-binding motion to freeze EU membership talks with Turkey.

Arguing that relations between the EU and Turkey could not be reduced to the issues of the struggle against terrorism and migration alone, Çelik said the agenda between the two sides was “very big” and that accession negotiations form the basis of it.

Çelik also said the upcoming period would be “very intense” for Turkey and the EU and that relations between the aforementioned sides should be developed within the framework of uttermost strength, constructive dialogue and criticism.

Çelik said the European Parliament should have stood in solidarity with Turkey following the July 15 coup attempt, which left 248 people dead and nearly 2,200 wounded. “This coup attempt took place on European soil, against a European democracy. What we're proud of is this; the democratic conscience of the Turkish people is so high that the people took to the streets.

People were martyred, thousands were wounded and this coup attempt was thwarted,” Çelik said, adding that Turkey had been a European state and has been a European democracy for the last hundred years.

During his speech, Çelik said the European Parliament should have defended Turkey's democracy in the wake of the failed takeover. “They [the European Parliament] are saying that they stood beside the Turkish people, but it's not enough to stand with the Turkish people rhetorically,” Çelik said, adding that no MEP visited Turkey until one-and-a-half months after the thwarted coup.

“Who are the sides? The ones who directed their weapons to kill our people and the representatives of the elected government and the people themselves. Thus, in all this framework, if a powerful solidarity had been shown with Turkish democracy, we would have given the world a message; we would have shown how powerful European Union institutions stand up when a democracy outside its borders is attacked,” he also said.

Turkish-EU relations have been strained due to an open split of opinions over a migrant deal. Turkey and the EU agreed to speed up membership talks in March as part of an accord on curbing migrant flows into Greece.

The deal was clinched in return for several incentives for Ankara, including EU cash assistance for Syrian refugees in Turkey and visa-free travel to the Schengen area by Turks. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said Turkey should not be “fixated” on the idea of joining the European Union and should look at other opportunities, such as the Russia-led Shanghai Pact.

“Turkey should first of all feel relaxed about the EU and not be fixated” about joining it, Erdoğan told reporters on the presidential plane while returning from Uzbekistan, daily Hürriyet reported on Nov. 20.

Turkey launches humanitarian campaign for besieged Aleppo

Hurriyet Daily News, 08.12.2016



Ankara has launched a humanitarian campaign for Aleppo amid the Syrian regime’s intensified military offensive aiming to capture the remaining parts of city from rebel groups and serious accusations of attacks on civilians.

The campaign titled “Do not let humanity die in Aleppo,”. “This is not just the announcement of an aid campaign. This is raising a voice against the destruction of Aleppo, which is one of the most beautiful cities in the region with its historical and geopolitical importance, the destruction of our culture in Aleppo, and most importantly the destruction of humanity that is dying in despair, hunger and in vein,” Kurtulmuş said.

“Politically, many meetings have been held about how this issue has come to this point. Negotiations are in progress so that a solution can be found,” he added. Kurtulmuş also criticized the “futile efforts” and “indifference” of the international community to humanitarian problems in the Muslim world.

“We will continue to say that the world is bigger than five,” he said, referring to the Turkish government’s motto against the limits of the five-member U.N. Security Council. “The international community should decisively make an effort to establish a lasting peace and ensure that humanitarian aid is delivered to Aleppo as soon as possible.

As Turkey, we are actively involved in both phases,” he said. In order to solve all these problems, the people of the Islamic world also need to demonstrate their will to solve their own problems,” he added. Ibrahim Kalın, the spokesperson of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, also expressed anger at the Bashar al-Assad regime’s military offensive against civilians in Aleppo at a press conference.

“Developments in Aleppo seriously concern us. The regime is openly committing crimes against humanity and war crimes in Aleppo,” Kalin said. Recalling al-Assad’s recent statements to the international media, Kalin said the Syrian president had made clear that the regime was “not open to any formula for a ceasefire in the city.” He also referred ongoing talks between Ankara and Moscow on the issue, stressing that the Turkish government’s efforts for a ceasefire will continue.

Turkish PM: One-year halt in Turkey, Russia ties ‘over’

Anadolu Agency, 06.12.2016



A year-long hiatus in relations between Russia and Turkey is over, Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım said in his first visit to Moscow as prime minister.

