


Turkey's relations with Europe are in flux following Ahmet Davutoğlu's resignation

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Turkey's Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, announced his resignation on 5 May. [Didem Buhari-Gulmez](#) writes that the resignation reflected a wider split within Turkey over the need for security-oriented policies, the validity of the deal between Turkey and the EU over refugees, and the aim of Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to move the country toward a presidential political system.



Turkey is currently fighting multiple wars on multiple fronts against the [PKK](#), TAK (a break-away from the PKK), ISIS and terrorist organisations such as the [DHKP-C](#), whose militants have become better trained and equipped for deadly attacks in urban centres since the outbreak of the Syrian war.

This situation has ensured that the language of security has gained prominence over that of democratisation among Turkey's political elites, who frequently resort to marginalising and criminalising critical voices. Moreover, the in-flows of millions of Syrian refugees to the country have also led to a growing discontent among the public, who have long been polarised between pro-government circles (the so-called '50 per cent' of society) and the rest.

The ongoing negotiations over the EU-Turkey deal, which centre on Turkey agreeing to the readmission of refugees in return for financial assistance worth 3 billion euros and a facilitated visa scheme for Turkish nationals, have [raised some hope](#) that the refugee crisis could bring about a 'strategic rapprochement' between Turkey and Europe. However, the expected revival of Turkey-EU relations has proved short-lived with the [resignation](#) of Turkey's Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu on 5 May.

Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has recently criticised the readmission agreement, placing particular emphasis on the EU's conditionality regarding Turkey's anti-terror laws. His speech on the topic was reminiscent of an [earlier statement](#) given by Turkey's ambassador to the EU, which indicated that the EU had lost its leverage over Turkey.

Turkey and the EU's difficult relationship

When Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power with a land-slide victory in November 2002, it adopted a pro-EU and reformist approach allowing for several laws towards the liberalisation and democratisation of the country. Its critics claimed that the party lacked a clear understanding of democratisation and that it had failed to implement several reforms it had adopted on paper. Nevertheless, the single-party government continued its reforms with the support of liberal votes and secured the launch of official accession negotiations with the EU in 2005.

Its new 'win-win' discourse, inspired by Davutoğlu, was based on strong criticism of Turkey's 'old politics', taken as representing the historical Kemalist paranoia of being encircled by domestic and foreign enemies seeking to disintegrate the Republic (the so-called Sèvres syndrome). Davutoğlu was the main architect of Turkey's new approach to foreign policy, which aimed for the 'de-securitisation' of Turkish politics and Turkey's reconciliation with its historical 'enemies'. Turkey started to take initiatives toward the normalisation of its relations with Cyprus, Armenia and the Kurds, while adopting an 'open door' policy waiving visa requirements for many countries (including those who do not have similar agreements with the EU).

However, the [Mavi Marmara incident](#), the Arab uprisings and the Syrian civil war revealed disagreements within Turkey's elite over how to deal with the emerging crises. The elections of June 2015 resulted in the governing party

losing support, with the party joining forces with the ultra-nationalist MHP party in launching a new wave of 'securitisation' in Turkish politics. This trend is particularly visible in both the increase in the number of prosecutions against intellectuals, [academics](#), journalists and citizens who express critical views, and the conclusions of Turkey's National Security Council meetings that emphasise the multiplication of threats coming from outside of the country (such as ISIS and Islamophobia in Europe) and from within. The latter includes Fethullah Gülen's followers, the so called 'parallel state', Kurdish and leftist groups, and others.

Similar to Turgut Özal's Presidential term between 1989 and 1993, when the Prime Minister Yıldırım Akbulut was relegated to a passive role, Davutoğlu's role as Turkey's Prime Minister was often seen as representing the President's preferences. However, the negotiations over the EU-Turkey refugee deal revealed a deepening divide between Davutoğlu's preferences and the ongoing re-securitisation in Turkish politics and society. Critics believe that Davutoğlu had to resign because he failed to sufficiently share the President's concerns about the fight against the multiplying security threats facing the country.

Pro-EU circles in Turkey [remain disempowered](#) and Europe is no longer a main reference point for Turkey. There is a general indifference to the possible annulment of the EU-Turkey deal because to many, the negotiations led by Merkel undermined the 'EU spirit' based on human rights, democracy and liberal freedoms and the promise of visa facilitation for Turkish nationals seems unrealistic. Today, [Euro scepticism in Turkey](#) is too high to allow for domestic compliance with EU conditionality on human rights, anti-corruption and anti-terror reforms.

Similar to Özal, who accused the EU in the 1990s of imposing double-standards on Turkey, Erdoğan receives substantial support from public opinion when he criticises the EU over the refugee deal. The next Prime minister of Turkey is likely to be chosen from among the political figures who share the President's concerns about the necessity for security-oriented policies and a transition to a Presidential system that will allow for a more effective fight against the domestic and external 'threats' surrounding the country.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics. Featured image: Turkey's former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, via [ajanshaber.com](#).

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