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News Diplomacy

Aspen Atlantic Group studies Turkish politics in Ankara

The Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) hosted a high-level meeting of former foreign ministers from North American and European countries in Ankara last weekend.

The event was organized by the Aspen Atlantic Group (AAG), an initiative aimed to foster a more collaborative transatlantic exchange under the auspices of the Washington-based Aspen Institute. During the event, titled "Turkey: Forging a Common Agenda for a Defining Moment," former cabinet officials debated the role Turkey plays in the region, on issues ranging from Iraq to Armenia, from the economic crisis to dialogue with Iran.

AAG is led by former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who said, "We are very happy with the discussions held in Turkey and were very pleased with the warm welcome extended to the Aspen Group by TOBB." AAG members met with President Abdullah Gül, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Ali Babacan.

The meeting held on Saturday included experts from the executive and legislative branches of government, think tanks, academia and the media. TOBB Chairman Rıfat Hisarçkılıç presented the economic dynamics of Turkey in an hour-long presentation at the TOBB twin towers in Ankara on Saturday. He said, "TOBB was very influential in bringing the leaders of trade interest groups together from Israel and Palestine, as well as heads of trade chambers from Afghanistan and Pakistan." "With economic cooperation schemes, we were able to contribute to the solution of conflicts in our region," he added.

The AAG had extensive talks, especially about EU enlargement, Turkey-EU relations and Turkey-EU-US relations. İsmail Cem, the late foreign minister of Turkey, was a member of the group and had attended the events organized by the AAG. Sixteen former foreign ministers had participated in the TOBB-hosted meetings.

The AAG signs up senior foreign policymakers who seek to develop concrete, non-partisan recommendations to help the two sides of the Atlantic address common global challenges. The recommendations adopted by the AAG have an impact on others because the members of the group have leverage as leaders of opinion, and most serve as advisors to governments and political parties across the spectrum. The group has addressed such issues as Iraqi reconstruction, Iran's nuclear program, the fight against terrorism, peace in the Middle East, humanitarian intervention and reform of the transatlantic architecture.

Aspen Atlantic Group former foreign ministers who attended the meetings in Ankara are Madeleine Albright (United States), Malcolm Rifkind (United Kingdom), Lamberto Dini (Italy), Lloyd Axworthy (Canada), Igor Ivanov (Russia), Jozias Van Aartsen (Netherlands), Joschka Fischer (Germany), Niels Helveg Petersen (Denmark), Hubert Védrine (France), Donald McKinnon (New Zealand), Jan Eliasson (Sweden), János Martonyi (Hungary), Rosario Green (Mexico), Ana Palacio (Spain), Halldór Ásgrímsson (Iceland) and Mircea Dan Geoana (Romania).

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ABDULLAH BOZKURT ANKARA

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