“We see altogether that an unfortunate one-year period is over,” state-run Anadolu Agency quoted Yıldırım as saying during the open part of his meeting with Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev in Moscow. “We can bring our strategic relationship to an even better point than before by utilizing the adverse experience this past year has brought us,” Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım added on December 6.

Relations between Russia and Turkey soured last year after a Russian warplane was brought down by Turkish jets on the Syrian border for an alleged airspace violation on Nov. 24, after which the Kremlin imposed a raft of sanctions on Turkey.

Yıldırım said relations with Moscow had faced a “test” but added: “Thanks to mutual political will, we have endured the difficult situation.” He recalled the “normalization process” which started on Aug. 9 following a meeting between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, in St. Petersburg.

“Due to the nature of the region, we [as Russia, as Turkey] have a crucial duty. At the same time we have responsibility [in the region],” Yıldırım added. Speaking alongside Medvedev in a joint press conference, Yıldırım said the dialogue and coordination between Turkey and Russia was better than before, especially on military diplomatic affairs.

Medvedev, for his part, said the Turkish Stream gas pipeline project, which was signed on Oct. 10 between Turkey and Russia, would soon be ratified in Russia, too. This statement came hours after the Turkish Stream agreement entered into force in Turkey when it was published in the Official Gazette after being passed in parliament and approved by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Medvedev also said a joint investment fund would be established with Turkey in order to provide financing for various projects and to produce joint projects in third-party countries.

Russia and Turkey have the potential to boost bilateral trade and economic ties, including via the implementation of big projects, Medvedev said at the beginning of the bilateral talks with his Turkish counterpart, according to TASS News Agency.

According to Medvedev, the two countries have historically had an impressive volume of trade ties, even if they have declined recently. “We are able to boost them and implement big joint projects, which are numerous,” he said, adding that the meeting between the prime ministers was aimed at “boosting economic, investment, humanitarian cooperation in all sectors.” Yıldırım also met the chairwoman of the Council of the Federation, Valentina Matviyenko.

EU: Migrant deal with Turkey producing results

Hurriyet Daily News, 08.12.2016



A Turkish-EU deal on migrants is yielding positive results, the European Commission said on Dec. 8, but no progress was made on the issue of visa-free travel for Turks even though the process has been unblocked for Ukrainians and Georgians.

“Our comprehensive European approach on migration is showing positive results,” European Commission First Vice-President Frans Timmermans said. “We can see this in the continued implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement and the dramatic decrease in the number of irregular migrants arriving in Greece,” he added.

“The implementation of the EU-Turkey statement has confirmed the trend of a steady delivery of results, albeit in the face of many challenges,” the commission said. “Numbers of irregular crossings of the Aegean during the reporting period remained dramatically lower than before the EU-Turkey statement,” the statement read.

“Since March, arrivals have averaged 90 per day, compared to 10,000 in a single day in October last year. However, important shortfalls remain, notably as regards the still too slow pace of returns from Greece to Turkey which has led to additional pressure on the Greek islands.” However, there was no good news for Turkey on visa waiver for the Schengen zone.

“As regards the implementation of the Visa Liberalization Roadmap, seven benchmarks remain to be met by Turkey,” said the statement. “The commission encourages Turkey’s efforts to complete the delivery of all outstanding benchmarks as soon as possible.

The commission and Turkey have continued their dialogue to find solutions, including on the legislative and procedural changes needed to meet the outstanding benchmarks,” it said. But there was good news for Ukraine and Georgia.

The EU will soon let Ukrainians and Georgians visit the bloc without needing a visa after diplomats and lawmakers struck a deal to end an internal EU dispute that had been holding up the promised measures.

The prospect of easier travel to Western Europe has been used by governments in Kyiv and Tbilisi to win popular backing for painful, EU-sponsored reforms. But EU leaders got cold feet about opening doors to 45 million Ukrainians after the public backlash which followed last year's refugee crisis in Europe. "Europe is delivering," the conservative leader in the EU legislature, Manfred Weber, tweeted after the deal, while Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko hailed "encouraging news from Brussels."

Turkish air strikes kill 23 ISIL militants

Reuters, 07.12.2016



The Turkish General Staff said its warplanes "neutralized" 23 ISIL militants in air strikes in the al-Bab city of Aleppo province in northern Syria between 10:05 a.m. and 11:30 a.m..

Three ISIL shelters, three headquarters, two checkpoints, three tanks and a bomb-laden vehicle were destroyed in the air strikes. Earlier, the military said its warplanes carried out a separate set of air strikes in al-Bab on Dec. 6. Four ISIL shelters, three headquarters and a tank were destroyed in the strikes. Also, ISIL killed one Turkish soldier and wounded six other soldiers in a car bomb attack in al-Bab the military said in a statement.

One of the injured soldiers is said to be in critical condition, the statement added, while an unspecified number of Turkey-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) fighters were also wounded in the attack. The killed soldier was identified as Specialized Sgt. Ahmet Şahin, whose body was brought to the southeastern province of Gaziantep with a helicopter, while the wounded troops and FSA fighters were flown to Gaziantep and neighboring Kilis to be treated at hospitals.

On Aug. 24, the Turkish Armed Forces launched an operation in Syria, the Euphrates Shield operation, with FSA fighters to clear the country's southern border of both Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) forces, which Ankara considers to be a terrorist group linked to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The operations are in their 106th day.

Over 215 residential areas, including more than 1,800 square kilometers of land in northern Syria have been cleared of ISIL terrorists as part of the operation so far. Last month an air strike, which Turkey's military initially assessed to have been carried out by the Syrian Air Force, killed four Turkish soldiers in the region. Moscow has said neither Russian nor Syrian armed forces carried out the attack. A senior Turkish official has told the Hürriyet Daily News on Dec. 6 that an Iranian-made unmanned drone was used in the attack on Nov. 24.

US, Russia working on plan as Assad forces advance in Aleppo

Hurriyet Daily News, 08.12.2016



U.S. Secretary of State Kerry said he was “hopeful” about reaching an agreement with Russia over Syrian city of Aleppo as government forces continued their advance in the city.

“We’re working on something here,” Kerry told reporters after meeting Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Asked if he was confident about a breakthrough, Kerry said he was not confident, but “hopeful.” The Kremlin said on Dec. 7 that a potential U.S.-Russia deal to allow Syrian rebels to safely leave Aleppo was still on the agenda, amid calls from the rebels in the city for a cease-fire.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, meanwhile, said victory for his forces in Aleppo would be a “huge step” in ending Syria’s war. Despite pleas from Western countries and the United Nations, al-Assad also rejected talk of a cease-fire in Aleppo.

In a wide-ranging interview with Syrian daily al-Watan, al-Assad was confident of victory in Aleppo, though he admitted retaking the city would not end the country’s conflict entirely. “It’s true that Aleppo will be a win for us,” al-Assad said. “Let’s be realistic – it won’t mean the end of the war in Syria,” al-Assad said. “But it will be a huge step toward this end.”

Regime forces have retaken about 80 percent of former rebel territory in Aleppo since launching an all-out offensive three weeks ago to recapture Syria’s second city. After a highly symbolic retreat from Aleppo’s Old City, the rebels on Dec. 7 called for a five-day cease-fire to allow for the evacuation of thousands of civilians still in opposition-held territory.

But al-Assad’s government has said a truce is only possible after a full rebel withdrawal from Aleppo, and opposition fighters have rejected any talk of abandoning the city. Asked about the possibility of a truce, al-Assad said: “It’s practically non-existent, of course.”

Al-Assad’s forces, backed by foreign fighters from Iran and Lebanon’s Shiite Hezbollah movement, were continuing to advance on Dec. 8, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The Britain-based monitoring group said there was heavy rocket fire on several rebel-held districts and fighting in the Salaheddin and Bustan al-Qasr neighborhoods.

The assault has prompted a mass exodus of residents, with the observatory saying at least 80,000 have fled their homes. Syrian troops and aid groups have been helping to evacuate residents from newly retaken areas of east Aleppo, where civilians lived for months under heavy bombardment and a regime siege. The International Committee of the Red Cross said on Dec. 8 it carried out an operation overnight with Syria’s Red Crescent to evacuate 150 civilians, many disabled or sick, from a health facility in the Old City.

“These patients and civilians had been trapped in the area for days because of heavy clashes nearby and as the front line kept drawing closer,” said ICRC Syria delegation head Marianne Gasser. “Many of them cannot move and need special attention and care. It must have been terrifying for them,” she said.

It was unclear how many civilians remained in rebel-held territory, but there were an estimated 250,000 in east Aleppo prior to the latest offensive. Save the Children said tens of thousands of children were “sitting targets” in the fighting.

“It defies belief that after nearly six years of suffering through this war, the international community is still willing to stand by as civilians are bombed with seeming impunity,” said the group’s Syria director, Sonia Khush.

Economic integration and the “four freedoms”

Economist, 09.12.2016



“What’s the model? Have cake and eat it.” So read handwritten notes, snapped in the hands of an official of Britain’s ruling Conservative Party, as she left a meeting in Downing Street on Brexit strategy in late November.

Britons seem keen to pick and choose from a menu of ties with Europe—in particular, to retain access to the single market while gaining more control over migration. Angela Merkel, the chancellor of Germany, is unwavering. In a speech in Berlin on December 6th Chancellor Angela Merkel reiterated that Europe’s “four freedoms” are inseparable and inviolable.

Countries hoping to share in the free movement of goods, services and capital must accept the free movement of labour as well. The European project was meant above all to be a process of economic integration (intended, in the words of the Schuman declaration in 1950, “to make war [within Europe] not merely unthinkable but materially impossible”).

Dissatisfaction with the EU often boils down to the suspicion that its original mission of economic integration has morphed into a misguided push for political union. Which one of these agendas does the free movement of people advance?

Some economists argue that though the free movement of people is essential to Europe’s political project, it is not necessary to accomplish the sort of deep economic integration that reduces wage inequality across countries. In the simplest trade models, such as the one developed by Bertil Ohlin and Eli Heckscher in the early 20th century, this is certainly true.

Such models suppose that countries' comparative advantages are determined by their relative abundance of resources. Countries with lots of low-wage labour, for instance, tend to export goods that use a lot of low-wage labour in production. Building on this theory, Paul Samuelson pointed out that opening trade between two countries ought to cause the price of traded goods to equalise across markets.

That, in turn, should cause the return to the factors used in production, including the wages paid to labour, to converge, even if those factors could not move across borders. Free trade alone is enough to generate convergence.

Yet this is an impoverished view of integration. New models of trade do not imply that close economic integration should cause incomes to converge. Firms and places are often subject to economies of scale: they become more productive as they grow larger.

As freer trade expands the size of the market, producers with initial size advantages outcompete rivals. In an integrated market one country might specialise in a high-wage industry with increasing returns to scale (like skilled manufacturing or finance) and others in areas in which wages are lower.

In fact, the conditions needed to bring about convergence go well beyond what free trade alone is likely to achieve. For incomes to equalise, different countries must use similar sorts of technology, for instance. Yet achieving comparable levels of technological capability across countries may require more than just free trade: supranational standards, for example, and the flow of knowledge in other ways—such as through the movement of individuals.

In 1961, in his book, “The Theory of Economic Integration”, Bela Balassa, a Hungarian economist, offered a more satisfying definition of his subject. He suggested it was an “absence of various forms of discrimination” between economic units in different countries. A free-trade agreement, he noted, is a step towards economic integration, but just a step. Harmonising external tariffs is a further leap, and setting common internal standards and regulations is yet another move along the continuum.

Using discrimination as a metric strongly implies that limits on movement of labour inhibit economic integration. Such limits directly prevent competition among providers of in-person services from different countries; Polish doctors cannot easily treat British patients from surgeries in Poland.

And constraints on labour mobility undermine the formation of social ties across borders: relationships that play an important economic role. A paper published in 2013 examined the fortunes of different regions in West Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and found that where households maintained close social ties to East Germany, the fall of the wall led to more cross-border investment and a higher return to entrepreneurial activity.

It is costly to gain valuable economic information about unfamiliar places. Social ties reduce that cost. Borders, which frustrate the creation of those ties, necessarily mean that firms on one side of the line will be at a disadvantage when investing or operating on the other. Indeed, it may be the very logic of economic integration, with its attendant erosion of discriminatory barriers, that truly irks Eurosceptics. Cultural differences of all sorts, from language barriers to tastes and habits, make it harder for people and firms from one country to do business in others: for French-language newspapers to sell in Frankfurt or for Spaniards to network with Czechs.

Complete economic integration implies the smoothing away of these differences, and the formation of something closer to a European identity. Pro-Brexit voters were not wrong to fear that European economic integration threatened the primacy of their unique culture, or to worry that in the big, cosmopolitan cities—where people from many countries mix to build ties and share knowledge—a broader, post-national identity is being forged.

The goal of ending war within Europe through deep economic integration is not so different from that of ending war by eliminating the pesky nationalism of individual states. As enthusiasts and critics of the European project should know, closer economic, political and cultural ties are indivisible. Putting up barriers to labour mobility is not just a political choice. It implies a halt to—and perhaps even the reversal of—economic integration.

Theresa May is a religious nationalist

Foreign Policy, 06.12.2016



One of the least understood, yet most important, things about British Prime Minister Theresa May is that she is the daughter of a Church of England vicar. The fact that she is personally devout, by contrast, is well-known.

I have heard several anecdotes about her time as a member of Parliament and minister when she would turn up at local parish initiatives that could offer her no conceivable political advantage. Such devotion to the church is unusual if not unknown among British politicians. Gordon Brown remains a very serious Presbyterian; Tony Blair went to Mass most Sundays.

But the reason May's Anglicanism offers insight into her political character, and her political agenda, is not because it has informed her identity as a devout Christian. Rather, it is because it has informed her identity as an Englishwoman.

As a Conservative politician, May's appeal depends largely on her apparently apolitical common sense. Her manner and rhetoric always suggest that things are pretty much all right as they are, that reasonable people don't want to rock the boat, and that there is something wrong with the people who want large change. She expresses distrust of ideologues and chancers — the two labels that most naturally attach to her political rivals at the moment.

But it's telling that the teachings of the Church of England have always managed to combine common sense with a very strong nationalistic streak. The clue is in the name. The one thing that distinguished Henry VIII's church from that of his father, Henry VII, was that the king of England appointed the clergy, not the bishop of Rome. Doctrine had hardly changed at all. (That would have to wait until the convulsions under Henry VIII's children, Edward, Mary and Elizabeth.) Until Henry died, all that really changed was that England became, to use the technical term of the times, an "empire."



In that sense, Brexit really is a continuation of the Reformation impulse — it promises nothing so much as a restoration of national prerogatives and privileges. Brexit really is a continuation of the Reformation impulse — it promises nothing so much as a restoration of national prerogatives and privileges.

This is not to suggest that May, who is now obliged to oversee the Brexit process, is enthusiastic about its prospects. Prior to the referendum vote that initiated Brexit, May believed the economic effects were likely to be disastrous, as her leaked pre-referendum speech to Goldman Sachs showed.

And her intentions about Brexit are still remarkably opaque: A senior aide leaving a recent briefing at the newly created Department for Exiting the EU was photographed holding a briefing note on which the words “have cake and eat it” could be read. That plan will clearly not survive contact with the enemy.

But it’s worth noting that May seemed quick to embrace the idea of a hard Brexit, in which keeping out immigrants takes priority over ensuring decent trading conditions. And that would be consistent with her time leading the Home Office, where she showed a consistent determination to keep down net immigration figures. (Someone who worked with her then described her three policy priorities as “down with immigration, down with crime, and up with Theresa May.”) Generally, the leaks we have had make it seem that she is more concerned about managing her party, and its constituents, than managing relations with the French and Germans.

If Americans don’t immediately grasp what this style of thinking has to do with the Church of England, that’s because it’s built on a very different model of Christianity from the one that seems natural in the United States. From the Middle Ages until very recently, the church was organized and understood itself on the basis of the parish.

The parish, in England, is a geographical division, one that is no longer a unit of political or economic significance but which remains fundamental to the church’s self-understanding. Everyone lives in a parish, and every parish has its church, so everyone has a priest in the Church of England who is in some sense responsible for their spiritual welfare.

This has also meant that the church hierarchy — the clergy, and ultimately the bishops, who sit in the House of Lords and thus have a say over all legislation considered by Parliament — is expected to feel a responsibility for everyone in their respective parishes, no matter how poor and miserable.

This sense of responsibility, almost as much as the two world wars, was what reconciled the English Conservative Party, which had a close relationship with the church hierarchy, to the welfare state. And that state was very much inspired by the work of Anglican intellectuals, such as William Temple, the wartime archbishop of Canterbury. For that generation, the postwar welfare state was an attempt to turn England into the New Jerusalem. The Christian elements of that vision faded with time and so did the nationalist ones. The last ones may now be coming back. The Church of England is, in an important sense, not a religious body at all. It is, or was, a mode of being English. The Church of England is, in an important sense, not a religious body at all. It is, or was, a mode of being English. It was the official position of the Church of England that it had no distinctive doctrines of its own.



It was simply the English part of the universal church. This claim was hard to sustain in reality — the doctrine that the Church of England has no unique doctrines is itself unique to the Church of England — but it reflected a deep conservative self-confidence. It was only as a member of the Church of England that C.S. Lewis could write a book titled *Mere Christianity*, referencing the plain, commonsensical essence of belief, without the extravagance of Rome or the doctrinal extremism of the puritans.

The link with May should be obvious. The lack of explicit theological distinctiveness in her church coheres with an almost complete lack of ideology in her politics. She seems to have no large vision of how society should be organized or the economy run:

She sees problems in her nation and fixes them, without worrying too much about how everything might fit into a grand scheme. If she had a slogan, it might be “common sense without stupidity.” The Brexit vote would seem to contradict both halves of the slogan.

But we still have no clear idea how she intends to deal with it — except that she does not intend to let anyone outside the government know anything until the last possible moment. The attempt to negotiate what is supposed to be a return to parliamentary sovereignty without a vote in Parliament is one example. Another is her repetition of the phrase “Brexit means Brexit” until its lack of meaning became embarrassingly obvious.

It’s almost as if she believed her policies could be as private as her spiritual beliefs. Though she has by all accounts a strong sense of duty, May is quite remarkably undemonstrative. She is extremely private about her religious beliefs, as with all other aspects of her private life; this, too, is a traditional sort of Englishness, in which you perform your duties but have no public existence outside them.

Those duties sometimes take a universalist cast. One of the causes May pushed hardest at the Home Office and elsewhere was the fight against modern slavery. There are few votes to be won in this fight, but it is the right thing to do, and she has worked very hard to ensure that problem was taken seriously throughout the criminal justice system.

The bishops would agree with her on that, while being a long way to her left on welfare reform and on the treatment of refugees. It’s very notable that some of the most bigoted social conservatives on the English Christian scene are also in favor of the large-scale resettlement of Christian refugees from around the world to England.

Generally, however, May’s political career is given coherence by her supposition that her Christian duty is to the people of England rather than to humanity in general or even to other Christians. This is another thing that distinguishes state churches, on the European model, from congregational ones, on the American model. The state church is not something you join, or leave, any more than the nation is.

It is run as a kind of public utility: a national spiritual health service, if you like. In Germany and Scandinavia, the churches are paid for out of taxation collected by the state, as the English church once was, even if the church taxes in Europe are now voluntary. Because there is no special membership status, no one is excluded either, and there is an obligation to serve everyone.

May's father was legally obliged to marry or bury any resident of the parish who demanded this service — the assumption being that they were members of the church. May won't bring her faith into politics explicitly, but we can expect her to behave as if England were a special, almost sacred, country in ways that none of her immediate predecessors, much less Americans, would understand.

It was a corruption election it's time we realized it

Foreign Policy, 06.12.2016



I have an odd perspective on the election of Donald Trump: a warped kind of déjà vu. For the past decade, I've worked on the issue of corruption around the world.

In particular, I've spent a lot of time explaining that people who live in structurally corrupt political and economic systems are sometimes driven to extremes. I have always understood that the analysis was relevant in the United States — just maybe not how relevant. In the past 10 years, populations have rejected “rigged systems that had stood for decades. They have risen up in mass protests in Brazil, Guatemala, South Africa, and South Korea.

They have overthrown their governments in open insurrections like the Arab Spring and Ukraine's Maidan. Or they have fallen in behind self-proclaimed Robin Hoods such as Venezuela's Hugo Chávez. Occasionally, they have joined violent religious movements like the Islamic State or Boko Haram. With Trump's election, the United States just joined this list.

It might make his voters uncomfortable to hear that they've behaved much as my former neighbors in Kandahar, Afghanistan, who re-embraced the Taliban in their disgust at the corruption of Hamid Karzai's government. Hillary Clinton voters might be equally upset to consider the degree to which the United States has come to resemble that regime or those of other corrupt countries I have been studying.

We Americans may not be subjected to shakedowns by the police, the judge, or the county clerk. But consider current realities: Networks that weave together public officials and business magnates (think the food or energy industries, pharmaceuticals, or Wall Street) have rewritten our legislation to serve their own interests.

Institutions that have retained some independence, such as oversight bodies and courts, have been deliberately disabled — starved of operating funds or left understaffed. Practices that, while perhaps not technically illegal, clearly cross the line to the unethical, the inappropriate, or the objectively corrupt have been defended by those who cast themselves as bulwarks of reason and integrity. How many of us have said — in any meaningful way — “That's a red line!”?



Who among us refused, in the end, to take the money or make the excuses? Who among us refused, in the end, to take the money or make the excuses? For me, the seminal moment came on June 27, when the Supreme Court overturned former Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell's conviction on corruption charges. A businessman had lavished luxury travel, designer clothes, a Rolex watch, and tens of thousands of dollars on McDonnell and his wife, apparently in return for their help persuading public universities to perform clinical trials on his company's tobacco-based anti-inflammatory supplement.

The Supreme Court's decision was unanimous. Not one of the eight justices could come up with a reason why such behavior might violate the law. None even thought the matter significant enough to warrant separate comment or a cry to our collective conscience: "Given the wording of the statute, I had to vote this way. But the legal definition of corruption has grown too narrow. These statutes had better change if America as we know it is to survive."

Subsequent commentary was signally lacking in outrage. On NPR's The Diane Rehm Show that day, for example, the guests (two legal scholars and a journalist) practically skipped over the McDonnell decision. Rehm had to push them to grapple with it. Their consensus seemed to be that if the standard enshrined in the lower court's decision to convict McDonnell were to prevail, every politician in Washington would be liable. Well, exactly.

These are moral issues. And the very laws we depend on to enforce what should be bedrock standards have sometimes undermined them. Do we reject corruption? Of course we do — just as we refuse to countenance torture.

But then come the legal definitions. What counts as torture? How bad does it have to hurt? What do you mean by corruption? The head of an Egyptian business association once told me: "That's part of the brilliance of corruption in Egypt; they make it legal!"

The United States is going down the same road: The laws we hold so dear have narrowed the definition of corruption almost to the point of irrelevance. The laws we hold so dear have narrowed the definition of corruption almost to the point of irrelevance.

Two candidates — Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump — made the word "corruption" central to their campaigns. Together they drew easily more than half of votes cast. Yet to use this word to describe America remains almost taboo in polite circles. In the hundreds of pages of post-election commentary, how often has it been emphasized?

One remark from 2013 says a lot about what has befallen America. When then Salon writer Alex Pareene described some of JPMorgan Chase's practices as corrupt, CNBC host Maria Bartiromo slapped him down.

"Should we talk about the financial strength of JPMorgan, at this point?" she wondered. "Even with all of these losses, the company continues to churn out tens of billions of dollars in earnings and hundreds of billions of dollars in revenue. How do you criticize that?" Indeed. How do you criticize money these days? In a country full of sophisticated lawyers and lobbyists and rationalizers, it is now urgent to ask whether we still understand what corruption is. To say it's what is proscribed by law is to fall into a logical sinkhole.



What does corruption mean when a senior public official receives gifts from foreign leaders, via an institution bearing her name, while she is making decisions regarding these same foreign leaders? How should someone like me talk about corruption overseas when five different police departments use force against peoples whose lands were stolen through repeated treaty violations, on behalf of a private company pleading the letter of property laws?

What is the definition of corruption when a bank defrauds millions of customers without losing its license? When 2 million American adults are behind bars for trivial offenses, their lives permanently derailed, while no legal institution has punished any executive for bringing about the collapse of the world economy?

It's time to see past the rationales and the rhetoric. No matter who won our vote, we must come to grips with these questions. Whatever our affiliation or walk of life, we must also, each of us, discover and hold on to that dividing line that marks off the reasonable compromises from the unacceptable.

For, like the people of Mosul in Iraq or northern Nigeria, who traded intolerably corrupt regimes for Islamist crusaders who were worse, Americans will wake up in January under a system that is more corrupt than the one that fueled their rebellion. That is the irony of resorting to a wrecking ball to bring down a corrupt regime. Too often, the kleptocratic networks prove resilient, while those who revolted end up with crushed heads.

Already, President-elect Trump's questionable affiliations and potential conflicts of interest — as genteel vocabulary would have it — are making headlines. The issue is not one of technical legality or poor vetting.

His actions and associations are deliberate. While tweeting out distractions to disguise the fact, he will unleash a feeding frenzy. Our laws and institutions will be bent to the purposes of personal enrichment. Industry lobbyists will draft the bills. He will negotiate business deals with foreign counterparts, confusing his personal interests for the good of the nation.

Agencies that try to hold the line will see their budgets slashed, their officials belittled in public. Law enforcement will be even more selective than it is today. The labor of human beings, the land, and what's on it or under it will be converted to cash as efficiently as possible. And what can't be converted will be bulldozed out of the way.

And what will Americans do in the face of this exacerbation of our own brand of corruption? And what will Americans do in the face of this exacerbation of our own brand of corruption? Will we further relax our standards, shrugging our shoulders and referring to the letter of ever-changing laws? Or will we reach for a definition of corruption that is in line with common sense and rebuild our foundations upon that bedrock? Our answer to that challenge will determine whether this is a crisis the United States survives and from which it emerges renewed — or whether we lurch into some more violent and damaging cataclysm.

Announcements & Reports

An anatomy of inclusive growth in Europe?

Source : Bruegel
Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2016/10/an-anatomy-of-inclusive-growth-in-europe/>

A glass half full: The rebalance, reassurance, and resolve in the U.S.-China strategic relationship

Source : RAND
Weblink : <https://www.brookings.edu/research/a-glass-half-full-the-rebalance-reassurance-and-resolve-in-the-u-s-china-strategic-relationship/>

Income convergence during the crisis: did EU funds provide a buffer?

Source : Bruegel
Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2016/10/income-convergence-did-eu-funds-provide-a-buffer/>

Upcoming Events

Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union

Date : 19 December 2016
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/534-competitive-gains-in-the-economic-and-monetary-union/>

The Future of Capitalist Democracy: UK-Japan Perspectives

Date : 19 December 2016
Place : London - UK
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/future-capitalist-democracy-uk-japan-perspectives>

13th Asia Europe Economic Forum (AEEF)

Date : 20 December 2016
Place : Beijing - China
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/13th-asia-europe-economic-forum/>

Emerging Markets and Europe: Time for Different Relationships?

Date : 21 December 2016
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/524-emerging-markets-and-europe-time-for-different-relationships/>



What future for Europe's Social Models?

Date : 22 December 2016
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/526-what-future-for-europes-social-models/>

Challenges for Growth in Europe

Date : 23 December 2016
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/521-challenges-for-growth-in-europe/>

Global Governance of Public Goods: Asian and European Perspectives

Date : 24 December 2016
Place : Paris - France
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/529-global-governance-of-public-goods-asian-and-european-perspectives/>

The Future of the Welfare State

Date : 24 December 2016
Place : Berlin - Germany
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/541-the-future-of-the-welfare-state/>

Vision Europe Summit 2016

Date : 25 December 2016
Place : Lisbon - Portugal
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/vision-europe-summit-2016/>